

Notes on Joshua

2 0 1 6 E d i t i o n

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Introduction

TITLE

The name of this book in Hebrew, Greek, and English comes from the principal character in it—Joshua—rather than from the writer. Joshua may or may not have been the writer of this book. The title is appropriate because "Joshua" means: "Yahweh saves." "Joshua" is the Hebrew name that translates into Aramaic as "Jesus." What Jesus is to God's people in a larger sense, Joshua was to the Israelites in a smaller sense. Joshua brought God's people into the realization of many of God's plans and purposes for them. This book is a record of God's deliverance of the Israelites into what He had promised them.

In the English Bible, Joshua is one of the historical books (Genesis through Esther).

In the Hebrew Bible, however, it is in the second of the three main divisions of the Old Testament, namely, the Prophets. (The Law and the Writings are the first and third divisions of the Hebrew Bible.) Joshua is the first book in the first half of the Prophets, called the "Former Prophets." The Former Prophets section contains four books (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings), as does the second division, the "Latter Prophets" (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve [minor prophets]).

The fact that the Hebrews included mainly historical books, such as Joshua, in the Prophets section, reveals a basic attitude of God's people. They viewed what God revealed here not primarily as a historical record, as much as an authoritative record of selected historical events designed to teach important spiritual lessons.¹ We should therefore recognize Joshua, not simply as a record of history, but as a "selective history" intended to reveal God's will. In the Prophets section of the Old Testament, God revealed Himself through historical events as well as through the oracles of individual prophets.

"The Book of Joshua, like all other books of the Bible, is primarily a book of theology. Through it God has revealed himself and continues to do so."²

¹See Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message*, pp. 271-72, for an explanation of the Hebrews' view of history.

²Donald H. Madvig, "Joshua," in *Deuteronomy-2 Samuel*, vol. 3 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 245.

DATE AND WRITER

The Book of Joshua evidently came into existence several years after the events recorded in the book took place. A number of statements point to a time of composition beyond the years of conquest, and perhaps even beyond the lifetime of Joshua. For example, the phrase "to this day" (4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28-29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10), refers to a period considerably after the events referred to happened. How much later, it is hard to say. These references point to a time of composition *many years later* than the actual occurrence of the events recorded.³

However, the writer *himself* claims to have crossed the Jordan River with the *other Israelites* when Israel entered the land ("we crossed"; 5:1 [marginal reading], 6). Therefore, he must have written the book *not too long after* the conquest. This conclusion finds support in the general impression the reader receives that an *eyewitness* of the events recorded wrote the book. An editor may or may not later have added the account of Joshua's and Eleazar's deaths (24:29-33) to the book (cf. Deut. 34:10-12). This depends on whether the writer wrote it before or after Joshua died.

According to Jewish tradition, Joshua himself wrote the book.⁴ Many modern conservative Old Testament scholars believe that he did.⁵ However, other good conservative scholars believe that the writer was not Joshua, but a contemporary of his, possibly one of the elders of Israel.⁶ Many more scholars are unsure.⁷ I prefer the traditional view that Joshua wrote the book, because I find the arguments, of those who believe the writer could not have been Joshua, unconvincing. As with several other Old Testament historical books, there is evidence in Joshua that some later editor probably added a few statements and, in some cases, updated a few names, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.⁸

SCOPE

The date of the Exodus was probably about 1446 B.C. (cf. 1 Kings 6:1).⁹ Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness (Exod. 16:35; Num. 14:33-34). Thus Israel crossed the Jordan River and entered the land about 1406 B.C. The Book of Joshua, therefore, begins with events in or very close to the year 1406 B.C.

³See Richard S. Hess, *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary*, pp. 110-11.

⁴The Talmud. *Baba Bathra* 15a. Cf. R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 666.

⁵E.g., idem; Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, pp. 264-65; John Davis and John Whitcomb, *A History of Israel* (Davis wrote the section on Joshua), pp. 22-23; David M. Howard Jr., *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books*, pp. 60-61; George Bush, *Notes on Joshua*, p. viii; et al.

⁶E.g., C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, pp. 15-19; Robert Jameson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary . . . on the Old and New Testaments*, 2:210; et al.

⁷E.g., Merrill Unger, *Introductory Guide to the Old Testament*, p. 281; et al.

⁸Cf. Eugene H. Merrill, "Joshua," in *The Old Testament Explorer*, p. 159. See Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 122-29, for discussion of various approaches to the question of authorship.

⁹See my notes on Exodus 12:37-42, and idem., pp. 124-25.

Josephus said the conquest of the land took five years.¹⁰ However, when Caleb received the town of Hebron as his inheritance, he said that God had promised him 45 years earlier that he would enter Canaan (14:10; cf. Num. 14:24). Since God gave that promise 38 years before Israel crossed the Jordan, the conquest must have taken closer to seven years (ca. 1406–1399 B.C.). The record of this conquest occupies the first half of the Book of Joshua.

"Many scholars have suggested that the conquest of Canaan took place between 1250 and 1150 B.C. because there is archaeological evidence of the destruction of Canaanite cities around that time. However, there are problems with this view, the most significant of which is that the Israelites destroyed only three cities—Jericho, Ai, and Hazor—during their conquest. God had promised that they would live in cities they had not built, enjoy fields they had not planted, and harvest fruit they had not tended (Deut. 6:10, 11). Therefore, the Israelites fought most of their battles in the fields outside the cities. The widespread destruction of Canaanite cities found by archaeologists may date to the time of the judges. During this period, God allowed many foreign invasions to devastate the countryside and the cities in order to discipline His rebellious people."¹¹

When Caleb spoke these words, he was "85 years old" (14:10). Joshua appears to have been about the same age as Caleb, perhaps a little younger. Joshua died when he was 110 (24:29). Assuming Joshua was 75 when the Israelites crossed the Jordan River, the amount of time the Book of Joshua spans may be about 35 years. If these figures are correct, Joshua would have led the Israelites in their battle with the Amalekites, just after the Exodus (Exod. 17:8-13), when he was 35 years old.¹² Some writers have speculated, therefore, that Joshua may have been involved with the Egyptian army and received training in its ranks.¹³ This may have prepared him for military leadership in Israel.

The first half of the book (chs. 1—12) therefore covers about seven years, but most of this material, specifically chapters 1—9, deals with events that probably happened in less than one full year. John Gray's comment that "Joshua . . . is but the prelude to Judges"¹⁴ is only true chronologically, since the conquest took only about seven years, and the Period of the Judges covered about 300 years. Joshua is every bit as significant *theologically* as Judges, and is no mere "prelude" in that sense.

¹⁰Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 5:1:19. This work reflects some traditional Jewish understandings, but Josephus was not divinely inspired.

¹¹*The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 350.

¹²See Thomas L. Constable, "A Theology of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 93, n. 4.

¹³E.g., Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary/History*, p. 11.

¹⁴John Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, p. 2.

A Brief Historical Outline of Palestine

The Stone Age.....	? - 4500 B.C.
The Copper Age.....	4500 - 1350 B.C.
The Bronze Age.....	1350 - 1200 B.C.
The Iron Age.....	1200 - 586 B.C.
The Neo-Babylonian (Chaldean) Period.....	586 - 538 B.C.
The Persian Period.....	538 - 332 B.C.
The Greek (Hellenistic) Period.....	332 - 63 B.C.
The Roman Period.....	63 B.C. - A.D. 324
The Byzantine Period.....	A.D. 324 - 640
The Early Arab (Islamic) Period.....	A.D. 640 - 1099
The Crusader (Christian) Period.....	A.D. 1099 - 1291
The Mamluk (Egyptian) Period.....	A.D. 1291 - 1517
The Ottoman (Turkish) Period.....	A.D. 1517 - 1918
The Modern Period.....	A.D. 1918 - the present

THEOLOGY

David M. Howard Jr. identified four major theological themes in Joshua: the land, rest, the keeping of the covenant, and purity of worship.¹⁵ John Wenham identified five, all of which appear in Deuteronomy as well: holy war, the land, the unity of Israel, the role of Joshua, and the covenant.¹⁶ Eugene Merrill identified two major purposes: Yahweh as a covenant-keeping God, and the sovereignty of God.¹⁷

OUTLINE

- I. The conquest of the land chs. 1—12
 - A. Preparations for entering Canaan chs. 1—2
 1. God's charge to Joshua 1:1-9
 2. Joshua's charge to Israel 1:10-18
 3. The spying out of Jericho ch. 2
 - B. Entrance into the land 3:1—5:12
 1. Passage through the Jordan chs. 3—4
 2. Circumcision and celebration of the Passover 5:1-12
 - C. Possession of the land 5:13—12:24
 1. The conquest of Jericho 5:13—6:27
 2. Defeat at Ai ch. 7

¹⁵For discussion, see Howard, pp. 89-96.

