BOOK OF JOSHUA

by

Daniel J. Lewis

ENTERING THE LAND
The Book of Joshua

Introduction

Every scholar or theologian approaches his or her research from some particular perspective. It is only fair that I should set forth mine, particularly since the Book of Joshua has become so decidedly controversial in recent decades. As a Christian scholar committed to the orthodox faith of the Christian church (which means not only an unambiguous commitment to the Bible as God's Word but also a deep sensitivity to the way the church has read the Bible over the past two millennia), my benchmarks for interpretation follow in kind. This is not to say the church has always been right on every issue, but rather, that the final court of appeal for any interpretation lies not merely in the present but also in the past. Modern folk, in my judgment, too easily throw over that which, to use the language of Vincent of Lerins (died ca. AD 450), has been *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus* (believed everywhere, always and by all). I subscribe to the notion that there is such a theological core and that modern scholars who claim to be Christians ought to pay attention to it.

Hence, in exploring the ideological and exegetical controversies surrounding the Book of Joshua, I confess to reading the book in the way my Christian forebears have generally read it, that is, as a book that in addition to its theological moorings in the ancient Judeo-Christian faith sets forth an historical account of real events about real people. To be sure, there are nuances in any reading of an ancient text that must be oriented to the way ancient people composed and used such texts, but it is precisely for this reason that these nuances should not become the handmaiden to 21st century politics, favored slants and reconstructions, however well-intended.

For Christians who are unaware of the issues, the Book of Joshua may never have seemed a threat, but rather, an encouragement that God supplies the needs of his people by his sovereign power, and they need only take courage and dare to believe and take action toward what God promised. In

exploring the issues that now emerge, they may be quite disconcerted to find that contemporary scholars often dismiss such perspectives as hopelessly sentimental. In a world "come of age", to borrow a phrase from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, they too often approach the text from an absence of faith, urging that such "neutrality" gives them the edge for appropriate interpretation. In fact, I would argue that it does not, and that there is no such thing as this supposed neutrality. If the Book of Joshua says anything it says that neutrality about what God intends to say is not merely dangerous, it is the death knell of faith. With my presuppositions fairly outlined, let us turn to those issues in contention.

The Modern Historical Debate About Joshua

The Book of Joshua has become a modern battleground. Until the past century or so, most who read the Book of Joshua, whether Christian or Jewish, were confined to the biblical text itself, which narrates the entry of the Israelites into Canaan. However, with the development of the historical-critical method—the applied science of interpreting ancient documents using the disciplines of history, archaeology and literary criticism—the Book of Joshua increasingly has become the subject of much scholarly wrangling. Early on, the debate was about the literary relationship of Joshua to the Pentateuch. More recently, the validity of the historical narratives themselves have come under severe doubt. A recent treatment, if anything, is typical when a commentator in a major series writes, "It is possible, but unlikely, that this story was recorded as it happened in history."[1] Actually, his judgment, as extreme as it may sound to someone uninitiated to the debate, is moderate. Not a few scholars would strike out the possibility of biblical historicity altogether.[2]

Further, there is a political component that looms large vis-à-vis the modern nation-state of Israel, surrounded as it is by Palestinian and Arabic communities. Israel's "entitlement" to its ancient lands is considered to be

---

[1] R. Cootes, "Joshua—Introduction," *New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998) II.556.

[2] William Dever cites a sampling of recent titles that demonstrate this trend of denying historicity to the ancient biblical narratives: P. Davies, *In Search of "Ancient Israel"* (1992); K. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (1996); L. Grabbe, *Can a "History of Israel" Be Written?* (1997); T. Thompson, *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel* (1999); I. Finkelstein and N. Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (2001). Furthermore, since these works openly question the origin of Israel (at least in the biblical sense), they have been quickly translated into Arabic and now have become standard resources for the Palestinian perspective that Israel has no right to be there.

an illusion altogether if the historicity of the exodus, conquest and early monarchy is eliminated. Some consider the recent celebration of "Jerusalem 3000" (recalling the Israelite control of Jerusalem gained in the time of David) to have been a farce. At the same time, archaeology in the holy land is being co-opted to serve a nationalist agenda, whether extreme forms of Zionism on the one hand or Muslim fundamentalism on the other.

Finally, and perhaps most important of all, there is a deep theological fracture if the events in the Book of Joshua never happened. The Bible as God's Word—a Word that tells the truth about things—is at stake. To be sure, some would have it that historicity in the biblical narratives is unnecessary to the theological enterprise, but instinctively most people are smart enough to realize that if the stories were simply manufactured in order to bolster a fragile national self-image, then the calling and covenant for God's ancient people is equally at risk, not to mention the calling and covenant for God's New Testament people.

The Literary Issue

Traditionally, the material in the Hebrew Bible was divided along the lines of the *Torah* (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) and the *Former Prophets* (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings). With the translation of the Bible into English, most Christians were reared with the belief that Moses compiled the Pentateuch, while later Israelites compiled the so-called "historical books", including Joshua. By the 19th century, however, historical-critical scholarship was urging a very different scenario. The so-called Documentary Hypothesis suggested that the Torah was not the work of Moses, but the compilation of various independent traditions with a long history of editorial work, a process beginning no earlier than the monarchy and extending into the post-exilic period.[3] Since the Torah envisioned the entry of Israel into Canaan but did not actually describe it, the question naturally arose as to just how the Book of Joshua was related to the Torah.

Two primary hypotheses were advanced. The Hexateuch theory suggested that the Book of Joshua was compiled from the same independent sources as the Torah. Here, the story of the Torah with its long-standing promise of the land had its true conclusion in the Book of Joshua, when the

---

[3] Even a cursory examination of the Documentary Hypothesis is well beyond the scope of this study, but the broad outlines can be found in R. Friedman, "Torah (Pentateuch)," *ABD* (1992) VI.608-618.

land was taken by the Israelites.[4] The Tetrateuch theory, on the other hand, suggested that the Torah itself should be divided after the first four books, leaving Deuteronomy to be directly linked with the succeeding books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings.[5] In both cases, the Book of Joshua carried much closer literary and ideological ties with Deuteronomy than had been previously assumed, while Deuteronomy was linked more with what followed it than what preceded it.

In recent decades, the view that Deuteronomy should be linked with the books that follow has become dominant in the academy. While the precise nature of this link is still widely discussed, there is a general agreement that the theology of Deuteronomy, with its blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience, is normative for the books of Joshua through Kings. Following this lead, the narratives in Joshua are read as having a clear ideological character heavily influenced by Deuteronomy. This, in itself, is not necessarily problematic, but when it is coupled with the suggestion that many of the Joshua narratives were either deliberately shaped or even invented so as to support the theology of Deuteronomy, the specter of pseudo-history raises its head.

The Archaeological Issue

If the literary issue was not enough, the explosion of archaeological data in the past century has affected the Book of Joshua even more seriously. Part of the problem was the development of an overdependence upon archaeology itself. In the first half of the 20th century, archaeology came to be perceived as the savior of the Bible in the midst of skeptics. A number of astounding archaeological discoveries seemed to "prove" the Bible's historicity, and in particular, the Book of Joshua. The discovery of the Amarna Letters (correspondence between the Egyptian Pharaoh and various city-states in Canaan[6]) testified to a series of conflicts between Canaanite

---

[4] For a summary of the Hexateuch theory, developed primarily by the scholars Otto Eissfeldt and Gerhard von Rad, see D. Freedman, "Hexateuch," *IDB* (1962) 2.597-598.

[5] For the Tetrateuch theory and its corollary of a Deuteronomistic History in Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings based upon the ideals of Deuteronomy, see M. Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1981).

[6] Discovered in 1887, the cache of documents called the Amarna Letters (found at Tell el-Amarna, Egypt) consisted of more than 350 letters from the middle of the 14th century BC between the Egyptian court of the Eighteenth Dynasty and other states in the ancient Near East. More than 300 of the letters were imperial documents consisting of administrative correspondence with Egypt's western empire city-states in Canaan. These included, among others, letters from various vassal cities like Jerusalem, Lachish, Shechem, Gezer, Gaza, Ashkelon, Keilah, Aijalon, Joppa, Taanach, and Hazor. The letters address domestic problems, quarrels between vassals, trade, tribute, and military security, cf. R. Cohen and R. Westbrook, *Amarna Diplomacy* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University, 2000), pp. 1-12. For actual English

cities and the *Hapiru*, a group of semi-nomadic invaders who were threatening Canaanite hegemony.[7] The *Hapiru* sounded a lot like the Israelites, and some even posited that the name *Hapiru* was linguistically related to the word "Hebrew". John Garstang excavated Jericho and announced he had discovered a collapsed double wall dating to ca. 1400 BC—the presumed time of Joshua's advance. Later, Yigael Yadin excavated Hazor in northern Canaan, revealing that it had been destroyed by fire in the Late Bronze Age, just as the Book of Joshua stated (cf. 11:11). These were heady discoveries, and many if not most people began to look upon archaeology as the debunker of the biblical nay-sayers and cynics. The downside of this optimism was the reinforcement of a perception that there was some sort of straightforward relationship between archaeology and the Bible, and when later archaeologists began to question and retract some of these sensational discoveries, the credibility of the Bible itself suffered. By the beginning of the 21st century, a nearly 180 degree reversal had occurred. Whereas archaeology once was an important means by which to demonstrate the reliability of the Bible, it now had become a means to debunk the Bible when archaeological finds seemed at odds with the biblical record.[8] The attendant corollary has been great shifts from faith to loss of faith.[9]

Archaeologists, even those who strongly uphold the historical reliability of the Bible, are much more careful in delineating the role of archaeology today. Alfred Hoerth, Director of Archaeology at Wheaton College, carefully defines archaeology's relationship to the Bible as *illumination* in terms of culture and historical setting and a knowledge of ancient people, places, things and events, but he is quite clear that archaeology should NOT be assumed to confirm, authenticate or prove the

---

translations of the Armana letters, see W. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 1992).

[7] The Amarna Letters frequently mention a group called the *Hapiru* (also *Habiru* or *'Apiru*). This Akkadian term refers to an apparently landless group, possibly refugees or brigands, who attacked the settled areas of Canaan or, in some cases, hired themselves out as mercenaries. In the Amarna correspondence, the term *Hapiru* seems to be used as a general term of abuse or denunciation. However, the term *Hapiru* is by no means confined to the Amarna Letters. References to them (and there are more than 250 total) can be found in sources all over the ancient Near East in the 2nd millennium BC, both in Mesopotamian texts as well as Hittite texts. Hence, they cannot be equated with the Hebrews directly, though since the term is a pejorative one, it could conceivably have been applied to the Hebrews, cf. N. Lemche, *ABD* (1992) 3.6-10.

[8] D. Merling, "The Relationship Between Archaeology and the Bible: Expectations and Reality," *The Future of Biblical Archaeology*, ed. J. Hoffmeier and A. Millard (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 29-30.

[9] In a recent telling article, two widely recognized scholars, Bart Ehrman and William Dever, discuss their loss of faith through their scholarship. Both were reared within Christian fundamentalism with a high view of Scripture as the inerrant Word of God, and both credit their loss of faith directly to their perceived loss of historicity in the Bible, cf. H. Shanks, "Losing Faith: 2 Who Did and 2 Who Didn't," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 2007), pp. 50-57.

Bible and that "confidence and hope should not be built on any external proof—not even archaeology."[10]

Should, therefore, archaeology have any role at all in interpreting the Bible? Certainly, but its role must be seen as corollary, not primary. Archaeology, like most scientific disciplines, is an ongoing task. New discoveries lead to new theories along with reversals of previous opinions. While archaeology can provide insight into the world of the ancients, it cannot tell us the central meaning of biblical texts. The texts themselves must do this. At the same time, the relationship between archaeology and biblical historicity will be ongoing, and there appears to be no end in view for the debate between minimalists and maximalists.[11]

Contemporary Models for the Origin of Israel in Canaan

The earliest attestation to the Israelites in Canaan outside the Bible comes from the Merneptah Stela (ca. 1210 BC). In a hymn of conquest, Pharaoh Merneptah claimed victory over several Canaanite peoples, one of which was Israel (specifically, the inscription reads, "Israel is laid waste, his seed is no more.").[12] Though Pharaoh boasted that he had annihilated Israel, a claim that was patently overstated, it is equally clear that by the late 13th century there was an identifiable people group called Israel already in Canaan. The Torah narratives describe them as a band of Hebrew slaves descended from the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and recently escaped from Egypt. The literary theories previously described and the absence of any clear archaeological record substantiating their exodus across the Sinai Peninsula has led to alternative theories about their origins. These theories differed (in some cases differed substantially) from the narratives in the Book of Joshua.

The *conquest model*, advocated by William Albright. G. Ernest Wright and others, was based on the archaeological evidence of destruction layers in many Canaanite cities during the Late Bronze Age. This model followed fairly closely the biblical story, but the archaeological record yielded mixed results with some cities seeming to fit rather closely to the biblical narrative (e.g., Hazor and Bethel) while others did not fit very well at all (e.g., Jericho and Ai). The *immigration model*, derived from Albrecht Alt and Martin Noth, proposed that the Israelites immigrated from

---

[10] A. Hoerth, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), pp. 13-21.

[11] The terms "minimalist" and "maximalist", originally coined by William Hallo of Yale University, currently are used to differentiate between those who see little historicity and those who see much historicity in the biblical narratives.

[12] *ANET* (1969) pp. 376-378.

somewhere outside Canaan (possibly Egypt), first occupying the highlands of Canaan but gradually extending their control to the plains. Here, the rise of Israel in Canaan was not by direct conquest and more closely follows the pattern in the Book of Judges than the Book of Joshua. The *revolt model*, originally developed by George Mendenhall and later updated by Norman Gottwald along Marxist political lines, was that the Israelites were basically lower class Canaanites who became disaffected from their city-state overlords and rebelled, eventually winning out and becoming the Israelites in the Bible. Here, the Israelites were not from the outside at all, and they did not arrive via an exodus from Egypt. The *gradual emergence model* also holds that the Israelites were insider Canaanites who gradually developed a separate identity, migrated to the uplands from the lowlands (possibly due to the arrival of the Philistines from the Aegean), and eventually gained dominance as the biblical Israelites.[13] Obviously these latter two models depart radically from the story one reads in the Book of Joshua, though the Book of Judges is often cited to support them. To a large degree, the narratives in the Book of Joshua are pitted against the narratives in the Book of Judges as though they were mutually exclusive. Further, these latter two models (or at least versions of them) have come to dominate in the academy, while the earlier models, which were much more compatible with the record in the Book of Joshua, have fallen into disfavor. Speaking for most, William Dever, the widely acclaimed archaeologist from the University of Arizona, puts it, "We must confront the fact that the external evidence supports almost *nothing* of the biblical account of a large-scale, concerted Israelite military invasion of Canaan, either that of Numbers east of the Jordan, or of Joshua west of the Jordan. Of the more than forty sites that the biblical texts claim were conquered, no more than two or three of those that have been archaeologically investigated are even potential candidates for such an Israelite destruction in the entire period from *ca.* 1250-1150 B.C."[14]

So, Where Do We Go from Here?

Initially, it bears remarking that the epistemological center of faith lies in the conviction of sin and the acceptance of the gospel. While orthodox Christians have always upheld the integrity of the Bible, the center of their faith does not lie in history per se, even though history is very important.

---

[13] J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), pp. 186-191.

[14] W. Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 71.

Christians can be confident about the center, even though they may have enduring questions about any number of historical issues, especially since these latter concerns do not admit the kind of closure Christians rightfully have about their faith itself. It is from this center, then, that they must address the historical problems.

The ancient poet in Psalm 11:3 posed the trenchant question, "When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?" His circumstances may have been different, but his sentiments surely resonate with all who are committed to the trustworthiness of the Bible and a belief that God's revelation in Scripture cannot contradict his revelation in the concrete world of experience. The contemporary challenges to the historicity of the Bible via the Book of Joshua are formidable. In some ways, they are more formidable than the older challenges to the historicity of the patriarchs in Genesis. While Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as real people have been dismissed by skeptics for a long time (not to mention virtually all the other characters in the Book of Genesis that are earlier than the patriarchs), the fact that the patriarchs lay so far back in antiquity was, in a sense, a safeguard. No one expected to find any material evidence of individuals as far back as nearly four millennia ago, so they were largely exempted from speculation based on such things. To be sure, the new literary theories about the Pentateuch tended to dismiss the patriarchs as fictional, but literary theories are easier to ignore than artifacts, and for the most part, conservative Christians, apart from a few notable exceptions, have done just that with the literary theories—ignored them. However, there is a concreteness about the archaeological investigations of Canaanite city-states mentioned in Joshua that raises the bar. Conservative Christians very well may choose to ignore this area too, but it certainly will be more difficult.

There is, however, a way forward short of blissful ignorance. Admittedly, Christians who follow this path will be a minority in the larger academic community, but they often have survived as the minority in any number of adverse circumstances throughout their history. If such Christians believe anything at all, they believe in the sovereignty of God in all things! They must mentally prepare themselves, of course, for regular put-downs from the intellectual elite, but this is not new either. What they must NOT do is abandon the field. To a large degree they did abandon the field in the old modernist-fundamentalist debate after the Scopes "monkey trial" in the early 20th century. Their refusal to engage in dialogue with the reigning opinions of an increasingly secular culture left them marginalized and with no platform from which to speak. Isolationism was anything but helpful. Ironically, they might do well to take a chapter from their ancient Christian

brothers and sisters in the Medieval World, who vigorously interacted with the likes of Aristotle, Plato and others.

The way forward must include solid scholarship at the highest levels, for this is where the heart of the dialogue will continue. It must also include an irenic spirit, for very little will be accomplished by a shouting match— even a scholarly shouting match. Thankfully, some high level scholars committed to biblical fidelity are deeply engaged in this discussion, and though they are swimming against the current, they still are swimming! Here, it would seem, is the forward path.

The Trend toward Revisionist History

In the first place, it should be clearly understood that the issues concerning the Book of Joshua and the historicity of the Old Testament are part of a larger picture. That larger picture affects not only the history of the Bible, it affects the history of nearly everything! History in general is being rewritten by deconstructionist literary theorists and political activists with their own special axes to grind: New Left ideologies, radical feminists, Two-Thirds World liberation theologians, social reconstructionists, multiculturalists, New Age pop-psychologists and a host of other special interest groups.[15] Postmodernism, with its negative evaluation of any claims toward historical objectivity, is the handmaiden of this trend. Hence, while the historicity of the Bible is deeply important to many Christians, they should at least realize that the dehistoricizing of the past is a broad cultural movement affecting everything from American history to the history of the aborigines.