¹⁶John Wenham, "The Deuteronomistic Theology of the Book of Joshua," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 90 (1971):140-48.

¹⁷Merrill, p. 161.

3. Victory at Ai 8:1-29
 4. Renewal of the covenant 8:30-35
 5. The treaty with the Gibeonites ch. 9
 6. Victory over the Amorite alliance at Gibeon 10:1-27
 7. Other conquests in southern Canaan 10:28-43
 8. Conquests in northern Canaan 11:1-15
 9. Summary of Joshua's conquests 11:16—12:24
- II. The division of the land chs. 13-21
- A. The land yet to be possessed 13:1-7
 - B. The land east of the Jordan 13:8-33
 - C. The land west of the Jordan chs. 14—19
 1. The rationale for the allotments 14:1-5
 2. Caleb's inheritance 14:6-15
 3. Judah's inheritance ch. 15
 4. Joseph's inheritance chs. 16—17
 5. Survey of the remaining land 18:1-10
 6. The inheritance of the remaining tribes 18:11—19:51
 - D. The special cities 20:1—21:42
 1. The cities of refuge ch. 20
 2. The cities of the Levites 21:1-42
 - E. The faithfulness of God 21:43-45
- III. Joshua's last acts and death chs. 22-24
- A. The return of the two and one-half tribes to their inheritances ch. 22
 - B. Joshua's farewell address to the Israelites ch. 23
 1. A reminder of past blessings 23:1-13
 2. A warning of possible future cursing 23:14-16
 - C. Israel's second renewal of the covenant 24:1-28
 1. Preamble 24:1
 2. Historical prologue 24:2-13
 3. Covenant stipulations 24:14-24
 4. Provisions for the preservation of the covenant 24:25-28
 - D. The death and burial of Joshua and Eleazar 24:29-33

MESSAGE

Joshua reveals that it is because God loves people that He hates sin. Of course, He also hates sin because it offends His holiness. However, in Joshua, I believe the emphasis is on God's concern for the Israelites more than the vindication of His holiness.

The writer of this book portrayed Yahweh as a "God of war." This side of God's character has created problems for many people. How could God be loving and yet deal so severely

with the Canaanites? In view of Jesus Christ's commands to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44), and to be peacemakers (Matt. 5:9), how can we justify God's dealings with the Canaanites that this book records? One scholar called this the major problem in Joshua.¹⁸

The righteous side of God's character is, of course, a consistent emphasis throughout Scripture. In the Pentateuch, God punished all those who oppressed the patriarchs and their descendents (cf. Exod. 15:3). In the historical books, we find curses on the disobedient. The psalmist referred to Yahweh as "mighty in battle" against the forces opposed to His will (e.g., Ps. 24:8; 45:3). The prophets, especially Jeremiah, warned that God will judge sin. In the Gospels, we hear and see the wrath of God manifested in Jesus' words and works against the Pharisees for their sins. In the Book of Revelation, especially chapters 6—19, John pictured the wrath of God being poured out in judgment on the whole world. In Joshua, too, we see God commanding and leading the Israelites in violent mortal conflict with sinners.

The reason God wages war against sin and sinners is that He *loves people*, and wants to save them from the destruction resulting from sin and its consequences (cf. Rom. 6:23). If God is not a "God of war," therefore, then He cannot at the same time be a "God of love." To illustrate, a loving father will oppose anyone who tries to destroy his family members.

We can see God's hatred of sin both in His dealings with the Canaanites, and in His dealings with the Israelites, in Joshua.

In the Pentateuch, we discovered many statements and warnings about the Canaanites. Their wickedness was great, even in Abraham's day. The Sodomites were Canaanites (Gen. 19), but the measure of their iniquity was not yet full (Gen. 15:16; cf. Lev. 18:24-28). The Ras Shamra Tablets have shed much light on Canaanite religion and culture. Archaeologists discovered these written records ("several hundred clay tablets and fragments"¹⁹) in northwest Syria at the site of an ancient city: Ugarit. They date from the fourteenth century B.C., the time of the conquest by Joshua. The Canaanites wrote them in the Ugaritic language in cuneiform script. These records reveal that Canaanite culture was extremely immoral and inhumane. The Canaanites commonly practiced prostitution of both sexes, many kinds of sexual perversion, and human sacrifice. These were their *religious practices*.²⁰

As Israel anticipated entering the land occupied by these people, it was a case of "destroy or be destroyed." In commanding the Israelites to annihilate the Canaanites, God was performing *surgery* in order to remove a *cancer* from human society. He was not murdering an innocent primitive people, as some liberal critics of the Bible used to say. God had been extremely patient with the Canaanite tribes. They had had hundreds of years to repent after the witness of Melchizedek, Abraham, and many other God-fearing people who had lived among them. Since the Canaanites did not repent, God used Israel as a *broom* to sweep away their filth and purify the land. He did not drive the Canaanites

¹⁸Madvig, p. 246.

¹⁹W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, p. 37.

²⁰See Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, pp. 171-74.

out simply to make room for Israel. He did so also to remove this cancerous society and its malignant influence on the world's peoples.²¹ Israel exercised considerable restraint in dealing with the Canaanites, compared to the way some other ancient Near Eastern countries dealt with the peoples they defeated. The Assyrians, for example, were very brutal.

God also manifested His hatred of sin in His dealings with the Israelites. We have seen this already in the Pentateuch, as God disciplined His chosen people when they sinned. In Joshua, when Israel lusted after the things of Canaan, He dealt with His people severely. Achan's sin (ch. 7) affected the whole nation. God judged Achan *as He did*, in order to teach the Israelites a strong lesson concerning how serious sin is. God's dealings with His own people were even more severe than His dealings with the Canaanites.

In short, Joshua reveals that God wages war against sin wherever He finds it. He patiently waits for people to repent, but if they do not judge sin themselves, He will judge it (cf. Acts 17:30-31; 1 Cor. 11:31). God deals more severely with His own people than with others, because privilege heightens responsibility (cf. James 3:1).

Not only does Joshua reveal *that* God wages war against sin, but it also teaches us *how* He does it.

God uses the forces of nature to wage war against sin. He restrained the waters of a river, shook the walls of a city, sent hail from heaven, and lengthened the hours of a particular day—in order to accomplish His purposes. God rarely works in such direct ways today to judge sin. This should not lead us to conclude that He never did or never will. He will again "shake the heavens and the earth" to bring down His wrath on sinners (cf. Rev. 6—19). We have the privilege of living in the day of His *grace* (the Church Age), during which time God is being patient with sinners (2 Pet. 3:9-10). Nevertheless that day will end, and He will bring judgment on our world—just as He did on the world of the Canaanites.

God also uses people who are loyal to Him to wage war against sin. The people God used in Joshua were men and women of faith (Heb. 11:30). God's methods are unpredictable, and often seem strange to His servants. They frequently appear even *foolish* or ridiculous to us. Therefore God asks that we simply trust and obey Him. "Faith" in the Book of Joshua means doing what God directs (e.g., at Jericho), and not doing what He forbids (e.g., at Ai). Joshua is one of the clearest illustrations in the Bible that consistent trust in, and obedience to the Word of God, results in overcoming, victorious, powerful, and successful living. The Book of Joshua clarifies three characteristics of faith:

First, faith involves *accepting God's standard of holiness*. We tend to undervalue the need for personal and corporate holiness in our day, because God is not judging sin immediately, as He did in Joshua's day. This is the day of His patience. Nevertheless, Joshua teaches that *without holiness* there can be no spiritual power or consistent victory in our experience (cf. 1:8; 24:19-25). This is why the Christian must pay attention to his or her inner life: our thought life.

²¹See Peterson, pp. 273-74.

Second, faith also means *abandonment to God's will*. God has revealed in His Word how His people can experience all He wants them to have. Because God's ways are not the ways that we would choose, from our finite carnal viewpoint, we have trouble trusting God and committing ourselves wholeheartedly to His will. The Israelites succeeded at Jericho, as they did, because they committed themselves completely to engaging in that battle as God had commanded. They did so even though it must have looked like suicide to obey.

Third, faith also involves *achievement in God's might*. It is God who wins the victories. Without God, His people "can do nothing" productive (John 15:5). However, with Him "all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26; Phil. 4:13). The Israelites learned this when they failed at Ai. Success does not really come as a result of *our* action as we obey God. It comes as a result of *God's* action working through instruments whom He finds usable.

In conclusion, Joshua reveals that God *hates* sin. He is at war with it because it offends Him, but also because it destroys the people He has created to have fellowship with Himself. God uses the forces of nature, as well as people who are loyal to Him, to root out sin and bring deliverance to His people. However, the people He uses must accept His standard of holiness for themselves. They must abandon themselves to His way of doing things. And they must acknowledge that victories are the result of His might, not their own.²²

There are many parallels between the Books of Joshua and Ephesians. F. B. Meyer has noted these throughout his commentary on Joshua.

²²Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 1:1:99-115.

Exposition

I. THE CONQUEST OF THE LAND CHS. 1—12

The first half of the Book of Joshua records theologically significant events, that occurred after Moses died, and before Israel was able to settle in the Promised Land.

A. PREPARATIONS FOR ENTERING CANAAN CHS. 1—2

The first two chapters provide background information that enable the reader to understand how Israel was able to enter the land and conquer it.

1. God's charge to Joshua 1:1-9

In one sense, verses 1-9 are a preamble to the whole book. They contain the basic principles that were to guide Joshua and Israel, so they could obtain all that God had promised their forefathers.

1:1 The first word of the book is a conjunction translated "now" or "and." It shows that this book picks up where Deuteronomy ended.

"'Servant of the LORD' is a title of honor shared by Abraham, David, and the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah. (It is used most frequently of Moses: Exod 14:31; Num 12:7-8; Deut 34:5; and thirteen times in Joshua; 'my servant' occurs twice.) The term 'servant' was used to designate even the highest officials of a king. . . . Only at the end of his life was he [Joshua] honored with the title 'servant of the LORD' (24:29)."²³

Joshua was from the tribe of Ephraim (Num. 13:8; 1 Chron. 7:27).

1:2 The nation had mourned "the death of Moses" for 30 days (Deut. 34:8). Now God instructed Joshua to prepare "to [enter] the land." The death of any of His servants never frustrates or limits God, though this causes Him sorrow (Ps. 116:15).

"Think of the years of blessing in the Promised Land that Joshua forfeited because the people had no faith in God! But Joshua patiently stayed with Moses and did his job, knowing that one day he and Caleb would get their promised inheritance (Num. 14:1-9). Leaders must know not only how to win victories but also how to accept defeats."²⁴

²³Madvig, p. 255.

²⁴Wiersbe, p. 12.

- 1:3 God had promised all the land that the Israelites would tread under foot to the patriarchs and Moses ("every place on which the sole of your foot treads"; Gen. 13:17; Exod. 23:30-31; Deut. 11:24). The Israelites were now to claim it as their own by taking possession of it.
- 1:4 The area described here includes all the territory that God had promised to Abraham and the other patriarchs (Gen. 15:18; et al.). The writer apparently referred to "the Hittites" in a *representative* sense, in order to describe all the Canaanite tribes (as in 1 Kings 10:29; 2 Kings 7:6; Ezek. 16:3). This is a figure of speech called "synecdoche," in which a part represents the whole or the whole stands for a part (e.g., "bread" means food, or "all the world" equals all the Roman world [Luke 2:1]).
- 1:5 Many students of the book have called this the key verse. Here God promised Joshua His unfailing power and presence ("I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you"), so that he might be completely successful ("no man will be able to stand before you") in subduing the Canaanites. Joshua's failure to be entirely successful was not God's fault but the Israelites'.

"This text [vv. 2-5] summarizes the book. Verse 2 describes the crossing of the Jordan as found in 1:1—5:12. Verse 3 outlines the 'conquest' of 5:13—12:24. Verse 4 implies the distribution of the land in 13:1—22:34. The emphasis on all the days of Joshua's life in verse 5 is found at the end of Joshua's life in the final two chapters of the book. These verses also introduce the character of the LORD God of Israel. He is one of the main actors in the book. Here he reveals himself through his promises on behalf of Joshua and Israel."²⁵

I have been told that whenever a plane is taking off or landing from a U.S. aircraft carrier, the captain watches from the bridge. Even if the planes are flying around the clock, he stays on the bridge, catnapping between runs if necessary. Each time a pilot takes off in his jet aircraft, or lands on the deck of one of those floating airfields, he knows that his captain is watching. Likewise, whenever we are involved in spiritual warfare, wherever we are, we can be confident that the "Lord of armies," our Captain, is "with" us. But more than just observing us, He also guides, protects, and leads us in battle.

- 1:6 God exhorted Joshua on the basis of this promise (v. 5) to be "strong" and "courageous" (cf. Deut. 31:6). *Ownership* of the land depended on *God's* faithfulness, but *occupation* of the land depended on *Israel's* faithfulness (cf. Deut. 30:20).

²⁵Hess, p. 68.

The writer stressed two major theological points in this book: Yahweh's faithfulness in giving Israel the Promised Land, and Yahweh's hatred of sin.²⁶

"The word 'inherit' ["possession" in the NASB] used to describe the future possession of the land, is of rich theological significance. It has subsequently become a NT term for the enjoyment of the spiritual blessings of salvation (e.g., 1 Pet. 1:4)."²⁷

The same Hebrew word (*nahal* [verb] or *nahala* [noun]) also appears in Deuteronomy 1:38; 12:10; Joshua 11:23; 14:13; 16:4; and 17:6.

"The Book of Joshua records the fulfillment of these three promises: the first [that Israel would enter the land, vv. 3-4] in chapters 2—5, the second [victory over the enemy, v. 5] in chapters 6—12, and the third [that God would divide the land as an inheritance for the conquering tribes] in chapters 13—22."²⁸

1:7 Joshua's responsibility included unswerving obedience to the Mosaic Law. This would be the key to his "success." Knowing the law was only the first step. Practicing it was what would make Joshua effective ("be careful to do . . . all the law"; cf. Deut. 5:32-33).

"The important lesson which we hence learn is, that in nothing is there more scope for the display of the highest moral heroism than in daring, in all circumstances, to cleave steadfastly to the word of God as the rule of our conduct. It is in this chiefly that the fortitude of the Christian soldier is to evince itself."²⁹

1:8 Moses had left Israel a "written" document ("this book of the law"), that the Israelites regarded as authoritative law, namely, the Mosaic Law. The Lord commanded Joshua to keep this Word in mind constantly ("you shall meditate on it day and night"), so that he would remember his responsibilities under God, and would find encouragement to keep them (cf. Ps. 1:2; Isa. 59:21).

"The phrase 'from your mouth' refers to the custom of muttering while studying or reflecting. The Hebrew word translated 'meditate' (*hagah*) literally means 'mutter.' When

²⁶Constable, p. 103.

²⁷Martin H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, p. 61. See Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, pp. 43-91, for an excellent explanation of the Old and New Testament revelation concerning believers' inheritance.

²⁸Wiersbe, p. 19.

²⁹Bush, p. 20.

one continually mutters God's Word to himself, he is constantly thinking about it."³⁰

". . . [Meditation] does not mean theoretical speculation about the law, such as the Pharisees indulged in, but a practical study of the law, for the purpose of observing it in thought and action, or carrying it out with the heart, the mouth, and the hand. Such a mode of employing it would be sure to be followed by blessings."³¹

We should never view Bible study and memorization as ends in themselves. They are important methods of obtaining the end of being obedient to God's Word. We cannot obey it unless we understand it, and are consciously aware of it, as we make decisions day by day.