Since history is written in texts, it is the idea of text itself that often is directly attacked. Texts, the new theorists say, are composed by ideologues, and the texts of the Bible are no exception. They do not contain historical "facts"; rather, they are thoroughly laced with prejudices, private agendum, creative fiction, and the like. Texts are not to be trusted but are to be treated with the maximum of suspicion. Give this cultural mood, it is not too surprising that texts in the Bible come in for their share of deconstruction alongside virtually all other texts from antiquity.

---

[15] For a thorough critique of this more general trend, see K. Windschuttle, *The Killing of History: How Literary Critics and Social Theorists Are Murdering Our Past* (USA: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

The Issue of Biblical Interpretation

Bracketing out the postmodern reluctance to accept ancient texts, it still must be pointed out that the interpretation of texts is a critical issue. Even for serious historians who do not share the modern suspicion about text validity, the challenge of interpreting texts is considerable. In many cases, it is not the text itself that is the full problem, but the readers of the text who draw unwarranted assumptions. In other words, poor or hasty interpretations can give rise to problems that are more apparent than real.

This is especially true when texts like the Book of Joshua and the Book of Judges are juxtaposed with each other. By isolating passages in Joshua that describe the conquest of the land, some have concluded that the book describes a complete takeover without qualification.

> *So, Joshua took the entire land, just as the LORD had direct Moses, and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions.*
>
> Joshua 11:23

> *So the LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. The LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the LORD handed all their enemies over to them. Not one of all the LORD's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.*
>
> Joshua 21:43-45

By contrast, they conclude that the Book of Judges does not describe a complete takeover (e.g., Jg. 1:19, 21, 27-36), and therefore, the books of Joshua and Judges reflect competing traditions about Israel's entrance into Canaan. However, summary reports of victory in Joshua are not all that the book had to say about the situation. Joshua also contains material very much like one finds in the Book of Judges.

> *When Joshua was old and well advanced in years, the LORD said to him, 'You are very old, and there are still very large areas of land to be taken over.'*
>
> Joshua 13:1-7

> *Judah could not dislodge the Jebusites who were living in Jerusalem; to this day the Jebusites live there with the people of Judah.*
>
> Joshua 15:63

> *They did not dislodge the Canaanites living in Gezer; to this day the Canaanites live among the people of Ephraim but are required to do forced labor.*
>
> Joshua 16:10

> *Yet the Manassites were not able to occupy these towns, for the Canaanites were determined to live in that region. However, when the Israelites grew stronger, they subjected the Canaanites to forced labor but did not drive them out completely.*
>
> Joshua 17:12-13

At the very least, it should be acknowledged that the Book of Joshua does not offer a report of total occupation without qualifying comments.[16] The passages that do seem to record such sweeping victories might be better taken as literary summaries demonstrating that what began as a great promise in the Book of Deuteronomy (cf. Dt. 6:10, 18, 23; 7:17-19; 8:1; 10:11; 11:8-9, 20-21; 19:8; 31:7, 23; 34:4) had now been fulfilled.[17] Even Deuteronomy's language is not without some qualification, for Yahweh clearly said, "The LORD your God will drive out those nations before you, little by little. You will not be allowed to eliminate them all at once…" (Dt. 7:22). Hence, an interpretive approach is required that takes into consideration all these factors as opposed to a selective approach that singles out and isolates some passages without giving due consideration to others.

Kitchen trenchantly observes that in the biblical story the campaigns of Joshua were primarily disabling forays, not territorial conquests with Hebrew occupation. To be sure, Jericho and Ai were burned (6:24; 8:28), as was Hazor (11:13), but there is no biblical indication that this fate happened to any other Canaanite cities, though many Canaanite kings were killed in conflicts. Furthermore, after these conflicts the Israelites did NOT occupy the various cities but returned to the base camp at Gilgal (10:15, 43; 14:6). To be sure, there was some localized occupation in central Canaan (14:6-15; 15:13-19; 17:14-18; 18:1-2). Still, the first clear indication in the biblical text of a movement toward full occupation is not until 18:4ff. Hence, the common interpretation of a sweeping conquest with nearly immediate

---

[16] In fact, it is fair to say that terns like "all" or "entire" or "whole" (cf. 10:40; 11:11, 16, 19) might be more limited than they seem at first glance. For instance, in the stories of the plagues, where the hail "beat down everything growing and stripped every tree" (Ex. 9:25), there still was enough vegetation remaining for the locusts to destroy "everything left by the hail" (Ex. 10:12). Closer to home, the Book of Joshua indicates that the Israelites "destroyed completely" the cities of the five kings, but then immediately qualifies the statement by referring to the ones who escaped (10:20).

[17] By literary summary I mean the use of exalted language intended to underscore that the promises in Deuteronomy were fulfilled. Exalted language is often rhetorical rather than precise, but incidental rhetoric must be balanced with fuller descriptions given elsewhere in the text.

occupation of the whole land is not what the Book of Joshua actually describes. Therefore, to expect archaeology to demonstrate such an action is misplaced.[18]

The Dating Debate

One issue that cannot be avoided is timing. When did the Israelites arrive in Canaan? Dating is important because it changes the significance of the archaeological data as it bears upon given events. We already have seen that the Israelites were surely in Canaan by about 1210 BC, since they are mentioned specifically on the Merneptah Stela. Were they new arrivals or had they been there for some time?

Two theories dominate the field.[19] The one with the longest tenure, based on related Old Testament texts and simple calculation, is that the exodus occurred in about 1446 BC. This date is calculated on the basis of 1 Kings 6:1, where the work on the 1st temple began in the fourth year of Solomon's reign, 480 years after the exodus. Since Solomon reigned 40 years (1 Kg. 11:42), and since he died in 930 BC (a date that can be fixed based on Egyptian and Assyrian records[20]), his reign began in 970 BC. Hence, the temple work began in 966 BC, and 480 years earlier would be 1446 BC.[21]

Objections to this early date for the exodus lie along three primary lines, leading to a second dating theory of about the middle of the 13th century BC. First, any Old Testament cumulative figure that is a composite of 40 years increments may be a schematic number rather than a mathematical one (i.e., the 480 years of 1 Kg. 6:1 may represent 12 generations rather than a precise length of time).[22] Modern people usually do not use numbers in this way, but the ancients apparently did.[23] Second, the Israelites are described as building Rameses from which they also set out on

---

[18] K, Kitchen, *On the Historical Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2003), pp.160-163.

[19] For a discussion of both, see W. Shea, "Date of the Exodus," *ISBE* (1982) 2.230-238.

[20] For more details about how to correlate Solomon's dates with known history, see K. Kitchen, "How We Know When Solomon Ruled," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 2001), pp. 32-37, 58

[21] There is one other passage that may be significant, since it puts the exodus at 300 years prior to Jephthah, who lived in ca. 1100 BC (cf. Jg. 11:26).

[22] The various increments of "40" in the Hebrew Bible are copious, e.g., Moses time on the mountain, Israel's sojourn in the desert, the various periods of peace in the time of the judges, the careers of Samuel, Saul, David and Solomon as well as several other kings, Jonah's sentence of Nineveh's destruction, Jesus' sojourn in the desert, etc.

[23] D. Freedman, "The Chronology of Israel and the Ancient Near East," *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, ed. G. Wright (1961; rpt. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1979), pp. 207-208 and 227 note 29. The three hundred years of Jg. 11:26 would be understood in the same way.

the exodus (Ex. 1:11; 12:37). This is Pi-Rameses, the east delta city built by Rameses II (1279-1213 BC). Third, and probably carrying the most weight, there was a substantial break in the archaeological sequence in Palestine that occurred at the end of the Bronze Age, ca. 1250-1150 BC. During this time there was a sharp rise in settlements (farms, hamlets, villages) in Canaan, particularly in the northern part that became Ephraim and Manasseh. This sudden rise in population would accord well with the arrival of the Israelites. Hence, the majority of scholars opt for this later date. Devers bluntly says that "only a handful of diehard fundamentalists" would argue otherwise.[24] Dever's jibe notwithstanding, some conservative scholars do indeed support the earlier date, though even conservatives as a whole are divided on the issue.[25] All admit, however, that the issue of dating is fraught with unresolved problems.

The dating of the exodus, of course, sets the parameters for the context of the Book of Joshua. If one accepts the early date for the exodus, then the *Hapiru*, who figure prominently in the Amarna Letters, may well be related to the Israelites, if not directly, then broadly. It is fair to say that if the Hebrews may have been lumped in with the *Hapiru* by Canaan's city-state kings, it remains that the widespread presence of the *Hapiru* even beyond Palestine suggests that not all *Hapiru* were biblical Hebrews. On the other hand, if one accepts the later date then the Amarna letters are too early to offer any information about the Israelite entry into Canaan. In either case, the political relationship between Egypt and Canaan must be taken into account. Equally important, in either case the archaeological record in Canaan must be taken into account.

The Challenge of Reading the Material Evidence

Archaeology, while it certainly is scientific, offers results that are less precise than might be assumed. Again, the issue of interpretation looms large. Physical evidence is there, but what does it mean? In the first place, only a fraction of the known sites in Israel have been excavated, which means that as more excavation is completed, current theories are adjusted when new data emerges. Very little of what was made or written in antiquity survives. In fact, Edwin Yamauchi (professor of ancient Near East, Greek, Roman and early Christian history since 1969, Miami University) estimates

---

[24] Dever, p. 8.

[25] For a conservative source that opts for the early date, see Hoerth, pp. 178-181. For a conservative source that opts for the late date, see W. LaSor, D. Hubbard and F. Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 59-60.

that less than 2% of the known sites have been meaningfully excavated, and of those that have been excavated, only a fraction have been published with the results widely available. This circumstance means that it is the exception rather than the norm when there is a clear link between inscriptions or material evidence and the events and people described in the Bible. Not that this does not happen, of course, but at best expectations must be sharply curbed. Sometimes, material evidence might seem to go against the biblical record, but it is just as unwise to use material evidence to "disprove" the Bible (since later discoveries can alter the picture considerably) as it is to use such evidence to "prove" the Bible. The criticism once leveled against those who supported the historicity of the Bible by using archaeology inappropriately is double-edged, since often those who doubt the historical veracity of the Bible are also tarred with the same brush.[26]

Not only is this situation true with regard to Palestinian archaeology and the texts of the Bible, it is equally applicable to other ancient texts and their link with archaeology. Take, for instance, the relationship between Aegean archaeology and the works of Homer. A century and a half ago, the poems of Homer were treated with deep historical skepticism. The events described were assumed to be fictions or minor episodes blown out of proportion, transferred by the poet from various other places and later times to ancient Troy. Since the excavations in Troy, however, this severely negative tone has given way to a more positive outlook. Yamauchi's comment is to the point: *...too often negative criticisms of the traditions are based upon arguments from silence and therefore represent not so much the inaccuracy of the traditions as the inadequacy of our archaeological data.*[27] Egyptologist Kenneth Kitchen's maxim is in order: "Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence."

One always must keep in mind that material evidence discovered by archaeologists must be interpreted or "read". Very little is self-evident, and interpretations, therefore, are built upon current theories and constructs. If those theories or constructs are later found to be invalid, then everything built upon them must be reassessed. With regard to the book of Joshua, for instance, it matters a good deal how material evidence is read against the background of dating theory or the identification of sites. Unless there is an inscription (and sometimes, fortunately, there are inscriptions!), site

---

[26] McCray, pp. 21-22.
[27] E. Yamauchi, "Home and Archaeology: Minimalists and Maximalists in Classical Context," *The Future of Biblical Archaeology*, ed. J. Hoffmeier and A. Millard (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 88. For photos of material evidence in this regard, see Yamauchi's article "Historic Homer: Did It Happen?" in *BAR* (Mar/Apr 2007), pp. 28-37.

identification often becomes a matter of probabilities, not certainties. The absence of material evidence at Ai, for instance, is only meaningful if the site identification of Ai is correct.[28] David Merling (Andrews University) aptly states, *The relationship between archaeology and the book of Joshua is less clear than many assume. The locations of most sites mentioned in the Bible are not so clearly identified as supposed, yet these assumptions are the absolutes from which archaeologists begin their investigations of the book of Joshua.*[29]

Merling cites David Hackett Fischer's study in which he explored various scholarly fallacies in historical study, one of which was the fallacy of negative proof. It is a fallacy to argue for a factual proposition based on negative evidence. To admit that one has found nothing is only proof that one has found nothing, not that nothing exists.[30]

In any case, the conclusions offered by archaeological evidence are not quite so gloomy as some would have it. Truth has time on its side, and it is wise to avoid premature conclusions.

Joshua as an Ancient Text

The Book of Joshua describes how the Israelite clans entered the land of Canaan, a land that had been promised to the patriarchs. Moses had died at the end of the Book of Deuteronomy (Dt. 34:5), and Joshua, at God's instruction, had assumed leadership of the Israelites in the Plains of Moab (Dt. 3:28; 31:23; 34:9). The opening lines of the book are programmatic (1:1-5; cf. Ge. 13:14-17; 15:7, 18; 17:8; 26:3-4, etc.).

> *'Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give them—to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert and from Lebanon to the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—and to the Great Sea on the west.'*
>
> Jos. 1:2-4

---

[28] B. Wood, "Let the Evidence Speak," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 2007), pp. 26, 78.

[29] D. Merling, "The Relationship Between Archaeology and the Bible: Expectations and Reality," *The Future of Biblical Archaeology*, ed. J. Hoffmeier and A. Millard (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 35.

[30] D. Fisher, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 47 cited in Merling, pp. 33-34.

The territory described is essentially the same as promised to Abraham, from the Brook of Egypt[31] to the Euphrates River. However, many of the narratives in the book are more narrowly defined. For instance, most of the action in chapters 2-10 take place in the area that later would be assigned to the Benjamite clan. In the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Joshua is the first scroll in the collection called the Former Prophets. Hence, it tells the story of Israel's entry into the land through prophetic eyes, especially in light of the nation's covenant commitments to Yahweh.

Historical-critical scholars have analyzed the Book of Joshua in much the same way as the Pentateuch, that is, by piecing it up into various theoretical preexisting sources. The book quite naturally divides into two major sections, the entry into the land and the tribal division. Most of the first section (chapters 1-12) was assigned to the so-called J (Yahwist) and E (Elohist) sources, while the second section (chapters 13-24) largely was assigned to the so-called P (Priestly) source. In addition, various other strands, especially from the D (Deuteronomist) source,[32] were identified in various places. More recently, the older JEPD theory as applied to Joshua has been largely abandoned in favor of the Deuternomistic History theory. Here, the book's link with Deuteronomy has been emphasized, while dependence upon supposed J, E and P elements has been reduced substantially or even rejected altogether.[33]

Whatever theories may exist about the compilation of the material in Joshua, the book seems to attribute at least some of it to Joshua himself (24:26). Still, since the book also describes some events that happened after the death of Joshua (e.g., 15:13-19; 19:47; cf. Jg. 1:11-15; 18:27-29), not the least of which are a reference to the "house of God" (9:23) and the death of Joshua himself (24:29-30), Joshua can hardly have been the final compiler.[34] Since the book is formally anonymous, not much more can be said with any

---

[31] Initially, the reader might suppose that the text in Ge. 15:18 refers to the Nile River. However, its contrast with the "great river, the Euphrates" suggests some lesser tributary, possibly the Wadi el-Arish to the south of Philistia, cf. *ISBE* (1979) 1.549-550.

[32] O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 250-256, 155-188.

[33] *ABD* (1992) 3.1007-1008. E. M. Good sums up this doubt by saying, "The results are so inconclusive that it seems justifiable to doubt that the Pentateuchal documents continue into Joshua," cf. *IDB* (1962) 2.990.

[34] This notwithstanding, the Jewish Talmud credits Joshua himself as the author (*Baba Bathra* 14b). Still, several phrases in the book suggest that it was composed some time after the events it narratives, such as, the phrase "to this day" (4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28-29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 15:63; 16:10; 23:9). References to "the treasury" (6:19, 24) sound like references to the 1st temple, though they might apply to the tabernacle as well. On the other hand, the claim that the Jebusites were still living in Jerusalem and the Canaanites living in Gezer seem to limit how late one can date the compilation of sources (cf. 15:63 with 2 Sa. 5:6-9 and 16:10 with 1 Kg. 9:16).

certainty. Though some have taken the tack that Joshua is, pure and simple, a form of Josianic propaganda compiled after the discovery of the Torah scroll in the temple in order to buttress Josiah's reforms (cf. 2 Kg. 22-23),[35] such a reading undercuts almost entirely any sense that the Book of Joshua has anything to offer about the origins of Israel and its entry into the land.

Structure

The structure of the book, as mentioned earlier, easily divides into two major sections.

The Entry into the Land (1-12)
Preparation to cross Jordan (1:1-18)
Rahab and the spies at Jericho (2:1-24)
Crossing the Jordan (3:1—5:1)
The ceremony at Gilgal (5:2-12)
The rout of Jericho (5:13—7:26)
Conquest at Ai (7:1—8:29)
Covenant renewal at Mt. Ebal (8:30-35)
Treaty with the Gibeonites (9:1-27)
The southern campaign (10:1-43)
The northern campaign (11:1-15)
Summary of conquest (11:16—12:24)

Division of the Land (13-24)
The unfinished conquest (13:1-7)
Division of land to the Israelite clans (13:8—19:51)
    Reuben, Gad and Manasseh (13:8-33)
    Judah (14:1—15:63)
    Joseph tribes (16:1—17:18)
    Other clans (18:1—19:51)
Cities of Refuge (20:1-9)
Levitical cities (21:1-45)
Return of the Transjordan Tribes (22:1-34)
Final Things (23:1—24:33)
    Joshua's Farewell (23:1-16)
    Covenant Renewal (24:1-28)
    Joshua's Death (24:29-31)
    Addenda concerning the burial of Joseph and Eleazar (24:32-33)

---

[35] This is the reading of Robert Coote in the *New Interpreters Bible* (2.574-577). He argues that the stories in the Book of Joshua were compiled (or invented) in an effort to justify Josiah's reform, which included an ethnic cleansing of Canaanites who, in his reading of the texts, were either to submit to Josiah's rule or face elimination.

The Ancient Near Eastern Context

One of the challenges in studying the historical background is that there are few external sources that describe the people groups and events narrated in the book. Assyria, while a great ancient record keeper, remained east of the Euphrates during the period, so little help is to be expected from Assyrian archives. Canaan was still ostensibly under Egyptian hegemony, but Egyptian resources are brief as well. Mt. Seir (Edom) and Moab appear in texts of Rameses II and Rameses III (13th and 12th century), and of course, Israel is mentioned in the stele of Merneptah.

Whether or not the *Hapiru* are related to the Israelites, certainly the Amarna texts show a concern by some Canaanite city-state kings that such fugitive groups might make treaties with resident peoples. Further, the Amarna letters show that local kings sometimes joined in cooperative efforts to defend themselves. Apparently, the *Hapiru* successfully took some Canaanite cities and burned them. All these features are quite similar to what one finds in the Book of Joshua—the Gibeonites making a treaty with Joshua (chapter 9), various Canaanite kings joining forces to oppose Joshua (chapters 10 and 11) and the burning of Jericho, Ai and Hazor (6:24; 8:28; 11:11). Hence, the style of Joshua's war narratives are certainly consonant with what one finds in external sources of the period. A number of people groups described in Joshua can also be found in other ancient Near Eastern sources, such as, the Horites/Hivites (Hurrians), the Perizzites (also Hurrians), and the Girgashites, among others. [36]

The Moral Problem of Yahweh War in Joshua

Without question, the Book of Joshua is a book of war—not merely of the conflict between people groups, but more specifically, wars of extermination as commanded by Yahweh. It is one thing to describe war and quite another to describe divinely authorized wars of annihilation where one kills in the name of Yahweh. Christians look backward with shame at the atrocities of the Medieval Crusades, but the model of war in the Book of Joshua was part of the ideology of the Crusades in the first place. The Deuteronomic ideal was total extermination—men, women, children and animals, or in the language of Deuteronomy, the killing of "everything that breathed" (Dt. 7:1-2, 16; 13:12-16; 20:16-18). The record in the book of Joshua is that such extermination was carried out thoroughly and efficiently

---

[36] Kitchen, pp. 163-176.

(6:17, 24; 8:24, 29), and it was done explicitly at Yahweh's command (10:40; 11:12; cf. Dt. 7:24). Such extermination has caused more than a little distress for modern readers of this ancient text. Some, in fact, are bluntly negative, so much so that they simply retreat into Marcionism and treat this aspect of the Old Testament record as incompatible with Christianity. Robert Coote writes, *Much about the book of Joshua is repulsive, starting with ethnic cleansing, the savage dispossession and genocide of native peoples, and the massacre of women and children—all not simply condoned but ordered by God. These features are worse than abhorrent; they are far beyond the pale… People who regard themselves as peaceable Christians tend to shun the book of Joshua as not simply unedifying but irreconcilable with their faith…*[37] Theologians like Coote, though they examine the biblical text of Joshua, make little effort to reclaim it in any sort of positive way. At best, they treat it as a negative example of human depravity. Joshua and the Israelites are not heroes, but the central perpetrators of this depravity. John Collins responds similarly by saying "This is a case where biblical authority is a dangerous and misleading concept. The aura of biblical authority must not be allowed to mask the utter barbarity of the conduct."[38] How, then, should one respond?

At the outset, it must be conceded that the wars of Israel against the Canaanites, like all wars ancient and modern, were brutal affairs. No one need whitewash that fact. The enemies of Israel were under the חֵרֶם (= ban, dedication to total destruction), and such wars were controlled by specific obligations to Yahweh.[39] Similarly, wars among Israel's neighbors, even though their neighbors were pagan, likewise carried sacred responsibilities.[40] There was a huge difference, however, between the wars of Israel against the Canaanites and the wars of the Canaanites against Israel (or against each other). Israel was bound to an ancient covenant that said they were called into existence in the first place to be an avenue of blessing to the nations

---

[37] Coote, *NIB* (1998) 2.578.

[38] Collins, p. 194.

[39] The ban applied not only to humans but also to the booty of war. Human beings were slaughtered, while gold, silver and the like were put into Yahweh's treasury (cf. Jo. 6:18-19), cf. G. von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, trans. M. Dawn (rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 49-50. The word *herem* refers to what is utterly prohibited for common or private use. People, therefore, were not allowed to survive, while animals and moveable property were not allowed to be kept for profit, cf. W. Holladay, *Long Ago God Spoke* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), p. 125.

[40] Just as the Israelites were to dedicate the spoils of war to Yahweh, so also the Moabites under Mesha devoted to destruction their Israelite enemies. In a conflict with an Israelite town in Gad, Mesha boasted in the famous Moabite Stone that he "slew all the people of the town as satiation (intoxication) for [the god] Chemosh", and later, at Chemosh's divine mandate, he fought by night, "…slaying all, seven thousand men, boys, women, girls and maid-servants, for I had devoted them to destruction for [the god] Ashtar-Chemosh", cf. *ANET*, 320.

(Ge. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). At the institution of the Sinai covenant, Yahweh clearly indicated that Israel had been called as a kingdom of priests among the peoples of the world, a calling that embraced the earlier promises to the patriarchs (Ex. 19:5-6). There is no hint of such a calling for any of the Canaanite peoples. If so, then how do wars of extermination relate to the idea that Israel's calling was to be a blessing to all the peoples of the earth, and especially, how does such a calling and such wars relate to the Canaanites? This is the moral problem of Yahweh war.[41]

The Ethics of Yahweh War

With no pretense to resolving all the tensions that can be enumerated, there still seems to be a way forward without succumbing to a Marcionist view of the Book of Joshua, and at the same time, without succumbing to a vision of war that dismisses its horrors as something other than what they are.

First, the wars of Israelites against the Canaanites were not simply wars of conquest, even though this is a common assumption. To be sure, God had promised their ancestors the land of Canaan, but even in the initial promise to Abraham, God clearly sounded a note that in this invasion the descendents of Abraham were to be instruments of divine judgment on a wicked population.

> *In the fourth generation your descendents will come back here, for*
> *the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.*
>
> Ge. 15:16

This aspect of the invasion is attested elsewhere as well. The land of Canaan was so defiled by the debauchery of the Canaanites' immoral lifestyles that the land would "vomit out its inhabitants" (Lv. 18:24-27). Nor was Israel exempt, for if the Israelites defiled the land in the way the Canaanites defiled it, Israel, too, would "vomited" out (Lv. 18:28; 20:22-23).

> *It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you*
> *are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the*
> *wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before*

---

[41] Von Rad's language of "holy war" was taken from the Greeks (Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War* I.112), but I agree with those scholars who opt for the language "Yahweh war", since this latter terminology simply refers to war conducted in the name of Yahweh, not that war in itself had some holy character, cf. T. Hobbs, *A Time for War: A Study of Warfare in the Old Testament* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989), p. 205.

*you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and
Jacob.*

<div align="right">Dt. 9:5</div>

The wickedness of the Canaanite nations is summarized in a litany of
heinous offenses including human sacrifice, communication with the dead,
and witchcraft in general (Dt. 18:9-11). It was precisely because of these
"detestable ways" that Yahweh intended to drive them out (Dt. 18:12).

The real question about Joshua's invasion of Canaan, therefore, is not
whether God's people have the right to dispossess others of their land, but
whether God has the right to execute judgment. Nor does the divine sanction
for the wars of Joshua offer any broad approval for all subsequent wars. The
invasion of Joshua into the land of Canaan was not a war effort to be
determined merely by when the Israelites were ready to annex some land,
but rather, by when Yahweh was ready to pass historical judgment on a
wicked generation. The invasion, like the cross of Christ, was a one-of-a-
kind event, limited in scope. The Israelites were not permitted to build an
empire, which in turn reflects upon the uniqueness of their mission. Indeed,
in a special sense, the Israelites do not "fight" these wars, but Yahweh fights
through them.[42] In this sense, the wars of Israel against the Canaanites were
analogous to the judgments of Yahweh against the Egyptians in the plagues,
where "the LORD had brought judgment on their gods" (Nu. 33:4b). As such,
the wars in the Book of Joshua should not be taken as arbitrary violence, but
rather violence inflicted within the moral framework of wickedness and
punishment.[43] Further, the fact that in these wars the Israelites must devote
all the spoils of war to Yahweh—keeping none of the booty for
themselves—extracts out of these conflicts the incentive of aggression for
personal gain.[44] For the person who buys into the notion that the Book of
Joshua was simply propaganda literature invented in the time of Josiah to
buttress the Josianic reforms, then the foregoing explanation will not satisfy,
but for the person who is willing to take seriously the Bible's testimony

---

[42] John Goldingay observes that in Joshua 1-9 the verb for "fight" (לָחַם) does not even occur with respect
to Israel and only begins occurring in chapter 10, cf. J. Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's
Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), p. 478. Even when the word begins to be used, it is in the
sense that "surely Yahweh was fighting for Israel" (10:14). The point, of course, is that "fighting" is a two-
sided activity, while the wars of Yahweh in Joshua are essentially one-sided. Battling is an activity that
Yahweh has taken out of Israel's hands, and the battle at Jericho is the prominent case in point.
[43] C. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity, 2004), p. 476.
[44] This was the clear command at Jericho (6:18-19), though the ban was mitigated later (8:2; 11:14). This
may have been because at Jericho the Israelites waged a war of invasion (hence, they were not permitted to
take booty), while in the north they waged a war of defense (the northern kings banded together for a
preemptive strike against Israel, cf. 11:1-5).

about itself, the treatment of war as divine judgment is well within the range of what Yahweh not only dispensed to pagan nations, but what he dispensed to Israel as well. Israel, in turn, would become punishable for her sins, and in time Assyria would become Yahweh's war club of discipline (cf. Is. 5:25; 10:5ff.). Abraham Lincoln, in his 2nd Inaugural Address in 1865, came much closer to the biblical perspective than many modern theologians.[45]

Second, war in the Old Testament in general and the Book of Joshua in particular was never to be seen as a final end. Rather, the final end is a vision of peace.[46] The wars of judgment are necessarily limited by God's own sense of equitable punishment. However, the historical judgment of war (Dt. 12:1-3) is to be followed by a "resting place" which is characterized by safety and worship (Dt. 12:8-14). Premature peace was not appropriate, as the incident with the Gibeonites revealed (cf. Jos. 9:14ff.), but the larger goal of the invasion was, as Joshua rehearsed it to the Israelites, that "God is giving you rest" (Jos. 1:13). The later vision of the prophets was that peace was the ultimate eschatological goal, when all would "beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks" and "nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore" (Is. 2:4; Mic. 4:3).

Commentary on the Book

Preparing to Cross Jordan (1:1-18)

Joshua's story does not begin in the book that bears his name, but earlier. An Ephraimite (from one of the Joseph tribes, cf. 1 Chr. 7:27), his name Hoshea (= salvation) was amended by Moses to Joshua (= Yahweh

---

[45] "If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said 'the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'"

[46] Peter Craigie has made a helpful distinction between a "concept" of peace and a "vision" of peace. The former is immediate and pragmatic in that it seeks to realize peace in an actual situation. The latter is eschatological, lying still in the future, and it is the divine working of God in spite of all the empirical evidence that might suggest the contrary, cf. P. Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 88-90.

saves, cf. Nu. 13:8, 16).[47] He first appears as the field commander of the Israelite army in its conflict with Amalek (Ex. 17). Later, he appears as the aide of Moses when Moses was ascending Mt. Sinai (Ex. 24:13; 32:17), and he had served Moses from his youth (cf. Ex. 33:11; Nu. 11:28).[48] When the Israelites reached Kadesh Barnea, Joshua was one of the 12 spies sent into Canaan (Nu. 13:8). Upon their return, he, along with Caleb, urged the people to obey Yahweh by invading the land (Nu. 13:30; 14:6-9), which in turn gained him the privilege of finally entering the land many years later (Nu. 14:30, 38; 26:65; 32:12). Hence, it is not surprising that just before his death, Moses sought Yahweh's permission to appoint a successor, and that successor was the Spirit-filled Joshua who was installed by the imposition of Moses' hands (Nu. 27:15-23).

As Moses' successor, Joshua fulfilled two primary functions. First, he was to serve as the military commander of the Israelite forces in the invasion of Canaan (Dt. 1:38; 3:21, 28; 31:3, 23). Second, he was the administrator who was to allot the land to the various tribes (Dt. 31:7). Moses' final speech to the Israelites before his death was made with Joshua standing at his side (Dt. 32:44).

Joshua's Commission Reaffirmed (1:1-9)

The Book of Joshua opens with Yahweh's reconfirmation of Joshua as Moses' successor after the great law-giver had died. His duty to invade Canaan was reaffirmed as well, a fulfillment of the promise originally given to Abraham (cf. Ge. 15:18-21). Yahweh assured Joshua that his presence would be with him just as with Moses (1:5b, 9b). In view of this divine commission, Joshua was to be strong and fearless—no small matter when taking a numerically smaller force into the home territory of a much larger force (Dt. 9:1)! He was to be faithful to the Torah, for such faithfulness would ensure his military success (1:7-8).

Instructions to the Army (1:10-18)

The initial speech by Yahweh is followed by Joshua's speech to his lieutenants. They were to make ready their supplies, for the crossing of the Jordan would happen in just three more days. Throughout the various speeches, the land of Canaan is described as an inheritance and a gift. The idea of "inheritance" recalls the ancient promises originally made to the

---

[47] The name Joshua is the Hebrew equivalent of the New Testament name Jesus.

[48] The term נַעַר denotes a boy, a youth or a single young man of marriageable age.

patriarchs, who centuries earlier lived in this land. The idea of "gift" should not preclude the fact that this would be a military takeover—it was a gift in the sense that God divinely granted this land to the Israelites, but it must not be thought that this would be a taking of unoccupied land by a landless people.

Especially the Trans-Jordan tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh were reminded of their solemn responsibility to participate. Already, they had been permitted large tracts of land to the east of the Jordan River, but only on the condition that they participate in the coming war effort in Canaan to the west of the Jordan (cf. Nu. 32; 34:13-15; Dt. 3:12-20). This they had promised Moses (cf. Nu. 32:17-18, 25-27, 31), and now they reaffirmed this promise to Joshua (1:16-18). Obedience was paramount, and the responsibility to obey was buttressed by a death sentence for rebellion.

The Socio-Political Structure of Canaan in the time of Joshua

The discovery of the 14th century Amarna Letters offers considerable insight into the socio-political structure of Canaan so that we are able to sketch in the profile of a typical Canaanite city-state. The largest component among the more than 350 letters were from some 40 vassals in Syria-Palestine to the Pharaohs of the 18th dynasty. The Egyptian Pharaoh was the imperial overlord of Canaan. The Canaanite city-states were in a vassal relationship with Egypt so that the king in a Canaanite city owed fealty to the Pharaoh and considered his own kingship to be derived from the authority of the Pharaoh. Regular payments of tribute were sent to Egypt by these vassals. If and when a vassal encroached upon Egyptian interests, as did 'Abdi-Ashirta, he could be taken to Egypt and executed.

Alongside the Canaanite kings were priests in the royal temples, where the Canaanite deities were personified forces of nature. The priests were close to the kings, dependent on them, and expected to support them. The kings deeded them land to be worked by slaves. The pantheon consisted of the principal deity of the state (El), fertility deities (Ba'al and Astarte), a deity associated with the dead (Mot), and a personal or household deity. The most important deities for daily life were the fertility gods and goddesses, since they controlled the fertility of the land, animals and people, and the worship of these deities involved imitative magic, sacred prostitution and human sacrifice (cf. Lv. 18:21; Dt. 12:31; 2 Kg. 23:10; Je. 7:31). In addition, there was a cult of the dead (cf. Lv. 19:26, 31; Dt. 18:9-11). These "detestable ways" of the Canaanites became the underlying reason why the

Israelites were to be used as instruments of divine judgment (Dt. 12:31; 18:9-12).[49]

An urban aristocracy existed under the kings to whom the nobles owed allegiance and services while in turn receiving honors and land. Nobles were residents in the cities themselves. Below them were tenant farmers, artisans and slaves living in villages close to the cities. They worked for the kings, priests and nobles. More distant were the free land owners and pastoral nomads, who paid heavily in taxes to the king and were therefore susceptible to debt slavery and forced labor. Finally, on the fringes of society were the *Hapiru*, those landless elements who sometimes attacked settled areas or hired themselves out as mercenaries.[50]

Rahab and the Spies at Jericho (2:1-24)

The use of spies in war efforts had been customary for many centuries before Joshua.[51] Moses sent a dozen such spies 40 years earlier from Kadesh Barnea (cf. Nu. 13), and now Joshua followed in kind, sending two spies into Jericho to reconnoiter the city's approaches and defenses (2:1a). They found their way to the house of a prostitute, Rahab.[52]

Word soon was conveyed to Jericho's king that Israelite strangers were in town, and it would not have been much of a stretch for him to conclude that they were spies. Rahab, however, had hidden the two men, and she diverted the efforts of the king to apprehend them, saying they had left before the city gates closed at dusk (2:2-7).[53] She seemed very aware that the Israelites were intent on invading the land—indeed that this was widely suspected—and she pled with the spies for the lives of herself and her family (2:8-13). Her confession, "I know that Yahweh has given this land to you" and that he is "God in heaven above and on earth below", signaled her

---

[49] H. Ringgren, *Religions of the Ancient Near East*, trans. J. Sturdy (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), pp. 124-176.

[50] R. Cohen and R. Westbrook, eds., *Amarna Diplomacy: The Beginnings of International Relations* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University, 2000), pp. 8-9 and E. Hamlin, *Joshua: Inheriting the Land [ITC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. xvii-xix.

[51] Kitchen, pp. 167.

[52] While there is some debate about Rahab's occupation, the Hebrew term זוֹנָה (= prostitute) is to be distinguished from the term קָדֵשׁ (= cult prostitute). As a *zona*, Rahab was probably a secular prostitute, possibly reduced to this extremity in order to avoid debt slavery for herself and her family, given the several mentions of her family in the narrative (2:12-13, 18; 6:23, 25), cf. Coote, p. 592. The idea that she was simply an "innkeeper" (NIVmg) is a later Jewish tradition (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 5.1.2; T. B. Megillah 14b, 15a) as is the idea that she married Joshua and became the ancestor of Jeremiah and Huldah.

[53] There is an anomaly in the Hebrew text of 2:4, which says "the woman took the two men and hid him" instead of "hid them". Most translations (so NIV, ESV, NASB, NRSV, etc.) change the singular to a plural.

willingness to embrace the faith of Israel. Indeed, the author of Hebrews clearly took this confession to be an indication of valid faith (He. 11:31), while James holds up her actions of protecting the spies as a righteous work that demonstrated her faith (Ja. 2:25-26).

The spies appropriately assumed their authority to negotiate in such circumstances, which in turn speaks to the truth about God observed by Abraham so many years earlier: *Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked. Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?* (Ge. 18:25). Rahab's house was, quite literally, הַחוֹמָה וּבַחוֹמָה בְּקִיר (= in the city wall and in the wall). This odd-sounding expression probably means that her house was in a casemate section of the city's perimeter walls, that is, occupying a space between the double fortification wall of Jericho (2:15).[54] The window through which the spies escaped would have been in the outer of the two walls. On oath, the spies promised Rahab that she and her family would be spared so long as she hung a scarlet cord in the window of the wall and remained with her family in the casemate room (2:17-21). Much symbolic value has been attributed to the scarlet cord—everything from the notion that the red cord was a symbol of her occupation (the "red rope district" of Jericho) to a recollection of the blood of the Passover lamb to a prefigurement of the blood of Christ on the cross. Such typology is highly speculative and unnecessary. When the spies returned to Joshua they gave solid support to the invasion—exactly the opposite from what their fathers had done at Kadesh Barnea (2:22-24; cf. Nu. 13:28-29, 31-33).