"The higher any man is raised in office, the more need has he of an acquaintance with the sacred oracles, and the better will he be qualified by the study of them for the discharge of his arduous duties."³²

1:9 This was not just good advice. Joshua was receiving orders from his Commander. *Trembling* or *fearing* would betray lack of confidence in God ("Do not tremble or be dismayed [i.e., overcome by fear]").

"When a movement develops around a dominant personality, the real test of the quality of his leadership is the manner in which that work survives the crisis of his removal. . . . (Acts 5:38-39) . . . A work originated by God and conducted on spiritual principles will surmount the shock of a change of leadership and indeed will probably thrive better as a result."³³

Notice the chiastic structure of God's charge to Joshua:

- A** I will be with you (v. 5).
- B** Be strong and courageous (vv. 6, 7).
- C** That you may have success (v. 7).
- D** This book of the law (v. 8).
- C'** Then you will have success (v. 8).
- B'** Be strong and courageous (v. 9).
- A'** The Lord your God is with you (v. 9).

³⁰Madvig, p. 257.

³¹Keil and Delitzsch, p. 30.

³²Bush, pp. 21-22.

³³J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, p. 132.

This structure emphasizes the centrality of the book of the law of God as the key to Israel's success, Joshua's effective leadership, and God's enabling presence with His people. With this challenge, Joshua could advance into Canaan confidently.

This passage contains the principles necessary for spiritual success in every age. We must: know what God requires, maintain perpetual awareness of that, and be consistently and completely obedient to it in our daily experience—in order to gain victory over our spiritual adversaries.³⁴

2. Joshua's charge to Israel 1:10-18

Having received his marching orders from Yahweh, Joshua *prepared* to mobilize the nation of Israel ("Prepare provisions for yourselves").

1:10-11 Joshua expected to be able to "cross [the] Jordan (River) within three days." During these three days, the Israelites had time to consider and to realize that they were totally dependent on God for the ability to cross the wide, swift Jordan River and to defeat the Canaanites.³⁵

"The Jordan River wanders about two hundred miles to cover the sixty-five mile distance from the Lake of Galilee to the Dead Sea, dropping an additional six hundred feet below sea level as it goes."³⁶

"Caleb and Joshua were the oldest men in the camp, and yet they were enthusiastic about trusting God and entering the land. It isn't a matter of *age*; it's a matter of *faith*; and faith comes from meditating on the Word of God (1:8; Ro. 10:17)."³⁷

1:12-18 The concept of "rest" (vv. 13, 15) is an important one to grasp, in order to understand what the conquest of the land provided the Israelites. It also clarifies what the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews had in mind, when he referred to "the rest" that we enjoy as Christians (Heb. 3—4).³⁸ It was not "rest" in the sense of freedom from conflict, but rather, resting in contrast to journeying. Even after the seven-year conquest of the land, there was still much land that the Israelites had to take from the Canaanites and possess (13:1; 23:1-13; cf. 24:1-28; Judg. 1:1). Therefore *this* "rest" was the entrance into, and initial participation in, the inheritance the Lord had promised His people (cf. Deut. 12:10; 25:19; Josh. 21:44; 23:1; 2 Sam. 7:1, 11; 1 Kings 8:56; Ps. 95).³⁹

³⁴See Harry Foster, "Joshua, Walking into Battle," *Toward the Mark* 11:6 (November-December 1982):116-19.

³⁵F. B. Meyer, *Joshua and the Land of Promise*, pp. 27-28.

³⁶Trent C. Butler, *Joshua*, p. 17. Cf. *The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Jordan," by J. M. Houston.

³⁷Wiersbe, p. 21.

³⁸See Dillow, pp. 93-110, for a good exposition of the promises of rest that appear in Scripture.

³⁹See Hess, p. 78, and especially Butler, pp. 21-22, for a fuller discussion of "rest."

"This theologically significant term [rest] . . . is one of the key words for understanding the book of Joshua as well as later revelation."⁴⁰

In Christian experience, the "crossing of the Jordan" does not only correspond to the believer's death and entrance into heaven, which some popular Christian songs suggest. It also parallels the believer's entrance into the *enjoyment* of his or her eternal life—now—through dedication to Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:13; 12:1-2), and through walking by means of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16). The wilderness wanderings resemble the experience of the redeemed believer, who has not yet fully committed himself or herself to God, and who is still "walking in the flesh." When the Israelites crossed the Jordan, they encountered real *physical* enemies, and also had to contend with their *spiritual* adversaries—just as a New Testament believer does when he dedicates himself to God and walks by the Spirit. The Christian's rest is not the absence of hostility. It is the beginning of the *enjoyment* of some of the blessings that God has promised us (i.e., eternal life, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, victory over our spiritual enemies, etc.).

"Entering the land does not parallel the believer's entrance to heaven; it signifies his willingness to 'cross the Jordan' and engage the enemy. In other words, it is a decision by a regenerate saint to submit to the lordship of Christ and trust God for victory in the spiritual battle."⁴¹

In another sense, "Canaan" corresponds to the additional blessings that believers who follow God faithfully *in this life* will receive *following death*.⁴²

Not literally "all" the warriors from the two and one-half tribes went *with* (not "before," v. 14) their brethren across the Jordan. Only 40,000 of the 110,000 did (cf. 4:13 and Num. 26:7, 18, 34). The remainder evidently stayed in Transjordan. We should understand "all" (v. 14) in this limited sense.

The attitude of the two and one-half tribes was commendable. They followed through with their previous commitment to Moses (Num. 32:25-27), and with their present commitment to Joshua (vv. 16-18). There were no significant instances of complaining or rebellion among the tribes during Joshua's lifetime, according to what the writer recorded. In this respect, the nation enjoyed greater unity *during* the conquest, than it did in its former or later history.

⁴⁰Woudstra, p. 65.

⁴¹Dillow, p. 79, n. 57. See also Donald K. Campbell, "Joshua," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 335.

⁴²Dillow, p. 57.

"The officers encouraged Joshua by praying for him (v. 17). . . . 'Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare time?' asked Corrie Ten Boom, a question that especially applies to those in places of leadership?"⁴³

To be successful in our corporate task of overcoming our spiritual enemies, God's people must unite behind the leaders whom God has raised up to lead us. We should not complain or rebel against them (Heb. 13:17). Furthermore, as "God's people," we must commit ourselves to entering into conflict with our spiritual enemies, rather than avoiding such conflict—in order to possess the *fullness* of God's inheritance for us. The Christian's spiritual enemies are "the world," "the flesh," and "the devil" (1 John 2:15-17; Rom. 7:18-24; 1 Pet. 5:8).

F. B. Meyer identified four sources of Joshua's strength: (1) a faithful past, (2) a distinct call, (3) the sense of the presence of God, and (4) the indwelling of the Word of God.⁴⁴

3. The spying out of Jericho ch. 2

As preparation for entering Canaan, Joshua sent spies to reconnoiter the area Israel would enter.

"Although Joshua had received a promise from the Lord of His almighty help in the conquest of Canaan, he still thought it necessary to do what was requisite on his part to secure the success of the work committed to him, as the help of God does not preclude human action, but rather presupposes it."⁴⁵

2:1 The "two men" sent out "from Shittim . . . as spies" were young (cf. 6:23). Joshua sent them out "secretly" (cf. 7:2). He did not want a recurrence of the Kadesh Barnea rebellion (Num. 13—14).

"He had learned by experience that spy reports should be brought to the leaders only, for the people did not have sufficient orientation or experience to properly evaluate such a report."⁴⁶

Their mission was to explore the area Israel would enter, "especially Jericho." Jericho is possibly the lowest city on earth, lying about 750 feet below sea level.⁴⁷ The spies' object was to determine *when* and *how* to attack, not whether or not to attack.

⁴³Wiersbe, p. 22.

⁴⁴Meyer, pp. 19-25.

⁴⁵Keil and Delitzsch, p. 33.

⁴⁶Davis and Whitcomb, p. 33.

⁴⁷See *The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Jericho," by Kenneth A. Kitchen.

"Sending out men for reconnaissance was a widespread phenomenon in the east. Moreover, a prostitute's or innkeeper's house was the accustomed place for meeting with spies, conspirators, and the like. Thus, for example, we read in Hammurabi's Code: 'If scoundrels plot together [in conspiratorial relationships] in an innkeeper's house, and she does not seize them and bring them to the palace, that innkeeper shall be put to death' (law § 109). In a Mari letter we read about two men who sow fear and panic and cause rebellion in an army. Also, the pattern of a three-day stay in an area when pursuing escapees has support in ancient eastern sources; for example the instructions to the Hittite tower commanders specify that if an enemy invades a place he must be pursued for three days. In the same collection of instructions we find that it is forbidden to build an inn (*arzana*) in which prostitutes live near the fortress wall, apparently because of the kind of danger described in Joshua 2."⁴⁸

"Their immediate destination—the house of a harlot—seems strange at first, but two reasons may explain their selection. First, the house was part of the construction of the wall itself and therefore was more accessible and could more easily be a point of escape. Second, strange men at a harlot's place of business would hardly raise suspicion."⁴⁹

Jericho was not a large city, but it had strong fortifications and a strategic location on the eastern frontier of Canaan.⁵⁰ It was situated just a few miles west of the Jordan River, in the low-lying Jordan Valley. If the Israelites were to gain a foothold in Canaan, they would have to defeat Jericho.

The spies probably stayed at *Rahab's* "house" because they hoped to be less conspicuous *there* than they would have been if they had lodged elsewhere.⁵¹ The word "harlot" translates the Hebrew word for a common prostitute (*zah-nah*), not a cultic prostitute (*k'deh-shah*).⁵² Josephus called Rahab an "innkeeper," which she may have been.⁵³ The writer recorded

⁴⁸Moshe Weinfeld, *The Promise of the Land: The Inheritance of the Land of Canaan by the Israelites*, pp. 141-43.

⁴⁹Merrill, p. 164.

⁵⁰See Finegan, pp. 312-14.

⁵¹See Butler, pp. 31-32, for a discussion of the many instances of irony in this chapter.

⁵²Gray, p. 64. See Anthony J. Frendo, "Was Rahab Really a Harlot?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 39:5 (September/October 2013):62-65, 74, 76.

⁵³Josephus, 5:1:2, 7. See also Hess, pp. 83-84; and M. A. Beek, "Rahab in the Light of Jewish Exegesis," in *Von Kanaan bis Kerala*, pp. 37-44. Bush, pp. 31-32, strongly rejected this possibility.

Rahab's name because she became an important person in Israel's history. She was became an ancestor of David, as well as Israel's helper, on this occasion (cf. Matt. 1:5).

2:2-6

Rahab was a "woman of faith" in Yahweh (cf. Heb. 11:31; James 2:25). Apparently what she had heard about the *God of Israel* had led her to place her trust in Him ("the LORD your *God*, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath" [emphasis added]; vv. 9-12). The protection of one's houseguests was very important in the ancient Orient (cf. Gen. 19:8; Judg. 19:20-24). This cultural pressure fortified her faith, and doubtless encouraged her to hide the spies. Rahab should not have told a lie, however.

"To excuse Rahab for indulging in a common practice is to condone what God condemns."⁵⁴

Though she had come to faith in Yahweh, her moral life had not yet undergone radical change.

"Having been born and brought up among the depraved Canaanites, she had probably never been taught the evil of lying, and least of all where an apparently good end was to be answered by it."⁵⁵

". . . a lie is always a sin. Therefore even if Rahab was not actuated at all by the desire to save herself and her family from destruction, and the motive from which she acted had its roots in her faith in the living God (Heb. xi. 31), so that what she did for the spies, and thereby for the cause of the Lord, was counted to her for righteousness ('justified by works,' James ii. 25), yet the course which she adopted was a sin of weakness, which was forgiven her in mercy because of her faith."⁵⁶

"It has often happened, that even when good men have endeavored to keep a straight course, they have turned aside into circuitous paths. Rahab acted wrongly when she told a lie and said that the spies had gone; and the action was acceptable to God only because the evil that was mixed with the good was not imputed to her. Yet, although God wished the spies to be delivered, He did not sanction their being protected by a lie."⁵⁷

⁵⁴Donald K. Campbell, *No Time for Neutrality*, p. 19. See also R. Kent Hughes, *Living on the Cutting Edge*, p. 37; and Irving L. Jensen, *Joshua: Rest-Land Won*, p. 38.

⁵⁵Bush, p. 34.

⁵⁶Keil and Delitzsch, p. 35. See also John Rea, "Joshua," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 208.

⁵⁷John Calvin, quoted by idem, p. 35.

Lying is a more serious sin in some circumstances than in others, but it is always a sin (Exod. 20:16; Lev. 19:11; Deut. 5:20; Prov. 12:22).

"For one to lie in this manner is for one to assume that he knows the outcome of a situation which, in fact, he does not. God has control of every situation and therefore it might well be the will of God that the spies should die. It is the job of the believer to represent the truth and allow the Lord to care for that situation."⁵⁸

2:7-14 Assuming that the spies had fled back to the Israelite camp, "the men [of Jericho] pursued and" searched "all along (on) the road" from their city to the place where travelers forded "the Jordan" ("to the fords"; v. 7)—about five miles.

Rahab's reference to the *fear* of the Israelites that God had put in the Canaanites' hearts ("the terror of you has fallen upon us"; vv. 9-11) shows that the Lord had fulfilled His promise to make the Israelites' enemies be terrified of them (Exod. 23:27; Deut. 2:25; 11:25). This is one of the longest uninterrupted statements by a woman in a biblical narrative.⁵⁹

"Yahweh had proved himself more powerful than any other claimants to deity. The irony of the situation existed in the fact that Israel's enemies recognized this when Israel did not."⁶⁰

"Utterly destroyed" translates the Hebrew *herem*, a technical term for the practice of completely destroying the spoils of war as a way of consecrating them to a deity (cf. 6:17).⁶¹

"The people who in Rahab's time most frequently used such houses of prostitution were the traveling merchants. From them she had repeatedly heard of the marvelous nation which was approaching from Egypt, and of the God of Israel who had perfected such striking miracles."⁶²

The "melting" of the Canaanites' "hearts" (v. 11) pictures utter despair. We must be careful not to overestimate Rahab's confession of faith in this verse. She had come to "place her faith" in Yahweh (she was like a "new Christian," but in the Old Testament sense, of course; cf. Heb. 11:31; James 2:25), but she did not become a mature believer immediately. No one does.

⁵⁸Davis and Whitcomb, p. 35. For an explanation of Rahab's lie as legitimate, see Jim West, "Rahab's Justifiable Lie," *Christianity and Civilization* 2 (Winter 1983):66-74.

⁵⁹Hess, p. 88.

⁶⁰Butler, p. 33.

⁶¹Madvig, p. 262.

⁶²Abraham Kuyper, *Women of the Old Testament*, p. 69.

"If Rahab talked too much, her life was in danger [v. 14]; but if we don't talk enough, the lives of lost people around us are in danger."⁶³

2:15-21 The spies gave their solemn promise to spare Rahab and her household, but specified three conditions that Rahab had to meet:

1. She had to make her home known to the Israelites when they attacked ("tie this cord of scarlet thread in your window," v. 18).
2. She had to assemble her family into her home before the battle ("gather to yourself . . . your father's household," v. 18).
3. She had to keep the mission of the spies a secret ("if you tell this business . . . we shall be free from the oath," vv. 20, 14).

The "cord" Rahab was to hang out of her window and over the town wall—her house stood on the wall (v. 15)—was "scarlet" in color (vv. 15, 18). Archaeologists have discovered houses within the ruined walls of ancient Jericho.⁶⁴ Its unusual color would have *marked* Rahab's house for the Israelites to notice. The color had symbolic significance, too, since "red" recalls *blood* and *vigorous life* (cf. Gen. 38:28, 30; Exod. 12:7, 13).

"In the preaching of the Christian church, all the way back to Clement of Rome . . ., this has been taken as a sign of the blood of Christ, the Lamb."⁶⁵

There is no Scriptural statement that the cord is a *type*, however.