Crossing the Jordan (3:1—5:1)

The crossing of the Jordan parallels the crossing of the Red Sea, and after the event, this link is made explicit (4:23; cf. Ps. 66:6). The earlier event, of course, was the crossing of a body of water to escape Egypt, while the latter was a crossing in order to invade Canaan, but nevertheless, it hardly is to be doubted that the second generation Israelites who crossed the Jordan with Joshua would have been reminded of that earlier event in the

---

[54] In the Bronze and Iron Ages, when cities were nearly universally fortified against siege, the primary fortification was the city wall. One type of construction was the casemate wall in which two walls running parallel to each other surrounded the city. Short, interior dividing walls at right angels to the parallel walls created rooms between the parallel walls, and these sometimes served as living quarters, cf. O. Borowski, "Five Ways to Defend an Ancient City," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1983), p. 73. John Garstang's 1930-36 excavation of Jericho uncovered such a double wall, though his dating of it to the time of Joshua has been widely questioned.

lifetimes of their parents. This second crossing was the beginning of Joshua's exaltation as the new leader, so that it was clear that Yahweh was with him just as he had been with Moses (3:7; cf. 4:14). This crossing is what the prophet Micah would later describe as the journey "from Shittim to Gilgal", a journey displaying the "righteous acts of Yahweh" (Mic. 6:5).

All told, there were some four preparation days before the crossing, three days waiting for the spies (cf. 1:11; 2:22; 3:2) plus one day in cultic purification (3:5). Ceremonial purity was mandatory, since Yahweh himself moved in and about the war camp (cf. Dt. 23:9-14). The ark of the covenant, the palladium of war, would lead them across the Jordan (3:3; cf. Nu. 10:35-36). The crossing of the Jordan meant their arrival in the land of promise. Their 40 years of encampment in the desert from Rameses (Ex. 12:37) to the Jordan was punctuated by many movements, usually marked by the Hebrew verb נָסַע (= to start out, march on). Now, however, their movement between encampments would be few.[55]

The crossing began with the priests carrying the ark, who stood in the edge of the river water (3:6, 8). This entry of the ark into the Jordan would halt the flow of water, a signal that this crossing was designed by Yahweh as a surety of what he would do in driving out the Canaanites before them (3:9-13).[56] It has been observed that the cessation of the Jordan's flow some 16 miles north of Jericho (at Adam, i.e., Tell ed-Damieh) has occurred at various times due to periodic collapses of the embankments.[57] Whether such a collapse was in any way related to this incident is simply not stated, but in any case, the Book of Joshua clearly treats the event as a miracle (3:14-17; cf. Ps. 114:3, 5).

---

[55] Hamlin notes that this verb is used several times in Exodus and no less than 89 times in Numbers. In the Book of Joshua, by contrast, it will only appear three times, cf. E. Hamlin, *Joshua: Inheriting the Land [ITC]* (Grand Rapids/Edinburgh: Eerdmans/Handsel, 1983), p. 22.

[56] The seven nations in the land of Canaan are a stereotypical description (cf. Dt. 7:1). In the various listings, the full seven are not always given (cf. Ex. 3:8, 17; 13:5; 23:23, 28, etc.), but seven is itself a number signifying completeness, so the number seven has a formulaic value meaning "all". Some of these people groups can be found in outside ancient Near Eastern sources, such as, the Hittites, Canaanites and Amorites (in Mesopotamian, Ugaritic and Egyptian texts), cf., H. Hoffner, Jr., "Hittites," and K. Schoville, "Canaanites and Amorites," *Peoples of the Old Testament World*, ed. A. Hoerth, G. Mattingly and E. Yamauchi (Cambridge/Grand Rapids: Lutterworth/Baker, 1994), pp. 127-155, 158-159, 164-167. Some, like the Perizzites, Hivites and Girgashites, are more debatable, though some possible identities have been suggested (i.e., Perizzites = a Hurrian group?; Hivites = another Hurrian group?; Girgashites = Qarqisha?), cf. Kitchen, p. 175. The Jebusites, of course, were inhabitants of Jerusalem and/or its environs, cf. S. Reed, *ABD* (1992) 3.652-653.

[57] It happened, for instance, in AD 1267, when the river flow was stopped for some 16 hours. It happened again in 1906 and later in 1927, when the river was dammed for 21 hours, cf. Kitchen, p. 167. It also was reported in 1160, 1546, 1834 and 1906, cf. B. Wood, "Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho? A New Look at the Archaeological Evidence," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1990), p. 54.

When the whole nation had crossed the Jordan,[58] twelve representatives, one from each tribe, were chosen to build a memorial cairn on the west bank at Gilgal (4:1-20; cf. 3:12), much as Moses had erected twelve stones at the altar at Sinai (cf. Ex. 24:4).[59] They arrived at Gilgal on the same day of the year as the original Passover (4:19; cf. Ex. 12:3). The stones would signify the constitution of a renewed people now in the land. It would remain as a memorial for teaching future generations about God's mighty acts (4:22, 24). In Joshua's speech, there is a fascinating interplay between the address to Israel's sons and Joshua's own standing as one of Israel's fathers. "You" (the younger generation) crossed the Jordan on dry ground, and this event paralleled what Yahweh had done at the Red Sea when "we" (the older generation) crossed over.

Gilgal now would become the base camp for the invasion. It was strategically located, not only because it was near Jericho, the first target

---

[58] The fact that the entire body passed over the Jordan River in a single day (4:1) raises a question that usually is addressed in the context of the Book of Numbers, that is, how many Israelites were there? Traditionally, based on the military counts in the Torah that bracket the 40 year desert sojourn (Nu. 1, 26), the total number of Israelites has been estimated to be about two million persons (i.e., over 600,000 warriors of military age plus their wives, children, the aged and slaves). However, some significant logistical problems arise with such extraordinary numbers, not the least of which is the challenge of getting a group the size of metropolitan Detroit to cross the Jordan River in a single day. Practical logistical issues include: 1) the problem of communication (Joshua, like Moses before him, speaks directly to this whole group—and how does one speak to two million people?), 2) provision for livestock (since the families had their livestock with them, provisions in terms of fodder and water would have been a gargantuan challenge, especially in desert terrain), and 3) disciplines of camping, travel and sanitation (sanitation, especially, was difficult, since to relieve oneself an Israelite was expected to go "outside the camp", cf. Dt. 23:12). From extant ancient Near Eastern texts, the typical fighting force, even for a large scale conflict, was roughly from 10,000-20,000 warriors. A force of 600,000 warriors seems astronomically high, especially in light of the fact that the Israelites were considered to be "the fewest of all peoples" (Dt. 7:7), smaller than even the various Canaanite nations who were "larger and stronger" (Dt. 7:1). Finally, there are the birthrate logistics of how 70 people (cf. Ex. 1:5) could proliferate to such a large group in just a few generations. Each family would have had to average many children apiece for four centuries (cf. Ge. 15:13; Ex. 12:40-41), which the writer of Genesis reckons as only four generations (Ge. 15:16). Even more to the point, if at the time of the census there were only 22,273 firstborn males over a month old (Nu. 3:39-43), a very small number for a group of two million, it means that each household present at the census would need at least 27 sons and additional daughters, each mother needing to bear about 50 children in order to make up the full number. Various attempts have been made to find solutions to these logistical challenges, and for summaries, see R. Allen, "Numbers," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. F. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2. 680-691 and G. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary [TOTC]* (Leceister, England and Downer Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1981), pp. 60-66. With no attempt at solving this issue here, most scholars, including conservatives, conclude that the actual size of the group entering Canaan was probably much smaller than the traditional two million figure that often is assumed.

[59] There is some discussion about the 40,000 warriors in 4:13. Do they refer to warriors from the 2 ½ trans-Jordan tribes or the total number of Israelite warriors? The fact that the Hebrew text breaks the narrative sequence with a disjunctive construction at the beginning of 4:13 suggests that 4:13 is a summary of the entire preceding narrative, not merely a summary of 4:12, and if so, then the 40,000 would represent the full Israelite army. Further, since the word for thousand (אֶלֶף) also is used for a military unit of variable size, the exact number of warriors is ambiguous, cf. A. Myers, ed., *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 769.

(4:20), but also because there was a good water supply in the river and an open plain that was easily defensible. As a bridgehead into Canaan, it was supported by the recently conquered Transjordan area from which a supply line and reinforcements could be channeled. It also was the entryway into the central mountains.[60] The Israelites would maintain the base camp at Gilgal for a long time (cf. 9:6; 10:15, 43; 14:6), only moving outward from Gilgal toward occupation much later (cf. 18:4). Hence, the initial invasion of Canaan was on the order of disabling raids, not occupation. After the raids, the Israelites returned to the base camp at Gilgal.[61]

News of the Israelites crossing Jordan spread among the Canaanites (5:1). They knew the invasion had begun![62]

The Ceremony at Gilgal (5:2-12)

The circumcision ceremony at Gilgal is now the third ritual preparation for the invasion.[63] It followed the purification (3:5) and setting up of memorial stones (4:4-7, 20-24). Why the Israelites had not circumcised their sons while in the desert is unclear, since this was enjoined upon Abraham's descendants from ancient times (cf. Ge. 17:10-14). At the original Passover, the rite of circumcision was again enjoined, especially with regard to aliens and slaves (Ex. 12:44, 48). The generation who rebelled at Kadesh were all under broken covenant conditions (cf. Nu. 14:26-35), and therefore, apparently they were inclined to neglect circumcision or felt it unnecessary, given their death sentence in the desert. Still, given the seriousness attached to circumcision, this neglect seems surprising. Moses himself was nearly executed by God for failing in this sacred duty (cf. Ex. 4:24-26). In any case, it was absolutely necessary to reinstate this covenant ritual before proceeding further into Canaan (5:4-8). Further, the fact that they conducted the ritual with flint knives (in the Bronze Age!) suggests that they intentionally performed it as an ancient custom in the ancient way (5:2).

---

[60] A. Malamat, "How Inferior Israelite Forces Conquered Fortified Canaanite Cities," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1982), p. 31.

[61] See the pertinent discussion of this point in Kitchen, pp. 159-163.

[62] The use of a first person plural "we" is irregular in 5:1 (see also 5:6), especially in the larger context of the other third person plurals. A few commentators have suggested a vestige of an eyewitness account, but others treat it as a remnant of cultic usage, cf. T. Butler, *Joshua [WBC]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), p. 41.

[63] Circumcision had a long history in the ancient Near East, and it can be traced backward as far as the 23rd century BC in Middle Egypt, cf. P. King, "Circumcision: Who Did It, Who Didn't and Why," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 2006), p. 49. In Canaan, only the Philistines did not practice circumcision.

The renewing of the covenant conditions through circumcision marked the end of the disgrace of the earlier rebellion (5:9).[64]

A couple of further points are in order. The command to circumcise the Israelites "again" (lit., "a second [time]") is curious. Typically, interpreters argue that it need not imply that they had been circumcised previously, but rather, that circumcision was now reinstated after the long lapse. Others, however, suggest that Egyptian circumcision was not complete, and some Israelites may have been practicing Egyptian style circumcision and needed to have it done the second time.[65] In any case, the prepuce, once removed, does not grow back. Also, the "hill of foreskins" ("circumcision hill", cf. TEV) is thought by some scholars to be the site for an annual ritual in the northern nation due to the later cultic references to Gilgal in the 8th century (Ho. 4:15; 9:15; 12:9-11; Am. 4:4; 5:5).[66] Physical circumcision symbolized a deep, internal commitment to the covenant, for the expression "circumcise your hearts", which first appeared in speeches by Moses (Dt. 10:16; 30:6), aimed at undivided loyalty and love toward Yahweh himself. Jeremiah, also, employed this same metaphor (Je. 4:4; cf. 6:10), as did St. Paul in the New Testament (Ro. 2:29).

Four days later was the Passover, which marked the fourth preparatory ritual for the invasion (5:10).

Purification (3:5)
Erection of Memorial Stones (3:12; 4:4-7, 20-24)
Circumcision (5:2-9)
Passover (5:10)

The celebrations of the Passover may have extended some few days beyond the feast of unleavened bread, since after the Passover they ate "unleavened bread and parched grain". Parched grain occurs elsewhere in a Passover context in association with the restrictions on ordinary bread (cf. Lv. 23:14), and their eating of it here signified the initial harvest of Canaan, just as they had been instructed (5:11; cf. Lv. 23:9-10). At this point, the manna stopped (5:12; cf. Ex. 16:35), for they were now in the land.

The Rout of Jericho (5:13—6:27)

---

[64] The name Gilgal is a wordplay on the verb *galal* (= to roll away).
[65] King, p. 53.
[66] W. Brownlee, *ISBE* (1982) 2.470-471.

Jericho, near Gilgal, was the first target in the cisjordan. The "commander of the army of Yahweh" (5:13) is not described in further detail, though the supernatural figure is likely to have been the *Mal'ak Yahweh*, who appeared to the patriarchs and later would appear to the Israelites in the beginning of the Book of Judges to announce their failure at conquest (Jg. 2:1-5). On the banks of the Red Sea, Yahweh himself had been extolled as Israel's "Man of War" (Ex. 15:3), and certainly the appearance of this figure heralded the fact that any victory accomplished would be due to divine power, not human ingenuity. That Joshua was to take off his sandals, since any appearance of the divine theophany rendered the site holy, has obvious parallels with Moses at the burning bush (cf. Ex. 3:5).

The brief dialog between the mysterious figure and Joshua demonstrates another important truth. Joshua asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" The stranger's answer was "neither". The point of this answer is that the hosts of heaven do not side with humans, as though humans could "get God to side with them", but rather, the hosts of heaven are always on the side of God's purposes. It would become painfully clear in the debacle at Ai that God would not side with the Israelites simply as a matter of course. Hence, the issue was not whether God was on the side of Israel, but whether Israel was on the side of God!

The Archaeological Problem of Jericho

Before looking at the attack on Jericho in the biblical text, a long-standing problem must be addressed. Because of the biblical link, efforts to excavate Jericho began in the middle of the 19th century by Charles Warren (1868), later by Claude Conder and H. H. Kitchener (1883) and still later by the Austro-German team of Sellin and Watzinger (1907-1909). These excavations revealed much of the Middle Bronze Age glacis and Early Bronze Age walls as well as some later Israelite dwellings (11th-6th centuries BC). However, Sellin and Watzinger concluded that Jericho was not even inhabited during the Late Bronze Age, and hence, there was no fortified city occupying the mound in the period of Joshua. In 1930-1936, John Garstang of the University of Liverpool began a more concentrated excavation, hoping to discover the relationship between the material remains and the biblical story. From his analysis of what he called "City IV", he announced that he had indeed discovered evidence that the Israelites destroyed Jericho. City IV had been violently destroyed by fire in about 1400 BC (cf. Jos. 6:24), based on pottery found in the destruction debris. His excavation of fallen double walls, which he believed to be related to an earthquake, led

him to link Jericho's remains to the biblical story. The link was circumstantial, of course, but he believed it was solid.

More recently, Kathleen Kenyon, at Garstang's request, excavated parts of the Jericho tel (1952-1958). Her assessment was quite different. The destruction of City IV that Garstang had dated to about 1400 BC, she dated to about 1550 BC, which put it back in the Middle Bronze Age and much too early for the time of Joshua by any theory of dating. The collapsed double city wall that Garstang investigated she dated nearly a thousand years earlier. Even more to the point, she agreed with the Sellin-Watzinger team that at the time of Joshua the city of Jericho was not even inhabited, much less surrounded by a huge fortification wall. Kenyon died in 1978 without having published her final reports, but her preliminary reports and articles prior to her death convinced most scholars that her conclusions were sound.[67] Kenyon's conclusions became a centerpiece for some of the newer theories about the Israelite emergence in Canaan, an emergence that increasingly was conjectured to be either gradual or by peaceful infiltration, but certainly not by a crushing military invasion.

Few scholars or archaeologists have been willing to reopen the problem of Jericho. The issue is complicated by the two reigning dating theories of the exodus and invasion, the older dates in the 1400s BC (the minority theory) and the later dates in the 1200s BC (majority theory). One scholar who has done so, however, is the archaeologist Bryant Wood (University of Toronto, later Associates for Biblical Research), who argues that Kenyon, who never published an analysis of her pottery to support her claims, was quite likely wrong. Garstang, who published a detailed pottery study, Wood assessed as being "right on the money".[68] Of course, accepting Garstang's conclusions while rejecting Kenyon's, depends upon the early dating theory for the exodus and invasion.[69] Wood's conclusions have not been widely accepted,[70] other than by conservative scholars who are inclined to support the biblical record in any case.[71] Those who opt for the majority opinion (late date), but still want to support the biblical version of the battle of Jericho, argue that the town at that time was relatively small while erosion

---

[67] T. Holland, "Jericho," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, ed. E. Meyers (Oxford/New York: Oxford University, 1997) 3.220-224 and B. Wood, "Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho? A New Look at the Archaeological Evidence," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1990), pp. 44-49.

[68] B. Wood, "Let the Evidence Speak," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 2007) p. 78.

[69] B. Wood, "Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho? A New Look at the Archaeological Evidence," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1990), pp. 50-57.

[70] Piotr Bienkowski's rebuttal should be considered as representative, cf. "Jericho Was Destroyed in the Middle Bronze Age, Not the Late Bronze Age," but see Brant Wood's response, cf. *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1990), pp. 45-49, 68.

[71] E.g., Alfred Hoerth, pp. 209-210.

of the Jericho tel is so severe that one should not expect to find any material remains from the time of Joshua, so the question is moot.[72] Again, the question becomes, "Is absence of evidence evidence of absence?"

The Battle (6:1-27)

In conventional terms of the ancient Near East, the invasion of Jericho was not much of a battle at all. The invasion of fortified cities typically took the form of siege, where one or more techniques were attempted to penetrate the enclosure by scaling ladders, demolishing the gates or walls with battering rams, tunneling beneath the walls, or simply cutting off all access and waiting to starve out the defenders.[73] The Israelites, of course, used none of these techniques. Jericho, in the meantime, was preparing for siege, and the city gates were shut tight (6:1).

The divine order for attacking Jericho consisted of circling the city once each day for six days and seven times on the seventh day. At the completion of the 13th circuit, the priests would blow shophars, the people would shout, and the walls would fall down (6:2-5). The bulk of the army would be followed by seven priests blowing shophars, who in turn would be followed by priests carrying the ark. Behind the ark would come the army's rearguard (6:6-14). Everything proceeded according to Yahweh's order, and on the seventh day Joshua gave a final instruction that Rahab and her family were to be spared when the walls fell down. Nothing in the city was to be taken as booty, since it was *herem* (6:15-19). Since everything in the city was doomed to destruction, to take into one's camp that which was devoted to destruction meant that one's camp, also, then fell under the ban.