"It answered, therefore, the same purpose with the blood sprinkled upon the door-posts in Egypt, which secured the first-born from the destroying angel."⁶⁶

God spared the lives of Rahab and her household because of *her* "faith" (cf. Heb. 11:31). Any of Rahab's relatives, who had chosen to gather with her before the Israelite siege, would have done so because of *their* faith, as well, in God's promise through the spies. If they had had *no faith*, they would have stayed in their own homes. Thus the deliverance of Rahab and her family depended on believing a promise from God. Salvation always depends on believing a promise from God (cf. Gen. 15:6; John 3:16; et al.).

⁶³Wiersbe, p. 26.

⁶⁴See Bryant G. Wood, "Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho? A New Look at the Archaeological Evidence," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 16:2 (1990):56.

⁶⁵Frances Schaeffer, *Joshua and the Flow of Biblical History*, p. 77.

⁶⁶Bush, pp. 39-40.

2:22-24 The "hill country" referred to (vv. 22-23) was probably the mountainous area west of Jericho. This area contains many caves in the "deeply eroded and lonely chalk hills" and many "isolated canyons cut through the [1,500 feet high] limestone cliffs."⁶⁷ The spies evidently were absent from the Israelite camp a total of "three days" (v. 22; cf. 1:11; 3:2).

One of the major emphases in this chapter is God's *faithfulness*. When the spies returned to Shittim with news that some of the Canaanites believed that Yahweh would give the Israelites the land, God's people must have felt greatly encouraged (vv. 9-11, 24; cf. 1:2-3, 6, 11, 15).

This chapter also shows that God will deliver those who seek salvation from coming judgment, regardless of their past or present sins, if they have faith in Him. Rahab believed Yahweh was the *true* God ("*For the LORD your God, **He is God***" [emphasis added]; v. 11; cf. Ruth 1:16; 1 John 5:1). Her protection of the spies demonstrated the sincerity of her faith (v. 6; cf. James 2:25). Rahab's confidence (solid hope) about her preservation from the coming judgment rested on the *promise* given to her by God's "spokesmen" (v. 21; cf. John 6:47).

"If Joshua represents the Israelite male who finds guidance and success through faith in the LORD God, does Rahab represent his counterpart, the Canaanite female who also finds guidance and success through faith in the LORD God? In one of the most nationalistic books in the Hebrew Bible, does it not serve the purposes of the promise to Abraham that 'all peoples on earth will be blessed through you' (Gn. 12:3) to place side by side with the choice of a military leader and his initial preparations for battle, the story of a foreign woman who believed and was saved without arms or bloodshed?"⁶⁸

"The spies violated God's explicit command that none of the people living in the land were to be spared (Deut 7:1-6; 20:16-18). Rahab, however, turned to God and sought deliverance. Her experience is proof of the gracious saving purpose of God. His overarching decree is that 'everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved' (Joel 2:32). This is one of the most dramatic examples of grace in the OT and is set in bold relief by the questionable aspects of Rahab's profession and conversion.

"The salvation of Rahab is an example of what God would have done for others also. The king and the other citizens of Jericho knew all that she knew, but they did not turn to Israel's God for mercy. The fear that drove her to beg for mercy drove them in their stubborn rebellion. Accordingly, the others are called 'the disobedient' in Hebrews 11:31 . . ."⁶⁹

⁶⁷James Monson, *The Land Between*, p. 163.

⁶⁸Hess, pp. 96-97.

⁶⁹Madvig, p. 264.

Contrast the response of the Ninevites in Jonah's day.

B. ENTRANCE INTO THE LAND 3:1—5:12

The entrance into the land was an extremely important event in the life of Israel. The writer marked it off in three major movements. Each one begins with a command from God to Joshua (3:7-8; 4:1-3; and 4:15-16), followed by the communication of the command to the people, and then its execution. The way the narrator told the story seems designed to impress on the reader that it was Yahweh who was bringing His people miraculously into the land.

1. Passage through the Jordan chs. 3—4

This section contains two parts: the actual crossing of the Jordan River (ch. 3) and the commemoration of that crossing (ch. 4).

The crossing of the river ch. 3

3:1-6 Joshua may have moved the nation from Shittim to the Jordan's edge at approximately the same time he sent the spies on their mission (cf. vv. 1-2 and 1:11; 2:22). However, the sequence of events was probably as it appears in the text. Chapter 1 verse 11 describes one three-day period during which the spies were in Jericho and the hills. A second, overlapping three-day period began on the next day (day four) with the people's arrival at Shittim (3:1), and concluded two days later (on the sixth day) with the officers giving the people last-minute instructions about the crossing (3:2-4). The people then crossed the Jordan on the next day (day seven).⁷⁰

"Duty often calls us to take one step without knowing how we shall take the next; but if brought thus far by the leadings of Providence, and while engaged in his service, we may safely leave the event to him."⁷¹

From this point forward, God continued to lead His people by means of "the ark." Whereas in the wilderness, the cloudy pillar over the ark was the focus of the Israelites' attention, now the ark itself became the primary object of their interest. The writer mentioned the ark 17 times in chapters 3 and 4. It was the visible symbol that *God Himself* was leading His people into the land and against their enemies. The people were to keep their distance from the ark, however: "about 2,000 cubits," more than half a mile.

⁷⁰David M. Howard Jr., "'Three Days' in Joshua 1—3: Resolving a Chronological Conundrum," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41:4 (December 1998):539-50.

⁷¹Bush, p. 41.

". . . the ark was carried in front of the people, not so much to show the road as to make a road by dividing the waters of the Jordan, and the people were to keep at a distance from it, that they might not lose sight of the ark, but keep their eyes fixed upon it, and know the road by looking at the ark of the covenant by which the road had been made, i.e., might know and observe how the Lord, through the medium of the ark, was leading them to Canaan by a way which they had never traversed before; i.e., by a miraculous way."⁷²

Other frequently recurring words in chapters 3 and 4 are "cross" and "stand," used 22 and five times respectively. These words identify other emphases of the writer.

The people's self-consecration (v. 5) consisted of their turning their hearts to God and getting their attitudes and actions right with Him ("consecrate yourselves"; cf. Matt. 3:2; 4:17). God had previously promised to do "wonders" (v. 5, awesome miracles) upon their entering the land (cf. Exod. 34:10). Undoubtedly the people had been looking forward to seeing these miracles, in view of what their parents had told them, and what some of them remembered about the plagues in Egypt.

3:7-13

The miraculous parting of the Jordan was only the beginning of a series of miracles that demonstrated to the Israelites that their God was indeed among them. He was still acting on their behalf, but now He began working through Joshua to give them many miraculous victories ("I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel"; v. 7).

"And surely the exaltation of Christ as the God-man dates from the moment that he stepped into the hurrying waters of death and dried them up."⁷³

This event bore many similarities to the crossing of the Red Sea (3:13; cf. Exod. 14). In contrast, Moses had divided the waters of the Red Sea with his rod. Joshua divided the waters of the Jordan *with the ark*, which had become the divinely appointed symbol of God's presence ever since He gave the Mosaic Covenant (v. 8).

Evidently the pushing back of the waters of the Jordan was to be a sign to the Israelites that God would push back the Canaanites ("By this you shall know . . . that I will assuredly dispossess from before you . . ."; v. 10).

⁷²Keil and Delitzsch, p. 41.

⁷³Meyer, p. 41.

"*Canaanites* and *Amorites* were the Semitic elements in the population."⁷⁴

The title "the LORD of all the earth" occurs here (v. 11) for the first time in Scripture, indicating Yahweh's absolute sovereignty over this planet. Because He was "the LORD of *all* the earth," which also meant its "Owner," He could give Canaan to the Israelites.

3:14-17 The Israelites "crossed the Jordan" when the river was at its widest, deepest, and swiftest, in late April or early May. As the snow on Mt. Hermon melts and the rainy season ends, the Jordan rises to a depth of 10 to 12 feet, and floods to a width of 300 to 360 feet, at this point in the river's flow today. Normally it is only 150–180 feet wide here. However, in Joshua's day, the river may have been full only *up to* its banks, as the Hebrew text suggests. The people considered crossing the river at this time of year, by swimming, a heroic feat in ancient times (cf. 1 Chron. 12:15). This is probably how the spies crossed.

The town of "Adam" (v. 16) stood about 18 miles north of Jericho, near where the Jabbok River empties into the Jordan Valley. Interestingly, several earthquakes have sent much soil into the Jordan River in modern times, at this very location, damming up the river for many hours (in A.D. 1267, 1837, and 1927).⁷⁵ Perhaps an earthquake is what God used in Joshua's day, too. God may have supernaturally used, by divine *timing*, a natural phenomenon, like an earthquake or a landslide, near Adam—to cut off the waters of the Jordan as they flowed south.⁷⁶ Another possibility is that the phenomenon was entirely supernatural.⁷⁷

Two million Israelites could have crossed the river in half a day if their crossing procession was a mile or more wide. Since the Jordan River dried up from Adam, 18 miles upstream from where the priests crossed, there would have been plenty of dry riverbed for two million Israelites to cross. The "dry ground" (v. 17) was a miracle, too (cf. Exod. 14:21).

The major emphasis in chapter 3 is on the great miracle that God performed to lead the Israelites into the land of promise. The conquest of the land would continue to be accompanied by God's miraculous works for His people, all of which they were to remember and appreciate.

"The people of God [i.e., Israel] must realize that God does not help them automatically. God helps them when they obey his commands given through his leader."⁷⁸

⁷⁴Gray, p. 69.

⁷⁵Finegan, p. 155; Barry J. Beitzel, *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands*, pp. 37-38; Rea, p. 210.

⁷⁶Madvig, p. 272.

⁷⁷Campbell, "Joshua," p. 335.

⁷⁸Butler, p. 52.

The memorial of the crossing ch. 4

The main point in the story of the crossing recorded in this chapter, is the removal of the stones from the riverbed. They served as a "memorial" of this event for generations to come ("forever"; vv. 6-7).⁷⁹

4:1-14 Piling up stones was often a covenant ritual in the ancient Near East.⁸⁰ It was a common method of preserving the memory of important events (cf. Gen. 8:20; 12:7; 35:7; et al.).

There were apparently two piles of 12 stones each, one "at Gilgal" (their "lodging place"; vv. 3-8, 20), and one in the Jordan River bed ("in the middle of the Jordan"; v. 9). Some scholars believe there was only one pile of stones, which the NIV translation also suggests.⁸¹ The Israelites probably constructed two stone memorials, because the crossing was so miraculous that God wanted to be sure their children and the Canaanites believed it really happened. The stones on the bank would have reminded the Israelites that God had brought them into the land that He had promised to their ancestors. The stones in the river would have reminded them of the miracle that God had performed to bring them in, and that this was His doing and not their own.

The monument "at Gilgal" probably consisted of large stones that people could not normally remove from the riverbed. Building the other monument "in the middle of the (Jordan)" river was impossible under normal circumstances, due to the volume and current of the water there. Thus the Israelite children and the Canaanites had double proof, or two witnesses, of God's faithfulness and power. God specified "12 stones" for each monument, to represent the *12 tribes* of Israel.

"No certain identification exists for the site of 'the Gilgal'. It is not necessary or even likely that all the occurrences of Gilgal in the Bible refer to the same location. The name means 'circle', and is a good description for a fortified camp such as must have been present in Joshua's time."⁸²

"It is doubtful whether there was either city or town in that place before the arrival of the Israelites."⁸³

⁷⁹For a discussion of the supposed contradictions in chapters 3 and 4 and a solution based on literary analysis, see Brian Peckham, "The Composition of Joshua 3—4," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 46:3 (July 1984):413-31.

⁸⁰G. Herbert Livingston, *The Pentateuch in its Cultural Environment*, p. 157.

⁸¹E.g., Hess, p. 109.

⁸²Ibid., p. 115. Cf. Finegan, pp. 155-56.

⁸³Bush, p. 52.

4:15-24 The text carefully clarifies that it was the *presence and power* of God, which "the ark" symbolized, that held back ("cut off" or "dried up") "the waters of the Jordan." When the priests removed the ark from the riverbed, "the waters" resumed their flow ("returned to their place"; v. 18).

"The ark is the very symbol of *the covenant of the Lord*. Thus the full light falls on the redemptive significance of the event. No mere recalling of a miracle is envisaged. The miracle is to be viewed as an expression of covenant fidelity."⁸⁴

There are many references to the fact that "all Israel (the people) crossed" over "the Jordan" in this chapter (vv. 1-5, 8-9, 11-12, 14, 20, 24). This, too, highlights the faithfulness of God to His promises, to bring the whole nation into the Promised Land. They first pitched camp west of the Jordan at Gilgal (meaning "Circle [of stones]," or "Rolling," from Heb. *galal*, "to roll"), which, according to Josephus, was "10 furlongs [one and one-quarter miles] from Jericho."⁸⁵

"There the first camp was pitched, on the edge of a vast grove of majestic palms, nearly three miles broad and eight miles long, that stretched away to Jericho."⁸⁶

The notation that the crossing took place on the "tenth [day] of the first month" (v. 19) is significant. It was exactly 40 years earlier, to the day, that God had instructed Israel to prepare to depart from Egypt by setting apart the paschal lambs (Exod. 12:3).

"God had said in his wrath that they should wander forty years in the wilderness, and at last he brought them into Canaan five days before the forty years were ended, to show how little pleasure God takes in punishing, how swift he is to show mercy. God ordered it so that they should enter Canaan four days before the annual solemnity of the passover, and on the very day when the preparation for it was to begin (Exod. xii. 3), because he would have them then to be reminded of their deliverance out of Egypt."⁸⁷

The purpose of the memorial stones (v. 20) was the same as the purpose of the miracle at the Red Sea. Both events manifested the power of Yahweh to all people (v. 24; cf. Exod. 14:4, 18), and they caused God's people to fear Him (v. 24; cf. Exod. 14:31). "Fear the Lord" is the most common expression calling for faith in God in the Old Testament.

⁸⁴Woudstra, p. 91.

⁸⁵Josephus, 5:1:4, 11.

⁸⁶Meyer, p. 45.

⁸⁷Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 216.

"The Jewish father was not to send his child to some Levite or other to get his question answered [v. 21]. He was to answer the question himself. A good many modern parents who call themselves Christians are too likely to say, "Ask your Sunday School teacher," when such questions are put to them. The decline of parental religious teaching is working enormous mischief in Christian households, and the happiest results would follow if Joshua's homely advice were attended to: "Ye shall let your children know" (Maclaren). Parents have no right to abdicate their God-given responsibility in favor of Sunday School, Christian Grammar School, or any other agency. God impressed this principle time and again upon Israel, and it holds equally true for Christian parents today."⁸⁸

It is a good custom to memorialize God's great acts for us, so that we will remember them, and so that our children will learn that God is powerful and faithful (vv. 23-24). *Baptism* is one such memorial for the Christian, and the *Lord's Supper* is another.

"In the history of Dallas Seminary, there are just such 'memorial stones.' More than 40 years ago, Mrs. Howard Taylor told one such story in a pamphlet entitled, 'Empty Racks and How to Fill Them.'

"In the spring of 1924, plans were being laid for a new seminary to be organized in Dallas, to emphasize above all else the teaching of the Bible itself. Lewis Sperry Chafer, president-elect, had gone to Dundee, Scotland to hold evangelistic meetings at the invitation of a leading manufacturer of that city, in whose home he was a guest. Related Dr. Chafer:

"At four o'clock on a never-to-be-forgotten morning, I wakened with a sense of deep foreboding with regard to the agreement reached in Dallas. It seemed as if an unbearable burden had been thrust upon me. Failure, probable if not certain, was the only thing I could see, and all the forebodings the powers of darkness could devise came rolling like billows over me.

"In great agony of spirit, I cried to God, saying I could not go through the day without some very definite indication of His will in the matter. If such indication were not given, I should have to cable to Dallas requesting them to discontinue the whole project.

"Following that prayer I fell asleep, and later, seated by my host at the breakfast table, was surprised by his asking whether we had any provision in view for the library which would be needed for the new seminary. I told him that we had not, but that since Dr. Griffith Thomas had just died—

⁸⁸Henry Jacobsen, *Claiming God's Promises*, p. 42.

whose loss we were mourning on both sides of the Atlantic—I had written to our constituency in Dallas asking them to pray definitely that his valuable reference library might be secured for the college.