When Jericho's walls fell, the army directly charged over the rubble into the city and annihilated every living entity, human and animal, just as the Deuteronomic code had stipulated (6:20-21; cf. Dt. 7:2, 16, 24; 20:16-17). The walls, which would have consisted of a belt of jointed structures, would have fallen in segments, and Rahab's segment remained. She and her family were spared, and they were allowed to camp just outside the Israelite camp (6:22-23). Jericho and everything in it was then torched (6:24-25).

At the end, Joshua pronounced a curse upon Jericho and anyone who would attempt to rebuild it. Indeed, the archaeological record demonstrates that there was a long hiatus featuring a marked break in habitation. The

---

[72] This is the position of Kitchen, pp. 187-188. He argues, "We will never find 'Joshua's Jericho' during 1275-1220 [BC]" precisely because of the massive erosion.

[73] E. Bleibtreu, "Five Ways to Conquer a City," *BAR* (May/Jun 1990), pp. 36-44.

reoccupation of Jericho did not occur until the Iron Age, first in the 9th century BC (cf. 1 Kg. 16:34), but more extensively in the 7th century BC.[74]

The Sin of Achan (7:1-26)

One Israelite soldier, Achan ben Carmi, violated the ban (7:1; cf. 6:18-19). He took some of the booty and kept it. By doing so, he caused himself and everything associated with him to be also under the ban. This contamination only became apparent when Joshua sent a small contingent against Ai, a small neighboring city, where the Israelites were soundly defeated and suffered 36 casualties (7:2-5). Joshua and the elders sought Yahweh in prayer before the ark (7:6-9), and Yahweh revealed the broken *herem* (7:10-12). In violating the covenant ban, Achan also had violated several of the ten commandments—theft, lying and coveting (7:11, 21).

The only solution was to remove the violation from the camp—and this meant not merely removing the purloined objects, but Achan himself and his whole family (7:15; cf. Dt. 13:12-16). The behavior of the individual affected the whole of the nation.[75] The sin of the one was the sin of all. As yet, no one knew the identity of the transgressor, but in preparation for a showdown, the entire camp was ordered to become ritually ready (possibly by public confession of sin) for Yahweh's appearance the next day (7:13). The examination would proceed through the three concentric circles by which each individual identified himself—tribe, clan and family (7:14). The transgressor would suffer the same fate as Jericho—he would be executed and burned.

The tribe of Judah was selected, then the clan of the Zerahites, then the family of Zimri, possibly by casting lots (cf. 1 Sa. 10:19-24; 14:36-43). Representatives for each family unit were then brought forward, and Achan ben Carmi was selected (7:16-18). The expressions "give glory to God" (cf. Jn. 9:24) and "render praise to him" (7:19, Hebrew text) are probably euphemisms for "tell the truth" and "confess" (so KJV, ASV, NEB, NRSV).[76] Achan's long silence during the process of selection suggests that his confession, when he finally made it, was not out of a willing repentance but because no other alternative was now available. It is fascinating to observe that the Hebrew verbs in Achan's confession are exactly the same as

---

[74] T. Holland, 3.223.

[75] This concept of corporate personality—the fluidity between the group and the individual—was a characteristic of ancient Israel, cf. H. Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

[76] R. Bratcher and B. Newman, *A Translator's Handbook on the Book of Joshua* (London/New York/Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1983), p. 98.

those in Eve's confession (7:20-21; cf. Ge. 3:6): "I saw" (רָאָה), "I coveted" (חָמַד), and "I took" (לָקַח)". When Joshua's emissaries had searched his tent, they discovered the stolen booty—a Babylonian robe, about five pounds of silver, and a pound and a quarter gold ingot (7:20-23). Achan and the stolen booty, along with his family and possessions, were taken to the Valley of Achor and destroyed. The people of Israel stoned him and his family, then burned the corpses and booty. Over the ashes they piled a mound of rocks as a memorial to this heinous violation of the covenant (7:24-26). The Valley of Achor is a site on Judah's northern border (15:7), and there is likely a word play on the name Achan (עָכָן) and Achor (עָכוֹר = trouble), where the one is substituted for the other in the Chronicler's genealogy (1 Chr. 2:7).

The Conquest of Ai (8:1-29)

The initial attack upon Ai (7:2-5) resulted in disaster, because Achan had broken the *herem*. Most of Joshua 7, therefore, is preoccupied by the trial and execution of Achan. In chapter 8, the narrative returns to the conquest of Ai. Before taking up that narrative, however, the modern reader must also address a modern problem to which we now turn.

The Archaeological Problem of Ai

The biblical site called Ai is described as being "near Beth Aven to the east of Bethel" (7:2; 8:9, 17; cf. Ge. 12:8). The modern identification of Beth Aven (= House of Wickedness) is disputed.[77] Since Bethel (= House of God), which is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible more times than any other site except Jerusalem, is a known site (the modern Arab village of Beitin), archaeologists took this as their point of departure for locating Ai. Three sites were examined, Khirbet Haiyan (to the south), Khirbet Khudriya (to the east) and et-Tell (to the northwest). Et-Tell has been generally accepted as the site of Ai, since both the Hebrew and Aramaic names for the site mean "the ruin heap" and the topography fits the biblical description. John Garstang began the first excavations in 1928, Judith Marquet-Krause directed a second excavation in 1933-35, and Joseph Callaway yet a third in

---

[77] P. Arnold, "Beth-Aven," *ABD* (1992), 1.682.

1964-1976.[78] The long and short of things is that while this site had occupancy back to the early Bronze Age, it was destroyed near the end of that period (ca. 2550-2350 BC) and remained unoccupied for more than a millennium. No evidence of Middle Bronze Age (2200-1500 BC) or Late Bronze Age (1500-1250 BC) occupation has been found. The top of the mound was resettled as a small, unwalled village at the beginning of Iron Age I (1220-1125 BC) and then abandoned again with no further occupation on the site. Hence, archaeologists generally argue that there was no city for Joshua's army to destroy, and they usually relegate the biblical story to the category of folk legend, though some suggest there may have been some historical memory of older events that were stitched together.[79]

This brings us back to the question raised earlier—is absence of evidence evidence of absence? David Merling (Andrews University) makes an important distinction between what is "historically verifiable" and what is "true". Many if not most archaeologists assume that what is not historically verifiable is therefore not true. However, as Merling points out, this is a false construct based on false expectations. False expectations drive research into wrong directions. Further, nonevidence should not be used as supporting data for anything, since nonevidence is simply nothing. "Nothing is not evidence; it is nothing, or what I call, to give it some importance, nonevidence." It belongs to the list of false assumptions that sometimes historians unwittingly accept, one of which is the "fallacy of the negative proof", that is, the attempt to sustain a factual proposition merely by negative evidence. In fact, to admit that one has found nothing only means that one has found nothing. Not knowing that a thing exists is different from knowing that it does not exist, and the first does not necessarily imply the second.[80]

What is the answer to the archaeological conundrum? No answer is as yet possible, but several important factors should be considered. First, the identification of Ai as et-Tell is quite possible but not absolutely confirmed. While the Joshua narratives mention a "gate" at Ai (7:5; 8:29), interpreters usually have assumed that the biblical text requires a fortified, walled city, but this conclusion is not required, either. Free-standing gates without walls are known in other places in the ancient world, since gates were used not

---

[78] R. Cooley, "Ai," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, ed. E. Meyers (New York/Oxford: Oxford University, 1997) 1.32.

[79] Z. Zevit, "The Problem of Ai," and J. Callaway, "Was My Excavation of Ai Worthwhile?" *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1985), pp. 58-69.

[80] D. Merling, "The Relationship Between Archaeology and the Bible: Expectations and Reality," *The Future of Biblical Archaeology*, ed. J. Hoffmeier and A. Millard (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 29-34.

only as fortifications but also as civic centers in times of peace. Further, there still may have been remains of the ancient Bronze Age gate. This is not to say that there was no gate at Ai—only that the narrative in Joshua says little about it, whether large or small, new or old, connected or unconnected to a city wall. In the end, as Merling points out, "…excavations of the past tell us that the one area where archaeology is least helpful is with events. Events are usually short-lived and, when described in the Bible, too little detail is provided to be of much help to the archaeologist." The event at Ai was a one-day event, and there is no "straight link" between that ancient event and the archaeological excavations at et-Tell.

The Second Attack Upon Ai (8:1-29)

After resolving the covenant violation of Achan, Yahweh instructed Joshua to attack Ai once more, this time by setting up a decoy and an ambush (8:1-13).[81] The decoy consisted of a direct march on the city, while the ambush consisted of another force waiting concealed behind the city. The ruse worked perfectly, and when the king of Ai went out with his army to confront the decoy, Joshua's hidden troops slipped in behind them, cutting off their retreat back to Ai, and burned the city (8:14-19). When Ai's army saw the smoke, they realized they were trapped, but there was no escape. Pinned between the Israelite soldiers from the ambush and the army decoy, they succumbed quickly. The Israelites left no survivors of either Ai's soldiers or citizens (8:20-27). Like Jericho, Ai was burned (8:8, 28). The corpse of Ai's king was hung on a tree to symbolize the divine curse on the city, though his body was taken down and buried beneath a pile of rocks before sunset to avoid desecration of the land (8:28-29; cf. Dt. 21:23).

Several further points should be addressed about this narrative. First, in view of the original attack that ended in disaster and caused huge misgivings among the Israelites (7:5b-9), Yahweh's instruction was now emphatic: "Don't be afraid; don't be shattered; I have delivered Ai into your hands" (8:1)! Second, unlike at Jericho the *herem* was modified in this instance so that the Israelites were allowed to take booty (8:2, 27). Why this permission was given is unclear, though a precedent can be found in the earlier Transjordan wars (cf. Dt. 2:34-35; 3:6-7). Third, according to the Masoretic Text there seems to have been some joining of action between the

---

[81] The body of 30,000 soldiers (8:3) seems rather large for an ambush party, and some scholars have suggested a scribal error, instead recommending 3,000, cf. J. Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 92 or even 30, cf. R. Boling and G. Wright, *Joshua [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), pp. 237-238.

armies of Ai and Bethel (8:17), but if so, no information is given as to what happened to Bethel's army.[82] Fourth, Joshua's raised javelin during the battle (8:18, 26; cf. Sirach 46:2) seems to clearly recall Moses' raised staff in the earlier battle with Amalek (cf. Ex. 17:8-12). Once again, Joshua is, in effect, the new Moses (cf. 1:5; Dt. 34:9).

Covenant Renewal at Mt. Ebal (8:30-35)

If Joshua's raised javelin toward Ai replicated Moses' raised hands toward Amalek, his construction of an altar on Mt. Ebal carries out fully Moses' earlier instructions as well "according to what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses" (8:31, 34). The original instruction appears in one of Moses' final speeches, where he stipulated that after the Israelites had crossed the Jordan River, they were to build to Yahweh an altar of undressed fieldstones coated with plaster where the words of the Torah could be recorded (Dt. 27:1-8; cf. Ex. 20:25). Here at Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim in the Shechem Pass the Israelites were to stand, six tribes on each slope, to affirm the levitical recitation of the blessings and curses of the covenant (Dt. 27:9-26).

Now that the critical central targets of Jericho and Ai had been burned, Joshua directed the Israelites to comply fully with Moses' instructions. He built the altar as stipulated, offering sacrifices on it and copying the words of Torah on the stones (8:30-31). Staging the people on the two slopes of the facing mountains with the Levites and the ark of the covenant in the valley between them, he read aloud the blessings and curses (8:32-35).

If the archaeology of Jericho and Ai has been problematic, it is only fair to say that the excavations on Mt. Ebal have been more hopeful. In the early 1980s, archaeologist Adam Zertal discovered a square-based structure of fieldstones on Mt. Ebal which, on the basis of excavated scarabs he dated to between the reigns of Ramses II (19th dynasty in the 13th century BC) and Rameses III (20th dynasty in the early 12th century BC). Other excavated pottery forms (collar-rimmed jars) support this dating as well. The structure, which was built of undressed field stones laid on bedrock, he took to be an Israelite altar, possibly the very one built by Joshua, and several features seem to support this identity. Not only is it in the right place and at the right

---

[82] William Albright took this brief reference to Bethel as suggesting that the story was originally about Bethel, not Ai, cf. *BASOR 74* (Apr 1939), pp. 16-17, but his conclusion has not won many adherents. The LXX does not have the name Bethel at all, and this omission is followed in the TEV, NEB and JB.

time (assuming the later dating theory for Joshua), it contained ashes and animal bones of young male bulls, sheep and goats but very little in the way of domestic artifacts. The altar was constructed with a ramp (not steps) as stipulated in the Torah (Ex. 20:26), and it was surrounded by a perimeter wall (but not a fortification wall), possibly used to demarcate between holy and unholy ground.[83] At the very least, the site conforms to the basic criteria for cultic sites: it is isolated, it features unusual artifacts, it retained its cultic character over long periods of time, and it has parallels with other known cultic sites.

The Treaty with the Gibeonites (9:1-27)

The next episode, like the incident with Achan, involved a covenant violation, though whereas the former was intentional, the latter was inadvertent and due to deception. The invasion of Jericho and Ai had opened up the center of Canaan, as the geographical data of 9:1 indicates, moving in a westerly direction (the central mountain range, the lowlands or foothills and the coastal plain). Doubtless there was consternation among the city-states that remained, particularly in the highlands of the south. A marked decline in political and economic stability near the end of the Late Bronze Age seems evident in the Amarna Letters.[84] Nonetheless, various city-state kings were willing to put aside their differences and unite against a common enemy (9:1-2).

Before detailing Joshua's war with the major cities of the south, a lengthy interlude was necessary to describe a treaty between the Israelites and some of the cities just to the north of Jerusalem. The initiative to establish a peaceful covenant with the Israelites rather than defend

---

[83] A. Zertal, "Has Joshua's Altar Been Found on Mt. Ebal?" *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1985), pp. 26-43. As with all archaeological discoveries, interpretations vary. One archaeologist, Aharon Kempinski, suggested the structure might simply be an Iron Age I watchtower, cf. *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1986), pp. 42, 44-49, but see Zertal's pointed rejoinder, cf. *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1986), pp. 43, 49-53. Scholar Michael Coogan (Harvard) agreed that the site was cultic but suggested it may have been a Canaanite site taken over by the Israelites, cf. H. Shanks, "Two Early Israelite Cult Sites Now Questioned," *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1988), pp. 48-52. In spite of objections, the evidence suggesting that this was an early Israelite cultic site remains strong.

[84] The kings of Gezer (EA 270, 292), Jerusalem (EA 285, 289) and Akko (EA 234) complained about Egypt's commissioners. Shechem was at odds with Megiddo (EA 244) and Qiltu (EA 280). Jerusalem's king made accusations against Gezer (EA 289, 290), Shechem (EA 289), Gath (Gimtu) and Qiltu (EA 290), and Qiltu, in turn, complained of its isolation and enmity with Jerusalem and Lachish (EA 335). Lachish had attracted the attention of Pharaoh's representative (EA 333), and there are various references to hostile actions that are less well defined. While all the Canaanite kings accepted their allegiance to the Egyptian Pharaoh, they at the same time engaged in local political and military struggles within that larger hegemony, cf. A. James, "Egypt and Her Vassals," *Amarna Diplomacy: The Beginnings of International Relations*, ed. Cohen and Westbrook (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 2000), p. 115.

themselves against invasion was undertaken by the citizens of Gibeon,[85] a Hivite city that apparently had no king but was ruled by city elders (9:7, 11).[86] Dressed as refugees, representatives from Gibeon approached Joshua at the Gilgal camp, claiming that they were aliens from a distant place who had heard about the mighty acts of Yahweh in behalf of the Israelites (9:3-13). In sympathy for their apparent distress, Joshua entered into a treaty with them, agreeing to suspend any military advances against them, and the treaty was ratified by a covenant oath (9:14-15).

This hasty action, taken without seeking Yahweh's approval (9:14), was a direct violation of the Deuteronomic code. The divine command was specific: "Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy" (Dt. 7:2). Scarcely had the treaty been ratified before the deception was discovered, but now it was too late. Though the people complained, the community leaders could not retract their oath. They determined to make the best of a bad situation by allowing the Gibeonites to live but reducing their status to that of forced labor in service to the priests, a sentence usually accorded to peoples outside Canaan proper (9:16-21; cf. Dt. 20:10-15). That this treaty remained sacrosanct is evident years later when Saul attempted to kill them off and David was compelled by Yahweh to deal with Saul's oath violation (2 Sa. 21:1ff.; cf. 1 Sa. 22:18-19).

The treaty involved some four cities, Gibeon (el-Jib), Kephirah (a name meaning "lioness" and possibly mentioned in the Amarna letters), Beeroth (in the territory of Benjamin, cf. 18:25) and Kiriath-Jearim (el-Achar, about eight miles north of Jerusalem). Together, these cities occupied the entire northwest quadrant of approaches to Jerusalem.[87]

When Joshua interrogated the Gibeonites about their deception, they naturally explained that they were motivated by fear. They would rather throw themselves upon the mercy of a treaty, even if established by a trick, than face the Israelites in pitched battle. Hence, Joshua ratified the decision reached by the elders and consigned the Gibeonites to forced labor for the priesthood (9:22-27). Centuries later, it would appear that the Gibeonites were assimilated into the community of Israel (Ne. 3:7; 7:25).

---

[85] The identity of Gibeon (el-Jib), about five miles north of Jerusalem, has been well-established, since James Pritchard's excavations uncovered no less than 31 Iron Age jar handles stamped with the name Gibeon (probably for wine export), cf. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, ed. E. Meyers (New York and Oxford: Oxford University, 1997), 2.403.

[86] The LXX has "Horites", and while this variation may be due to a scribal error, some have suggested that the term Horite might refer to two distinct ethnic groups sharing the same territory, cf. D. Baker, "Hivites," *ABD* (1992) 3.234.

[87] Boling and Wright, *Joshua [AB]*, p. 266.

The Southern Campaign (10:1-43)

With the buffer cities of Jericho and Ai now destroyed and the treaty between Israel and Gibeon known, the kings of the various other major city-states in the south joined forces. Treaties with invaders were not unknown, for several Canaanite kings were accused of joining forces with the *Hapiru* against Egyptian hegemony.[88] It is no surprise, therefore, that the king of Jerusalem rallied four other kings to form a combined army in order to attack Gibeon. If the Gibeonite treaty was not summarily punished, these kings likely felt the risk that other city-states might be encouraged to defect to the Israelites as well. Such a fifth-column in the midst of the southern coalition would be disastrous. Hence, Adoni-Zekek of Jerusalem[89] solicited help from the Amorite rulers of Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon, and they put Gibeon under siege (10:1-5).[90]

The Battle of Gibeon (10:6-15)

Because the Gibeonites were now in league with the Israelites, they sent a runner to plead for help (10:6). Joshua was bound to respond, especially since he was instructed directly by Yahweh to do so (10:7-8). He force-marched his army by night from Gilgal to Gibeon, taking the Amorite coalition by surprise (10:9). On this occasion, Yahweh, the man of war (cf. Ex. 15:3), directly intervened by a hailstorm to give Joshua the edge (10:10-11). As was the case from the beginning, Israel's invasion of Canaan was by divine mandate as a judgment on the Canaanites, and Yahweh's direct

---

[88] The Amarna Letters EA 287, 148 and 189 all make charges against Canaanite city-states who aligned themselves with the *Hapiru*.

[89] The similarity is striking between the name Adoni-Zekek (my lord is righteous) and Melchizedek (my king is righteous) of Ge. 14:18, the latter who also was the king of Jerusalem. This is the first mention of the name Jerusalem in the Bible. The name is known elsewhere, however, as *Urusalimu* in Egyptian Execration Texts and in the Amarna Letters, where the king is listed as Abdi-Heba (EA 287:25, 46, 61, 63; 289:14, 29; 290:15). The Judges record indicates that the city also was called Jebus (Jg. 19:10).

[90] Hebron, also called Kiriath Arba (Ge. 23:2), is mentioned many times in the Hebrew Bible, and it also may appear in some Egyptian texts, though this is debated. According to Numbers, it was built some seven years prior to Zoan (Tanis) in Egypt (Nu. 13:22). It was one of the cities reconnoitered many years earlier by the spies under Moses (Nu. 13). Jarmuth (Khirbet Yarmuk), with a history going as far back as the Early Bronze Age, is west of Bethlehem in the Elah Valley, one of the towns situated in the Shephelah. Soundings have indicated continuous occupation from the Late Bronze Age to the early Byzantine periods, cf. *ABD* (1992) 3.646. Lachish (Lakisa), which is clearly mentioned in the Amarna Letters (EA 287:15; 288:43; 328:5; 329:6; 335:10, 16), has a long history going back to the beginning of the Bronze Age. Level VI, the last prosperous Canaanite city, was destroyed by fire and the site abandoned in about 1200 BC. It was not rebuilt until the 10th century BC, cf. D. Usshishkin, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, ed. E. Meyers (New York/Oxford: Oxford University, 1997) 3.319. The identification of Eglon, later incorporated in the Judean Shephelah district of Lachish (15:39), is debated, cf. *ABD* (1992) 2.320-321.

intervention should be viewed in that light. Since the Canaanites worshipped the deities of thunder, lightning and storm, they must have thought their own gods were now against them! Later, Isaiah would briefly reference this remarkable event by calling it Yahweh's "strange work" (Is. 28:21). During the battle, Joshua prayed, and the daylight hours were miraculously extended for many extra hours (10:12-14), for as the biblical narrative states, "Surely, Yahweh was fighting for Israel!"[91] The poetic version of Joshua's prayer was cited from what was presumably an ancient collection of war stories called the Book of Jashar (10:13b; cf. 2 Sa. 1:18).[92]

During the battle, the Israelites pursued the Amorite army from the pass at Beth Horon through the Aijalon Valley to Azekah and Makedah (10:10-11), a route that ascended from the northern part of the Shephelah to the higher hill-lands farther south. When the long day was over, Joshua returned with his troops to Gilgal (10:15).

The Execution of the Five Amorite Kings (10:16-27)

Another feature of the battle is now offered.[93] The five Amorite kings apparently had joined each other in their headlong flight, holing up in a cave at Makkedah (10:16). Joshua's instructions were to block the cave entrance with rocks so the Israelite army would lose no time in pursuing the larger Amorite force (10:17-19). Only a few enemy soldiers eventually made it

---

[91] A persistent urban legend that Joshua's "missing day" can be scientifically validated has survived many iterations since it first appeared in 1936 in a popular book by Harry Rimmer, titled *The Harmony of Science and Scripture*. For many years this story was copied and recopied in print, and more recently the legend makes it rounds on the internet. Rimmer cited a source from 1890 as his proof for the calculations, a book by a C. A. Totten of Yale University, but the modern versions, which link the story to NASA scientists in Maryland who discovered the "missing day" with the help of computers, obviously have an amplified content. (A current version of this popular urban legend can be found at http://www.snopes.com/religion/lostday.asp). In spite of the fact that the legend has been debunked by responsible Christians representing such conservative entities as *Moody Bible Institute* and *Christianity Today* magazine, who have investigated the details and say there is no such data and no one who can be found to validate it, the legend seems to have taken on a life of its own. Things that sound "too good to be true" often aren't true, and this is one of them!

Various other explanations have been offered for this remarkable miracle of the long day, ranging from poetic hyperbole to meteor showers to a solar eclipse to an incantation ritual. Such speculation is unnecessary and unwarranted. Better to let the text simply stand as written. Possible explanations are interesting, but they offer no enduring value.

[92] This lost collection was probably similar to if not identical with the collection called the Book of the Wars of Yahweh (cf. Nu. 21:14) and/or the Book of the Song (1 Kg. 8:52-53, LXX). A recent forgery said to be the Book of Jashar and discovered in Gazna was published in 1829, having been "rediscovered" in England in 1721. The occultic secret society of the Rosicrucians published it again in 1953.

[93] The fact that this narrative is separated from the former description of the battle and the return of Joshua's army to Gilgal (10:15) might suggest the splicing of two independent traditions.

back to their fortified cities; all the others were killed (10:20-21).[94] When the Israelite army had returned to a temporary bivouac in Makkedah, they opened the cave, bringing the Amorite kings before Joshua. He instructed Israel's commanders to place their feet on the necks of the prostrate prisoners of war, a familiar ancient Near Eastern symbol of subjugation and defeat depicted in reliefs and described in texts (cf. 1 Kg. 5:3; Ps. 8:6; 110:1).[95] Urging trust in Yahweh, who was the divine man of war, Joshua executed the five kings and exposed their corpses by hanging, similar to what had been done to the king of Ai (10:26-27; cf. 8:29; Dt. 21:23). They were buried in the same cave in which they had hid.

The Fall of the Southern Cities (10:28-43)

Makkedah itself was now put to the sword, and every living entity was executed (10:28). No details are offered about the fall of the city, which presumably was fortified with walls (cf. 10:20). From Makkedah, the Israelite army moved to Libnah, where it suffered the same fate (10:29-30).[96] From Libnah the army moved against Lachish, and it fell as well, even though the army from Gezer attempted to come to the rescue (10:31-33).[97] From Lachish the army moved against Eglon, taking it as the other cities before it (10:34-35). Next, they went on to Hebron, taking both the city and the surrounding villages (10:36-37). Finally, they attacked Debir, and it fell as well (10:38-39).[98] Conspicious by its absence is any mention of an attack upon Jerusalem. While the king of Jerusalem was executed, it would not be until much later that the Israelites would conquer this city. It would be allotted to Judah (15:8), but the army of Judah would be unsuccessful in dislodging its occupants (15:63). Jerusalem would not finally fall into Israelite hands until the time of David (cf. 2 Sa. 5:6-10).

---

[94] The odd statement in 10:21 that "no one uttered a word against the Israelites" (lit., "no one sharpened his tongue") probably is an idiom for slander, indicating that no one could speak against the obedient Israel. The NEB rendering, "Not a man of the Israelites suffered so much as a scratch on his tongue," is hardly helpful!

[95] M. Dahood, *Psalms 1-50 [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), p. 116. In the Annals of Tukulti-Ninurta I, the Assyrian king boasted of his defeat of an enemy by saying, "His royal neck I trod with my foot, like a footstool," cf. Boling and Wright, p. 286.

[96] The site is debated, cf. *ABD* (1992) 4.322-323.

[97] Gezer (Gazru), which guards the route between the Way of the Sea and Jerusalem, figured prominently in the Amarna Letters (253:22; 254:22; 287:14; 290:8; 292:43; 298:5; 299:4; 300:5; 369:1; 378:4). Though Joshua defeated the army from Gezer, the Book of Joshua does not indicate that the city itself was attacked. Later, it is apparent that the Canaanites still occupied it (cf. 16:10; Jg. 1:29).

[98] Earlier, the name Debir was used for the king of Eglon (10:3), while here it is used of a city in the Shephelah.

When the campaign was complete, Joshua had completed strike raids throughout the whole southern part of Canaan—the central hill-lands, the Negev and the Shephelah. His successful battles ranged from Kadesh Barnea (southernmost part of Judah) to Gaza (in the coastal plain)[99] to Goshen (not to be confused with the area in the Egyptian Delta by the same name)[100] to Gibeon. Just as Moses had commanded, the Israelite army executed "all who breathed" (cf. Dt. 20:16). They were obedient to the Deuteronomic code, and Yahweh fought for them as well (10:40-42). Of course, Yahweh fought for them because they were obedient, not because he necessarily would side with them on all accounts. The debacle at Ai demonstrated that Yahweh fought for Israel so long as Israel was faithful to the covenant—but not otherwise! In the end, the successful army returned to Gilgal (10:43).

The Northern Campaign (11:1-15)

Attention now shifts to the north of Israel to the Galilean uplands surrounding the Sea of Galilee. The wars in this area would take on a very different aspect, since the northern kings defended a different terrain with its large, flat areas between the mountains. In the south, all the fighting had been done with infantry, but in the north it was possible for the Canaanite kings to field a chariot corps.

The recognized superior city in the north was Hazor, about 10 miles north of the Sea of Galilee. Hazor was prominent in the Amarna texts[101] as well as other ancient Near Eastern sources,[102] and in the Book of Joshua it is cited as the "head of all those kingdoms [i.e., the northern city-states]" (11:10). Jabin of Hazor[103] marshaled the forces of a number of northern cities to oppose the Israelites (11:1-5). Some of these cities are identifiable,

---

[99] Though no details are given about a battle with the army of Gaza, apparently the city itself did not fall (cf. 13:3).

[100] Goshen may refer to a region (11:16) as well as a city (cf. 15:51).

[101] Hazor (Hasura) is named in EA 148:41; 227:3; 228:4, 15, 23; 364:18.

[102] The earliest mention of Hazor (*hdwizi*) is in the Egyptian Execration Texts (19th-18th centuries BC). It also was regarded as an important city in the Mari texts (18th century BC), and at least 14 Mari documents refer to it, cf. A. Ben-Tor, "Hazor," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, ed. E. Meyers (New York/Oxford: Oxford University, 1997) 3.1. Excavations at Hazor have been ongoing since the mid-1950s, and some 21 layers or strata of occupation have been identified at the 200 acre tell (the largest in ancient Palestine), dating back to the 24th century BC. For a long time the ancient library archives of Hazor have been sought by the archaeologists excavating there, but so far without success, cf. S. Zuckerman, "Where is the Hazor Archive Buried?" *BAR* (Mar/Apr 2006), pp. 28-37.

[103] The name Jabin might well be a dynastic name, since it appears later in the war of Deborah against Hazor (Jg. 4:2, 17, 23-24).

others are more questionable.[104] What is clear is that they fielded a large chariot corps[105] along with a huge infantry.

In the face of this huge force, Yahweh urged Joshua to be fearless, since he would deliver the Canaanites into the Israelites hands so they could hamstring the horses and burn the chariots (11:6; cf. Dt. 17:16). And so it was. In terrain that suited chariots, Israel's best chance was to surprise them, and John Gray suggests a night attack may have been the means.[106] The Israelites routed this huge force, chasing them westward toward Sidon (11:7-9).[107] Jabin of Hazor along with his people were executed. The city was burned (11:10-11).[108] All these cities and peoples Joshua put to the sword, though he burned only Hazor (11:12-13). As at Ai (cf. 8:2), the Israelites were permitted to take war booty, though they fully executed the Canaanite citizens in strict conformance to the ancient commands of Moses (11:14-15; cf. Dt. 7:1-6, 16; 20:16-18).[109]

---

[104] Instead of Madon, the LXX has Maron in 11:1, and where the MT reads "Waters of Merom" (11:5), the LXX has "Waters of Maron". Both Shimron and Achshaph are known from Egyptian Execration Texts, a list of Palestinian towns conquered by Thutmose III, and the Amarna Letters, cf. *ABD* (1994) 5.1218 and 1.57. Dor, about 12 miles south of modern Haifa, is mentioned in an inscription by Rameses II in a list of settlements along the Via Maris, but excavations indicate that it was founded as early as the 20th century BC and inhabited by Canaanites until about 1200 BC, cf. E. Stern, "The Many Masters of Dor," *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1993), p. 24. Chinnereth, like Shimron and Achshaph, is also mentioned in the towns listed by Thutmose III at Karnak, cf. *ABD* (1992) 1.909. Mizpah (= watch tower) is a common name of which there are several, and the location of this one is uncertain, cf. *ABD* (1992) 4.880. Merom also appears in town lists by Thutmose III and Rameses II, cf. *ABD* (1992) 4.705.

[105] The Ras Shamra Texts indicate that Canaanite light chariots had two horses and one reserve, while Egyptian and Hebrew Texts indicate that the chariot team consisted of a driver and a warrior. One Egyptian text indicates that in broken terrain the chariot could be dismantled and reassembled, cf. Gray, p. 115.

[106] Gray, p. 117.

[107] Sidon, of course, is a major Phoenician city, while the location of Mishrephoth-Maim is disputed, cf. *ABD* (1992) 4.873.

[108] Archaeological excavations have confirmed that the end of Canaanite Hazor was a severe conflagration. Across the site, an inferno leaving a thick layer of ashes and charred wood was apparently fed by large quantities of oil. The palace's mud-brick walls were vitrified, basalt slabs cracked and clay vessels melted. Whoever burned the city also deliberately destroyed the statuary in the palace, smashing figures and mutilating others. Carbon dating puts the destruction of Hazor in the 13th century BC. Scholarly debate over who destroyed Hazor is ongoing. The reasonable candidates are only four, the Sea Peoples, a rival Canaanite city, the Egyptians or the Israelites. Since the mutilated statuary are Egyptian and Canaanite, the invaders are not likely to have been them. Hazor is too far north to be a likely candidate for the Sea Peoples, who invaded Egypt and settled on the south coast of Palestine. The best candidate is the Israelites, cf. A. Ben-Tor and M. Rubiato, "Did the Israelites Destroy the Canaanite City?" *BAR* (May/Jun 1999), pp. 22-39. The mutilated statuary aligns very well with the Deuteronomic command (Dt. 7:5; 12:3).

[109] There is no clear indication as to why war booty was forbidden at Jericho but allowed in the north. Possibly it was due to the fact that at Jericho the Israelites were the aggressors (hence, it would not be appropriate to take booty, since this would change the character of the war from a war of divine punishment to a war of acquisition). In the north, however, Jabin of Hazor had marshaled forces for a preemptive strike against the Israelites, so the Israelites were fighting a war of defense. Here, the taking of booty may have been more appropriate. One sees the same pattern in the earlier Transjordan wars, where the taking of booty was allowed when Sihon of Heshbon attempted a preemptive attack upon Israel (cf. Nu. 21:23; Dt. 2:32, 35). The same was true in the conflict with Og of Bashan (cf. Nu. 21:33; Dt. 3:1, 7).

Summary of Conquest (11:16—12:24)

The final summary of Joshua's campaigns conclude this first half of the book. Beginning in the south, Joshua struck the central hill-lands, the Negev, the Shephelah, and the Jordan valley. Geographical markers included Mount Halak (= bald mountain), probably in the central Negev in the far south, all the way to Baal Gad, a mountain in northern Galilee near Mt. Hermon (11:16-17a). Joshua executed the Canaanite kings, sparing only the Gibeonites because of the treaty (11:17b, 19). While the strike narratives in the first half of the book might seem to occupy a relatively short time, here the narrative says plainly that the wars took a long time (11:18), and a close reading of the text suggests it may have occupied several years (cf. 14:6-10).[110] Further, other than at Jericho and Ai, the wars were defensive. In the south, a coalition under Adoni-zedek of Jerusalem attempted a preemptive strike against the Israelites (10:3-5). In the north, Jabin of Hazor similarly mustered a huge militia to attack the Israelites (11:1-5). As he had done to Pharaoh in Egypt (cf. Ex. 7:3), Yahweh hardened their hearts against Israel. In Egypt, Pharaoh was the god-symbol of the state, and the city-state kings of Canaan also fought under the names of their patron deities. This hardening of hearts, then, must be viewed against the background of a divine contest about who was truly God. It was the sovereign power of Yahweh that was at stake, and he would brook no rivals from any other deity, including the god-kings of Canaan. As the true God, Yahweh had demonstrated his sovereign power against Pharaoh (cf. Ex. 10:1-2; 14:4), and in Canaan he did the same thing (11:20). Donald Madvig has appropriately said that Yahweh hardened the Canaanites' hearts, not to keep them from repenting, but to prevent them from surrendering to Israel without repenting.[111]

A special notation is added concerning the dreaded Anakites,[112] who years earlier had proved such a formidable opponent that they intimidated the original spies sent in by Moses into offering a negative report (cf. Nu. 13:28, 31-33; Dt. 1:28). These central hill-land warriors Joshua also

---

[110] If Caleb was 40 years old at Kadesh Barnea, as this text states, and 85 years old at the conclusion of Joshua's wars, then the 38 intervening years between Kadesh Barnea and the crossing of the Jordan suggests that the wars of Joshua occupied about seven years.

[111] D. Madvig, "Joshua," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. F. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 3.311.

[112] All the biblical references to the Anakites agree that they were a tall, gigantic people (cf. Nu. 13:32-33; Dt. 2:10, 21; 9:2).

defeated, leaving only a few survivors in the Philistine cities of the Shephelah (11:21-22).[113] Joshua 11:23 captures the essence of the whole book and its two major divisions—the invasion of the cities and the allocation of the land to the twelve tribes. Finally, the land had rest from war.[114]

Chapter 12 lists the defeated Canaanite kings, both from the Transjordan, who had been defeated before Moses' death, and also from the Cisjordan (12:1). The geography of the Transjordan is divided by its primary water courses. The Arnon Gorge and its perennial stream empties into the Dead Sea. Further north, the Jabbok stream empties into the Jordan River. The area between these two boundaries originally was the kingdom of Sihon, king of the Amorites (12:2-3), who was defeated during the lifetime of Moses (Nu. 21:21-31; Dt. 2:26-37). Farther north, between the Jabbok and Mt. Hermon in Galilee, the land originally was the kingdom of Og of Bashan (12:4-5), who also was defeated during the lifetime of Moses (Nu. 21:33-35; Dt. 3:1-11). All this land had been allotted to two and a half of the twelve tribes with the proviso that they must help in the invasion of the cities west of the Jordan (12:6; cf. Nu. 32).

To the west of the Jordan, Joshua conducted strikes ranging from the north to the south, and these lands were appointed for the other nine and a half tribes (12:7-8). Then follows a catalog of the defeated Cisjordan kings (12:9-24). Details, of course, are given about some of these conflicts earlier in the book. Since some of the cities were not captured (i.e., Jerusalem, Gezer) even though their kings were killed, one wonders if perhaps this may have been true for other cities as well (i.e., Taanach, Dor and Megiddo, cf. Jg. 1:27).

Archaeology broadly confirms that at the close of the Late Bronze Age there was a major break in the civilizations of Palestine with a number of Canaanite cities being destroyed, a shift in population from the urban cities of the flat and fertile plains to the pastoral areas of the central hill-lands, and the establishment of many new settlements in the central mountains at the beginning of the Iron Age. Though older archaeologists, like Yigael Yadin, argued that these features tended to confirm the biblical

---

[113] Later, Jeremiah places the Anakim in a Philistine context (Je. 47:5, RSV), and it seems likely that the giant Goliath and other giants may have descended from them as well (1 Sa. 17:4; cf. 2 Sa. 21:16-22).

[114] Rest from war, of course, refers primarily to the initial strikes described in chapters 1-12. After the apportionment of the land to the various tribes, further wars were clearly envisioned before the land was fully to come under Israelite control (13:1ff.), and these wars would continue throughout the period of the judges (Jg. 1:1ff.). This is clearly recognized in the New Testament as well, for as the Letter to the Hebrews says, "If Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day" (He. 4:8).

account of an Israelite invasion under Joshua,[115] few contemporary archaeologists are so confident. They are more apt to agree with Aharoni that a much longer period of settlement and assimilation is in view.[116] The general continuity from Late Bronze Age material culture into Iron Age I material culture seems to forbid any simple archaeological answers. In fact, it is not at all easy to discern, at least on the basis of material remains, whether particular artifacts were left by Canaanites or early Israelites. They both used the same kind of pottery, ate much the same kind of food and employed the same kind of tools and weapons.[117]

We already have seen that the Book of Joshua does not offer a picture of complete conquest and settlement, but rather, of crippling raids and apportionment for later settlement. Hence, hard and fast conclusions about the historicity of the biblical narratives, positive or negative, on the basis of artifacts and material remains are hazardous. Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, and archaeology should not be embraced as the savior of the Bible (nor should it be allowed to become the debunker of the Bible, either). Alan Millard of the University of Liverpool points this out cogently in his comparison of Amorites in Babylon and Israelites in Canaan. Only the texts—not archaeological material remains—prove the presence of Amorites in ancient Babylonia. The absence of the Amorites from the archaeology of Babylon, even though they were clearly in the ancient texts and no one seriously doubts their existence, suggests that we should use a good deal of caution about trying to prove anything substantive about the origins of Israel or their entrance into Canaan on the basis of material remains only, particularly in a negative way.[118]

The Unfinished Conquest (13:1-7)

From the outset we have argued against the popular conception that the Book of Joshua is a story of complete conquest and immediate settlement, but rather, that it describes initial crippling raids and

---

[115] Y. Yadin, "Is the Biblical Account of the Israelite Conquest of Canaan Historically Reliable?" *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1982), pp. 16-23.

[116] Y. Aharoni, "The Israelite Occupation of Canaan: An Account of the Archaeological Evidence," *BAR* (May/Jun 1982), pp. 14-23.

[117] Some would argue that settlement changes, such as the appearance of the four-room house in peripheral areas formerly having only sparse population, may offer a clue, cf. V. Fritz, "Israelites & Canaanites: You *Can* Tell Them Apart," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 2002), pp. 28-31, 63.

[118] A. Millard, "Amorites and Israelites: Invisible Invaders—Modern Expectation and Ancient Reality," *The Future of Biblical Archaeology: Reassessing Methodologies and Assumptions*, ed. J. Hoffmeier and A. Millard (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 148-160.

apportionment of land yet to be settled. This in no way detracts from the successes of Joshua, but it does prevent the interpreter from assuming more than the book actually says. It is significant in the summary of the invasion in 12:9-24, the catalog cites kings killed, not cities destroyed. Only three cities were burned (Jericho, Ai and Hazor) and two others said to be destroyed (Makkedah and Hebron). Following is what the book actually says (or does not say) about the Canaanite cities themselves:

Jericho	wall collapsed (6:20) and the city was burned (6:24)
Ai	city was burned and left as a permanent ruin (8:19, 28)
Makkedah	destroyed (10:28)*
Libnah	no specific statement about the city's destruction (10:30)**
Lachish	no specific statement about the city's destruction (10:32)**
Eglon	no specific statement about the city's destruction (10:35)**
Hebron	destroyed (10:37)
Debir	no specific statement about the city's destruction (10:39)**
Hazor	city was burned (11:11)
Madon	city was NOT burned (11:13)
Shimron	city was NOT burned (11:13)
Acshaph	city was NOT burned (11:13)
Dor, etc.	cities were NOT burned (11:13)

   * The Hebrew text says of Makkedah and her king that Joshua destroyed "them" (אוֹתָם), and though the pronoun "them" could conceivably refer to the population, the grammar of the passage is better interpreted to include the city itself.
   ** Unfortunately, the NIV translation in 10:30 can be misleading if one reads too much into it. The Hebrew text simply says, "Yahweh gave her also into the hand of Israel and he put her king to the edge of the sword and every person who was in her". Comparable statements are made about Lachish, Eglon and Debir.

Hence, it should come as no surprise to find that by the time the initial strikes were concluded, Yahweh could frankly say to Joshua, "There are still very large areas of land to be taken over" (13:1).
   Specifically, the southwest coastal plain, with its Philistine pentapolis (13:2-3),[119] and the northern coastal plains (13:4-5) were virtually untouched. While Yahweh reiterated his promised to "drive them [the Canaanites] out", it would now be up to individual tribes to carry on the invasion (13:6-7). Israel would begin a new society unlike that of the

---

[119] The Philistines were not native Canaanites, of course. They were of Aegean origin, called the Sea Peoples (so-named by the Egyptians). After the collapse of the Mycenaean civilization about 1200 BC, they migrated toward Egypt, were driven back by Rameses III of Egypt and settled on the south coast of Palestine. While there is some debate about what migration route they took, their presence in southwest Canaan became a significant threat to the Israelites, cf. T. Barako, "One: By Sea…" and A. Yasur-Landau, "Two: By Land…" *BAR* (Mar/Apr 2003), pp. 24-39, 64, 66-67.

Canaanites. Previously, the land ultimately belonged to the Pharaoh of Egypt, who granted rights to his vassal kings, who in turn allowed it to be worked by his subjects. Now, Yahweh would own the land, and he would apportion it to the various tribes by lot.

Division of the Land to the Israelite Clans (13:8—19:51)

In the various listings of the twelve tribes of Israel, important variations should be noted. The twelve sons of Jacob and their descendents are not precisely the clans that were apportioned land in Canaan due to the fact that the Levites were restricted from owning tribal property (13:14, 33; 14:3-4; 18:7). Ephraim and Manasseh, the two sons of Joseph, were both given tribal properties (14:4). Further, given the negative evaluation of the history of the Book of Joshua by many historical-critical scholars, it should come as no surprise that many of them regard the tribal allotments in Joshua 13-19 as reflecting tribal boundaries established much later in the time of the monarchy. Against this, of course, stands the biblical record itself.

Reuben, Gad and Half of Manasseh (13:8-33)

The tribal allocations for the Transjordan clans had been made prior to Moses' death (13:8-14, 32; Nu. 32). Reuben had been allotted the territory from the Arnon Gorge northward to Heshbon (13:15-23).[120] Gad had been allotted the Gilead plateau up to the southern end of the Sea of Galilee (13:24-28). East Manasseh was allotted the territory of the northern Transjordan, the former kingdom of Og of Bashan (13:29-31).

Judah (14:1—15:63)

The larger narrative of land apportionment concerns the Cisjordan. The territories were assigned by lot, leaving final decisions to Yahweh himself, since he was the ultimate owner of the land (14:1-5). Caleb directly had asked for Hebron, appealing to the ancient oath of Moses that he would be given the land he had walked on (14:6-15; cf. Dt. 1:36). Though now old, he still was full of vigor and eager to lay claim to what had been denied him four decades earlier when he was a young man. Hebron, of course, had been

---

[120] Excavations in the ancient territory of Reuben have yielded remains of a four-room house, presumably Reubenite, cf. L. Herr and D. Clark, "Excavating the Tribe of Reuben," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 2001), pp. 36-47, 64, 66.

attacked and destroyed in the initial raids under Joshua (cf. 10:36-37; 11:21-22), and it may well be that the narrative here is a flashback to that time, since earlier it was stated that Joshua destroyed the Anakites from Hebron and the hill country of Judah, while here Caleb anticipates doing it.[121] That the passage ends with the same phrase as the former narrative, "Then the land had rest from war," reinforces this suggestion (14:15b; cf. 11:23b).[122]

The description of Judah's territory included southern, eastern, northern and western boundaries (15:1-12). Small details are added to Caleb's annexation of Hebron. He successfully drove out the three Anakite clans that had been there forty years earlier (15:13-14; cf. Nu. 13:22).[123] He spurred his younger brother Othniel to capture Debir, promising him his daughter in marriage (15:15-17; cf. Jg. 1:13; 3:9). Acsah, the daughter, then asked her father for springs (possibly for a dowry), which doubtless were necessary in the desolate region of the Negev, a request to which he acquiesced (15:18-19; cf. Jg. 1:14-15). The remaining description of Judah's allotment is grouped in four regions, the Negev (15:21-32), the Shephelah (15:33-47), the central hill-lands (15:48-60) and the wilderness descending to the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea (15:61-63).

Significantly, the description of Judah's allotment concludes with the ominous notation that the people of Judah were unable to dislodge the Jebusites from Jerusalem (15:63). This carries the added oddity that Jerusalem was not originally part of Judah's inheritance and later was assigned to the tribe of Benjamin (15:8-9; 18:28). Still later, the Book of Judges indicates that the warriors of Judah *did* capture and burn the city (Jg. 1:8), but then in language nearly word for word from Joshua 15:63 says that the Benjamites did *not* capture it (Jg. 1:21. Even later, as is well-known, it is David who captures it (2 Sa. 5:6-7). Boling suggests that what was captured in Judges 1:8 was only the southwest hill but that the heavy walls of the larger portion of the city were not penetrated.[124] If Jerusalem lay on the border between Judah and Benjamin, then each clan could be described as failing to dislodge the Jebusites, Judah failing from the south and Benjamin failing from the north. At the very least, it would seem that control of the city or at least some portion of it may have changed hands more than once.

---

[121] Viewing 14:6-15 as a flashback to chapter 11 is why the NEB renders 11:6 as "Now the tribe of Judah had come…", which is entirely justified. Clearly, this request had been made while the Israelite army still was camped at Gilgal.

[122] Historical-critical scholars, of course, read this as a doublet indicating two competing traditions.

[123] The Book of Judges credits this victory to the warriors of Judah (Jg. 1:9-10), but later it specifically names Caleb (Jg. 1:20).

[124] R. Boling, *Judges [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), p. 55-56.

The Joseph Tribes (16:1—17:18)

Many years earlier when Joseph brought his two sons to Jacob for his paternal blessing, Jacob's statement to Joseph was, "…your two sons…will be reckoned as mine; Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are mine," and further, "…in the territory they inherit they will be reckoned under the names of their brothers" (Ge. 48:5-6). Hence, in the allotment of land there was no single tribe of Joseph, but rather, there were two tribes, one from each of Joseph's sons. In the end, Manasseh actually had two territories, one in the Transjordan and one in the Cisjordan. The land of the Joseph tribes was extensive, occupying the heartland of Canaan (16:1-4).

Ephraim's share was immediately north of Benjamin (16:5-9). As with Judah, the ominous notation is added that Ephraim was not able to dislodge the Canaanites from Gezer, though they were able to subject them to forced labor (16:10; cf. Jg. 1:29). Though the king of Gezer had been killed in one of Joshua's campaigns (10:33; 12:12), the city itself maintained a Canaanite population.[125]

The remaining half of Manasseh's territory lay just north of Ephraim on the west side of Jordan, while the territory of the other half of Manasseh lay on the east side of the river (17:1-2). One branch of the family had no sons, only five daughters. Based on an earlier ruling by Moses himself (Nu. 27:1-7), these five daughters received territories within Manasseh's larger boundaries (17:3-6).[126] As before, the territorial description of Manasseh's boundaries ends with the notation that the tribe was not able to occupy many of the towns in their allotment, including major sites like Beth Shan, Dor, Taanach and Megiddo (17:7-13; cf. Jg. 1:27-28). Though some of the kings of these cities had been killed in Joshua's campaigns (12:21, 23), the Canaanites were able to maintain their culture, living alongside the Israelites.

---

[125] The large 33 acre mound of Gezer was identified in 1871, excavated by Robert Macalister in 1902-1909, later by G. Ernest Wright, William Dever and Joe Seger in 1964-1974, and again by Dever in 1984 and 1990. Twenty-six strata demonstrate the city's antiquity, going back to the Late Chalcolithic Period (about 3500 BC). It lay along the Via Maris and was fortified in the late Middle Bronze Age with a heavy fortification wall and many guard towers. Also, a cultic high place with ten large *masseboth* (standing stones) was uncovered. Middle Bronze Age Gezer came to a violent end by fire (possibly by Thutmose III, who in about 1468 BC cited Gezer as a city he conquered), but by the Late Bronze Age it was flourishing again. Ten of the Amarna Letters are from Gezer (EA 253:22; 254:22; 287:14; 290:8; 292:43; 298:5; 299:4; 300:5; 369:1; 378:4), and in the Merneptah Stela, Gezer once again is cited as a city conquered in an Egyptian campaign, though the site was not abandoned, cf. W. Dever, "Gezer," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, ed. E. Meyers (New York/Oxford: Oxford University, 1997) 2.396-400 and H. Shanks, "The Sad Case of Tell Gezer," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1983), pp. 30-42.

[126] The names of two of the daughters appear in the Samaritan Ostraca from the 8th century BC, cf. Hamlin, p. 125 and *ABD* (1992) 4.1123. By that time, the names seem to refer to districts near Samaria.

Though the Joseph tribes complained that they needed more territory (even though they already had been allotted some of the largest portions), Joshua resisted their request, urging them to fully occupy the territory already assigned to them (17:14-15). Central to this complaint was the military power of the Canaanites in the Plain of Megiddo, whose chariot corps were overpowering to the Israelite infantry, but Joshua stood firm, encouraging them to utilize their numerical advantage (17:16-18).

The Remaining Clans (18:1—19:51)

With territories now assigned to five tribes (Reuben, Gad, Manasseh, Judah and Ephraim), the final seven tribes assembled to receive their allotments (18:1-2). The fact that the venue changes from Gilgal (14:6) to Shiloh (18:1) suggests that some time had passed. The initial military encampment at Gilgal, established when the Israelites first entered the land and to which they returned after the various initial strikes into the interior (4:19-20; 5:9-10; 9:6; 10:6-7, 9, 15, 43), gave way to a site further into the interior and more centrally located within the territory allotted to Ephraim. Further, the fact that the tribes set up the tabernacle at Shiloh (18:1) indicates that the religious center for the nation would now be there, and, in fact, would remain there throughout the period of the judges (cf. Jg. 18:31; 21:19; 1 Sa. 1:3, 24; 2:14; 3:21; 14:3).[127]

At the assembly, Joshua chided the tribes for failing to occupy the land (18:3). He organized a survey team made up of tribal representatives who were to compose a written description of the various landmarks and boundaries. Once completed, the remaining portions of land would be assigned by lot "in the presence of Yahweh", that is, near the ark of God at Shiloh. The Levites, of course, would not receive a territorial allotment, and the allotments already assigned to five tribes would stand (18:4-7). Once the mapping had been completed, the survey crews returned to Shiloh, where Joshua cast lots for distribution (18:8-10).[128]

---

[127] The site of Shiloh for the tribal religious center was well-chosen. Though it had a long history as a Canaanite cultic site going back into the Middle Bronze Age, when massive fortification walls had been constructed, it had been destroyed near the end of the Middle Bronze Age in the 16th century with little settlement thereafter until the Israelites came. Hence, at the time of Joshua there would have been no competing Canaanite settlement surrounding it, cf. I. Finkelstein, "Shiloh Yields Some, But Not All, of Its Secrets," *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1986), pp. 22-41. The exact site of the erection of the tabernacle is uncertain, but a reasonable case can be made for the sizeable rock terrace first identified by Charles Wilson just north of the tell in the late 1800s, cf. A. Kaufman, "Fixing the Site of the Tabernacle at Shiloh," *BAR* (Nov/Dec 1988), pp. 46-52.

[128] Though the text says Joshua cast the lots, this probably should be taken to mean that they were cast under his jurisdiction. More likely the actual casting was done by the priest, Eleazer (14:1; 19:51; cf. Nu. 27:21).

Benjamin's allotment, which was smaller than the five allotments already completed, lay between the tribal territories of Judah and Ephraim (18:11-28). The cities assigned to Benjamin were cited in two lists, those in the east (18:21-24) and those in the west (18:25-28). The kings of Jericho and Bethel had been executed earlier by Joshua (12:9, 16). Further, the Gibeonites with whom Joshua had made the infamous treaty also lay within their territory, as did Jerusalem.

Simeon's allotment lay *within* the larger boundaries of Judah, since the Judah tribe had been assigned such a large tract (19:1-9). Most of the towns allotted to Simeon were first listed in the towns assigned to Judah (cf. 15:26-32, 42).[129]

In the north, Zebulun's towns were in southern Galilee about halfway between the lake and the Mediterranean (19:10-16), Issachar's to the southwest of the Sea of Galilee (19:17-23), Asher's along the coast north of Mt. Carmel (19:24-31) and Naphtali's in the Galilean highlands north of the lake (19:32-39).

Back in the heartland of Israel, the Danites were allotted land along the central coastal plain (19:40-46, 48), but they were unable to establish an enduring foothold. Eventually, they migrated northward and took the territory to the north of Naphtali, becoming the northernmost territory in Israel (19:47; cf. Jg. 18). Finally, when all the clans had been assigned territory for settlement, it is appropriate that Joshua himself, as the eminent leader in invasion and settlement, should be awarded the final allotment, a town in Ephraim (19:49-50).

Cities of Refuge (20:1-9)

Part of what we call civilization concerns the establishment of forms of justice. In primitive societies, justice invariably was meted out personally or by families, and this early form of justice is referenced in the law of Moses as well. Provided there were sufficient witnesses to the crime (Nu. 35:30), the Avenger of Blood (גֹּאֵל הַדָּם)[130] was legally empowered to

---

[129] This circumstance accounts for the virtual disappearance of the tribe of Simeon by the period of the monarchy. It also means that by the time of the divided monarchy, the northern ten tribes in Israel and the southern two tribes in Judah are somewhat ambiguous (cf. 1 Kg. 11:31). Perhaps by that time the two territorial allotments to Manasseh, one of the east bank and the other on the west bank, were counted as two tribes to make up the ten in the north.

[130] It is not without interest that the same word in Hebrew (גֹּאֵל) doubles for both "avenger" and "redeemer". It is used of a person's near relative who stands up for him and maintains his rights, whether in

execute the murderer of someone in his family or clan (Nu. 35:16-21; Dt. 19:11-13), not merely for the benefit of the family (i.e., not simply as an act of vengeance) but in God's stead (cf. Ge. 9:5-6). However, a corollary to this law of capital punishment was the distinction between premeditated murder and involuntary manslaughter. Sometimes people were killed inadvertently with no malice intended (Ex. 21:13; Nu. 35:22-25; Dt. 19:4-6), and if that were the case, the guilty party was permitted to live in an asylum city where so long as he stayed there he was safe from the Avenger of Blood (Nu. 35:26-32). Moses stipulated that six such cities should be so designated in the land of Canaan (Nu. 35:6), apparently three in the Cisjordan and three in the Transjordan (Dt. 4:41-43; 19:1-3, 7, 9b).

With the major territorial allotments assigned, Joshua's next responsibility was to designate the six asylum cities (20:1-3). If someone was guilty of involuntary manslaughter, he could state his case before the elders of one of these asylum cities, and they, in turn, would authorize him to live there until he had been vindicated by formal trial or until the high priest then in office died, a public office that served as the statute of limitations on the guilty party's liability (20:4-6).[131]

Six cities were designated (20:7-9; Dt. 4:43; 1 Chr. 6:57, 67): Kedesh (northern Galilee), Shechem (central hill country), Hebron (near Jerusalem), all in the Cisjordan; Bezer (in the south plateau east of the Dead Sea), Ramoth Gilead (in the central Transjordan), and Golan (in the northern Transjordan).[132]

Levitical Cities (21:1-45)

The asylum cities all were reckoned among the larger group of cities designated for Levites (21:11, 21, 27, 32, 36, 38; cf. Nu. 35:6). The Levites, of course, received no territorial allotments. Instead, Moses stipulated that

---

reclaiming a property, buying a kinsman back from debt slavery or visiting death upon a murderer who had killed someone in the family, cf. H. Ringgren, *TDOT* (1975) 2.351-352.

[131] For reasons that are unclear, 20:4-6 is mostly missing in the LXX.

[132] Because he wants to treat the Book of Joshua as propaganda literature for the Josiah reforms, a scholar like Robert Coote can say, "There are no stories or historical accounts in the OT in which such towns [i.e., asylum cities] appear," cf. p. 2.696. He is quite wrong. There is an important account during the civil war between the houses of David and Saul in which Abner was pursued by Asahel, the brother of Joab. Abner thrust backward with the butt end of his spear shaft, accidently killing his pursuer (2 Sa. 2:17-23). Abner later moved to the city of Hebron, one of the asylum cities (2 Sa. 3:19-21), where he conferred with David about ending the civil war. However, when Abner left Hebron on a mission in behalf of David, he also made himself vulnerable to Joab, the brother of the slain Asahel. Joab took advantage of the situation, killing Abner to avenge the death of his brother (2 Sa. 3:26-27, 30). There is a further reference to the asylums in 2 Sa. 14:11, though here the reference appears in only a parable.

various cities throughout the clan allotments were to be assigned to them, forty-eight in all (Nu. 35:1-8). The original mandate suggests that the Levites were not given arable land but pasture land, and the request of the Levite family heads to Joshua presumes the same thing (21:1-3). Perhaps this would prevent them from becoming a landholding elite. Also, since many of the Levites belonged to the priestly caste (3:3; 8:33), their dispersion throughout the designated cities among the various tribal holdings would augment their teaching role among the people (cf. Je. 2:8; 18:18; Mic. 3:11; Eze. 7:26; 2 Chr. 15:3; Mal. 2:7).

The Levites fell into three primary families, the Kohathites, the Gershonites and the Merarites (21:4-8), and the forty-eight towns were divided among them (21:9-42). In the end, all the distributions and assignments of properties were completed, though as clearly indicated earlier, they were hardly all yet taken over and settled by the Israelites (cf. 13:1ff). Still, the initial invasion was complete, and Yahweh's promises had been fulfilled. While not all of Canaan was yet in Israel's possession (nor would it be until the time of David), it all had been "given" to Israel, and the initial steps had been taken to secure it. At the same time, God had predicted only the gradual settlement of the land (cf. Ex. 23:30; Dt. 7:22), and the subsequent history of the Books of Judges and Samuel clearly bears this out. Hence, the sweeping statements in 21:43-45 must be taken as exalted rhetorical style. The "alls" of this passage, as Kitchen has pointed out, are qualified in the narrative itself.[133] Further, the Book of Joshua does not hesitate to paint this picture of full conquest and settlement as a future eventuality, when "Yahweh your God himself will drive them [i.e., the Canaanites] out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as Yahweh your God promised you" (23:5). The future tense of this statement clearly indicates that the conquest was not yet fully complete.

Return of the Transjordan Tribes (22:1-34)

With the primary war effort now reduced to individual tribal action, the larger Israelite militia could disperse into their tribal allotments. This disbursement, of course, included the Transjordan warriors who had loyally served throughout the strikes into the Cisjordan. Joshua commended them for their obedience and dismissed them to their homes east of the Jordan with a parting admonition to remain faithful to the Torah of Moses, serving

---

[133] Kitchen, p. 174.

Yahweh with all their hearts and souls (22:1-5). He blessed them and sent them on their way, laden with war spoils which they were to divide among their clan members (22:6-8).

On their return, just before fording the Jordan,[134] they constructed an imposing altar (22:9-10). The text does not immediately describe the purpose of this altar, whether simply for memorial or for actual sacrifice, whether pagan or Yahwist. However, when the Cisjordan clans became aware of it, they considered it in the worst possible light—that it was a direct violation of the command for a central place of worship with no other places allowed (cf. Dt. 12:8-14). The tabernacle, which now was installed at Shiloh, was therefore the only acceptable place for an altar. Hence, they mustered for war, since the Deuteronomic code specified destruction for even a clan member or an Israelite town that led the people astray toward false religion (22:11-12; cf. Dt. 13:6-18). Fortunately, a disaster was averted, since the clans were careful to follow the instructions of Moses that they must "inquire, probe and investigate carefully" (Dt. 13:14). They sent a delegation with the high priest on a fact-finding mission to enquire whether the Transjordan tribes were turning against the true worship of Yahweh (22:15-18a). Clearly, they understood the national implications of such a rebellion (22:18b). They also seemed to understand that the issue was national identity and not simply an alternative worship system, which is why they invited the Transjordan clans to move to the Cisjordan if the barrier of the Jordan River seemed so imposing as to divide them from each other (22:19-20). They recalled the horror of Baal Peor, where the people were seduced by the Moabites (cf. Nu. 25), as well as the sin of Achan at Jericho (cf. 7:1), and both incidents had disastrous repercussions for the whole community.

The rejoinder of the Transjordan clans was immediate and clear: they were faithful worshippers of the one true God, Yahweh, and they invoked his name as verification that there was no rebellious motive and no intent to use this altar for sacrifice (22:21-23). Rather, the altar had been built out of concern that at some future time the Jordan River might prove such a dividing barrier as to ostracize them from the community of Israel (22:24-29). In fact, this second altar had been a replica of the one at the tabernacle so as to intentionally link the two (22:28).

This explanation was fully satisfactory to the delegation who reported it to the other clans in the Cisjordan, and they, too, rejoiced that war had been averted (22:30-33). Most important, the unity of the tribes was

---

[134] The term גְּלִילוֹת (= districts, the circles) has been variously translated. Some versions take it as a place name (so NIV, NEB), some as a general designation for a region (so ESV, RSV, NASB, NKJV, NAB), and some, following the Brown, Driver and Briggs *Lexicon*, as circles of stones (so JB).

maintained in spite of the Jordan River. The Transjordan Israelites named the altar, "A witness between us that Yahweh is God" (22:34).[135]

Final Things (23:1—24:33)

Joshua's Farewell (23:1-16)

The similarities between chapters 23 and 24 have led a number of critical scholars to conclude that they are doublets of the same event, and some would even suggest that chapter 24 is a doublet of what is described in 8:30-35.[136] Such reconstructions notwithstanding, clearly the final two chapters of the book concern things that belong just prior to the death of Joshua, who by this time was quite old (23:1).[137] Chapter 23 consists of his farewell speech, while chapter 24 describes the renewal of the covenant.

Summoning all the tribal leadership, Joshua reviewed the history of the conquest as well as tribal responsibilities for the future. He reiterated that their success was not due merely to military skill but the sovereign power of Yahweh (23:2-3). The initial invasion had been a sterling success, but now it remained for the clans to complete the conquest. The territories had been allotted (23:4), but actual possession and settlement remained in the future (23:5).

Hence, devotion to Yahweh and his law was paramount. The language in Joshua's admonition is replete with Deuteronomic phraseology and vocabulary, so much so that every verse contains direct parallels (23:6-13):

Language	Joshua	Deuteronomy
Be strong	*23:6a*	*31:6*
Be careful to obey	*23:6b*	*8:1; 12:28; 15:5*
Book of the Law of Moses	*23:6c*	*28:61; 29:21; 30:10; 31:26*
Not turning to the right or left	*23:6d*	*5:32; 17:11, 20; 28:14*
Do not serve their gods or bow to them	*23:7*	*5:9; 7:16; 8:19; 11:16; 30:17*
You are to hold fast to Yahweh your God	*23:8*	*10:20; 11:22; 13:4; 30:20*
Yahweh has driven out nations	*23:9*	*9:4; 12:29; 19:1*
One of you routs a thousand	*23:10*	*32:30*
Be careful to love Yahweh your God	*23:11*	*6:5; 10:12; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3; 19:9; 30:6, 16, 20*
These nations will become snares and traps	*23:12-13a*	*7:16*

---

[135] While the MT only lists the two tribes of Reuben and Gad, the LXX also lists the half tribe of Manasseh.

[136] The scholarly literature on these points is voluminous: see the lists in Butler, pp. 258-261.

[137] Assuming that Caleb and Joshua were about the same age (cf. 14:10), then Joshua's death at age 110 (24:29) puts this farewell speech at about 25 years after the completion of the initial invasion.

Until you perish from this land 23:13b *4:26; 11:17; 28:22*

Joshua's warning is emphatic, since the presence of Canaanites in the land who were not yet subdued meant the high risk of assimilation. Success in completing the conquest depended entirely upon faithfulness to Yahweh and his covenant, and assimilation would finally result in the loss of the land (23:12-13). Yahweh may have sworn to give this land to Abraham's descendents "forever" (Ge. 13:15), but the Israelites must not take such a promise as some temporal guarantee that they could not lose the land even if they were unfaithful!

Sensing his eminent death, Joshua urged them that they must respect God's covenant faithfulness—both his faithfulness to fulfill his promises for good, which he already had demonstrated in the initial invasion, but also his faithfulness to bring retribution for covenant violation (23:14-15). Breach of covenant risked everything (23:16)!

Covenant Renewal (24:1-28)

The final episode in Joshua's life was a covenant renewal ceremony at Shechem, where he assembled the leaders of the tribes (24:1). It might come as a surprise that the ceremony was held at Shechem, since the tabernacle already had been pitched at Shiloh (18:1). However, Shechem was the place where Yahweh first promised the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendents (cf. Ge. 12:6-7), and it is the site where when first entering the land the tribes recited the blessings and curses of the covenant (8:30-35).[138] It should also be remembered that the tabernacle was a moveable shrine, so it may have been moved to Shechem for this ceremony. The later reference that Joshua erected a memorial stone "near the holy place of Yahweh" might suggest as much (cf. 24:26b).

The covenant renewal takes the form of a suzerainty treaty, a form common in the ancient Near East.[139]

---

[138] Shechem lies at the end of the narrow passage between Mt. Gerezim on the south and Mt. Ebal on the north. It was completely destroyed in the Middle Bronze Age, probably by Egyptian forces, but later rebuilt in the Late Bronze Age as a Canaanite city under Egyptian hegemony. It is mentioned in one of the Amrana Letters (EA 289:29). There is no destruction layer in the Late Bronze Age or early Iron Age. This may suggest that the city passed into Israelite hands relatively peacefully, and in turn, it may account for the fact that Shechem is not listed in 12:7-23 as under attack, cf. L. Toombs, *ABD* (1992) 5.1183.

[139] A rather large number of ancient Near Eastern international treaties preserved in texts have been discovered, and they show striking similarities to Old Testament covenant narratives. Especially the Hittite form of such treaties seems to underlie not only the account of the Sinai covenant but also this one at Shechem. It is not as though every ancient Near Eastern treaty necessarily had all the ideal elements, as though each one must conform to a rigid paradigm, but repeating elements from the wide range of available

Form of the ANE Suzerainty Treaty	Covenant Renewal at Shechem
Identity of the suzerain	*Yahweh says… (24:2a)*
Historical prologue	*Recital of Israel's history (24:2b-13)*
Stipulations	*Israel's obligations (24:14-15)*
Provision for deposit and public reading	*Record of the covenant(4:26)*
Witnesses	*The people and the memorial (24:22, 27)*
Blessings and curses	*Recital of blessings and curses (24:19-20)*
Ratification	*Israel accepts the covenant (24:16-18, 21)*

Joshua commenced the renewal ceremony with the solemn words, "This is what Yahweh, the God of Israel, says…" The recital of Israel's history underscores the gracious favor bestowed upon them by Yahweh, who called Abraham from paganism and gave him posterity (24:2-4). In Egypt, he delivered the Israelites, cutting off the Egyptians at the Red Sea (24:5-7) and bringing the people to the Transjordan, where he defeated the Amorites before them (24:8; cf. Nu. 21). He thwarted Balak's attempt to put a curse on the Israelites (24:9-10), and he defeated their various Canaanites foes, beginning at Jericho and extending throughout the land (24:11-13). The entire history is punctuated with God's sovereign action: "I took," "I led", "I gave", "I assigned", "I sent", "I brought", "I destroyed", and "I delivered". The summary of it all was: "You did not do it with your own sword and bow" (24:12)! That this later generation was to fully participate in the sacred memory these mighty acts of Yahweh is emphatic: *You saw with your own eyes what I did to the Egyptians* (24:7). Of course, none of them now living had even been born when the exodus originally occurred, but by sacred ritual in the renewal ceremony, they could participate vividly in the primordial events, just as their ancestors had done with Moses forty years after the exodus (cf. Dt. 5:3-4).

In view of Yahweh's benefaction, Joshua now urged the tribes toward covenant faithfulness, especially stressing their exclusive loyalty to Yahweh in the midst of the Canaanites who worshipped a pantheon of fertility deities (24:14-15). The people accepted his charge whole-heartedly (24:16-18).

Then follows Joshua's stern admonition about their human weakness (24:19-20). His words can be read as hyperbole (which is probably best in light of 24:31, cf. Ex. 34:6-7), though some have taken them as a straightforward prediction of national failure and eventual exile. In either case, his sternness produced the right effect, and they solemnly promised to serve Yahweh faithfully (24:21-24).

---

documents offer the ideal form, and it is strikingly close to the form here in Joshua 24, cf. G. Mendenhall and G. Herion, *ABD* (1992) 1.1180-1182.

The ceremony climaxed with Joshua drafting a covenant law code, perhaps a copy of the pre-existing Mosaic legislation, though the language suggests he may have added to it (24:25-26a). As a memorial to the covenant renewal, Joshua erected a standing stone (24:26b-27).[140]

Joshua's Death (24:28-31)

The covenant renewal at Shechem was Joshua's final duty. After sending the people back to their tribal territories, he died and was buried "in the land of his inheritance" within Ephraim's tribal holdings.[141] Joshua's death would mean a fundamental change in leadership style. Moses and Joshua were single leaders of the whole nation, the one succeeding the other by divine appointment (1:1-9; cf. Dt. 31:1-8, 14, 23; 34:9). No divine appointment was made for a successor to Joshua, and the Book of Judges will begin with the open question, "Who will be the first to go up and fight for us?" (Jg. 1:1).

Addenda Concerning the Burial of Joseph and Eleazar (24:32-33)

Centuries earlier, Joseph had left a dying request that when the time came for the Israelites to go to the promised land, they were to take his bones with them (cf. Ge. 50:24-26; He. 11:22). He was subsequently embalmed, and when the Israelites left Egypt, they fulfilled his request (cf. Ex. 13:19). Now, his remains were properly buried in the plot that Jacob bought so long ago from the sons of Hamor, the Shechemite (cf. Ge. 33:18-20).[142] The high priest, Eleazar, also died and was buried in the territory allotted to Ephraim (24:33). He was the last of the generation that had left Egypt. A new generation and a new era was about to begin.

The Masoretic Text of the Book of Joshua thus ends on a neutral if not a positive note. The Israelites were faithful to the covenant throughout Joshua's lifetime (24:31). The Septuagint, on the other hand, includes a final

---

[140] In the excavations at Shechem, archaeologists excavated a huge standing stone which some scholars think may have been the "stone of witness" (24:26-27; cf. Jg. 9:6), cf. D. Cole, *Biblical Archaeology Slide Set* (Washington DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1985), p. 21; I. Magen, "Shechem," *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. E. Stern (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 4.1352.

[141] The LXX includes the interesting addition that along with Joshua were buried the flint knives he used to circumcise the Israelites at Gilgal (cf. 5:2).

[142] Many centuries later, Stephen, in rehearsing this ancient history, would conflate Abraham's purchase of the cave at Machpelah (cf. Ge. 23:16; 49:29ff.; 50:13) with Jacob's purchase at Shechem. He would state that all the patriarchs were buried in the land of Canaan, including the other sons of Jacob (Ac. 7:15-16). Josephus preserves the tradition that the other sons of Jacob were buried at Hebron, cf. *Antiquities* 2.8.2.

paragraph that is more ominous and transitions more directly into the Book of Judges. Here, the concluding paragraph in the Greek text reads:

> *In that day the sons of Israel took the ark of God, carrying it around among themselves. Phineas held the priestly office instead of his father until he died and was buried in Gabaar, his own place. But the sons of Israel worshipped Astarte and Ashtaroth and the gods of the nations around them. The Lord delivered them into the hands of Eglon, King of Moab, and he ruled over them eighteen years.*

Obviously, this ending is directly linked with one of the opening stories of the Book of Judges during the time of Ehud (cf. Jg. 3:12ff.).