"I am interested in what you have told me,' he replied, 'and would like you to purchase these books and send the bill to me. And do not drive too close a bargain; I wish to pay whatever the library is worth.'

"A little later that same morning, I had retired to the study when my host came in and said, 'Speaking of the College, what about your salary as President?' I at once told him that I had not expected to draw any salary; that nothing was further from my thoughts.

"You will need some financial help,' he replied, 'and though I cannot give all that would be expected for one in such a position in the United States, I wish to send you personally two thousand dollars a year.'

"Truly my cup ran over! The gift of a library valued at four thousand dollars, and such unexpected provision for my salary—all in one day! Could I doubt that God desired the Evangelical Theological College to go forward?"⁸⁹

2. Circumcision and celebration of the Passover 5:1-12

"This [fifth] chapter records four experiences which God brought to Joshua and the people, each one centered about a token, or symbol . . . The Token of Circumcision: Restoration to covenant favor (5:2-9) . . . The Token of Blood: Anticipation of deliverance (5:10) . . . The Token of Fruit: Appropriation of the blessing (5:11-12) . . . The Token of a Sword: Revelation of a holy war (5:13-15)."⁹⁰

God had guaranteed Joshua's success only to the extent that he kept the Mosaic Law (1:7). It was necessary therefore that all the "males" who had been born in the wilderness, and who had not undergone circumcision, should now do so. Circumcision brought each individual male into the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 17). This rite was also a prerequisite for partaking in the Passover, that God required of all Israelites yearly (Exod. 12). Like the stones just set up, circumcision was also a memorial.

5:1 This verse at first might seem more appropriate as a conclusion to the previous chapter. However, the verse explains why the Israelites were able to take several days to perform the circumcision operation, that rendered them very vulnerable, militarily speaking, to their enemies. Israel's foes feared them greatly as a result of the miracle of the Jordan crossing, and, since they lost all their courage ("there was no spirit in them any longer"), they did not attack.

⁸⁹Campbell, *No Time* . . . , pp. 36-37.

⁹⁰Jensen, pp. 49-51.

This reference to the "Amorites" and "Canaanites" groups all the native tribes together. The people who possessed the South and the mountains of the land were mainly Amorites. Many of them had lived in Transjordan, and were the mightiest of the warriors among the pagan tribes. Those who lived in the North, in the lowlands by the Mediterranean Sea, and in the Valley of Jezreel, were mainly Canaanites. The Canaanites were typically traders rather than warriors.

The writer sometimes put all the native peoples in one or the other of these two groups. This depended on the area in which they lived (South or North, highlands or lowlands), or the general characteristic of the people that occupied most of that area (warlike or peaceful). Reference to the "Amorites and Canaanites" is probably a *merism*, a figure of speech in which two extremes represent the whole (e.g., "heaven and earth" means the universe).

"From the human standpoint, if ever there was a time to strike at the Canaanites it was right after the Israelites had gained entrance to the land. Fear had taken hold on the inhabitants of Palestine. But divine plans are not made according to human strategy."⁹¹

5:2-9

"The book of Joshua continues as a dialogue between the divine and human commander."⁹²

"Flint knives" (v. 2) were sharp flint rocks (obsidian). The first mass circumcision of the Israelites evidently had taken place in Egypt before the first Passover and the Exodus.

"The sentence upon the fathers, that their bodies should fall in the desert, was unquestionably a rejection of them on the part of God, an abrogation of the covenant with them. This punishment was also to be borne by their sons; and hence the reason why those who were born in the desert by the way were not circumcised."⁹³

Another explanation for the "uncircumcised" sons, is that most of the older generation simply neglected to circumcise their sons—out of forgetfulness, discouragement, or for some other reason.

"God's people must be *prepared* before they can be trusted with victory."⁹⁴

⁹¹Carl Armerding, *Conquest and Victory*, p. 62.

⁹²Butler, p. 58.

⁹³Keil and Delitzsch, p. 55.

⁹⁴Wiersbe, p. 35.

"In their weakness they were made strong; and through faith and patience they inherited the promises (Heb. 6:12)."⁹⁵

Why did God wait to command the circumcision of the new generation until *now*, rather than on the plains of Moab? Perhaps He did so because He wanted to bring the people into the land before enforcing this aspect of the Law. This is consistent with God's dealings with humankind. He first gives and then asks (cf. Rom. 12:1).

"There is a sense in which all believers have been circumcised in Christ; but there is another sense in which it is needful for them to pass one after another through the circumcision of Christ which is not made with hands, and which consists in the putting off of the body of the flesh."⁹⁶

"Had Joshua acted on the principles common to all other generals, when invading an enemy's country, he would either have prosecuted his advantages instantly, while his enemies were filled with terror, and crushed them before they had time to prepare for their defence [*sic*]; or he would have fortified his own camp to prevent surprise, and to be in constant readiness for any emergency that might arise. But instead of adopting any military plans whatever, the very day after he had invaded the country, without waiting to know what effect the invasion would have, he appoints nearly every male in the congregation to be circumcised! Thus by one act disabling the greater part of his whole army from even standing in their own defence [*sic*]! What but a principle of the most triumphant faith could have brought them to submit to such an injunction as this?"⁹⁷

The "reproach of Egypt" (v. 9) was the charge that originated with the Egyptians, that Yahweh had led the Israelites out of Egypt only to destroy them in the wilderness (cf. Exod. 32:12; Num. 14:13-16; Deut. 9:28). Now that He had brought them into the land He had promised them, He had invalidated or "rolled away" this criticism. Gilgal sounds like the Hebrew word translated "rolling" (*galal*) and means "circle." Another view is that the "reproach of Egypt" refers to the disgrace the Israelites experienced in Egyptian slavery. When the Israelites obeyed God by circumcising their young men, the Lord's deliverance of them reached its climax.⁹⁸

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 36.

⁹⁶Meyer, p. 53.

⁹⁷Bush, p. 56.

⁹⁸Butler, p. 59.

The Israelites apparently regarded the rolling away of the foreskins in the circumcision operation as having a double symbolic meaning: It represented God's removal of their reproach, as well as their personal renunciation of the flesh (cf. Gen. 17).

"Flint knives [cf. Exod. 4:25] are sharpened by chipping away at the edge of the stone, so that clean, sterile stone is exposed, since bacteria and viruses cannot grow in rock. Circumcision was thus performed with an instrument possessing comparable sterility to today's surgical scalpels. In view of the likelihood of infection following this operation with a contaminated instrument, use of the flint knife was enormously beneficial and therefore commanded by the Ultimate Healer (or in this case the preventer)."⁹⁹

God specified knives of "flint," even though this was the Late Bronze Age (1550–1200 B.C.), and bronze implements were common.

5:10-12 The Law prescribed that only members of the covenant community could eat the Passover. It was a memorial to God's redemption of Israel out of Egyptian slavery in the Exodus. It symbolized God's deliverance of His people from the tyranny of sin (cf. Exod. 12:43-51).

". . . let it ever be borne in mind that as no uncircumcised person was permitted to partake of the Passover, so none who are living in willful sin can feed on the flesh and blood which were given for the life of the world. There must be a Gilgal before there can be a Passover in the deepest and fullest sense."¹⁰⁰

In the Feast of Unleavened Bread that followed the Passover, the people were able to use "the grain (produce) of the land" to make bread (v. 11). God now provided for His people's need for daily bread by giving them the produce (grain and fruit crops) from "the yield of the land," rather than "manna," which now ceased (cf. Exod. 16:35).

"God does not wish that there should be those intervals of apparent desertion and the failure of supplies of which so many complain. . . . In the blessings of our outward life he does sometimes humble us, and suffer us to hunger. The brook Cherith dries before he sends us to Zarephath. But as to the inward life, he gives without stint."¹⁰¹

⁹⁹Jay D. Fawver and R. Larry Overstreet, "Moses and Preventive Medicine," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:587 (July-September):277.

¹⁰⁰Meyer, p. 59.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 61.

"We are prone to look upon our common mercies as *matters of course*, and God sometimes withdraws them to teach us our dependence more effectually."¹⁰²

Sometimes obeying God makes us vulnerable to the attacks of our spiritual enemies. Nevertheless, God will protect those who trust and obey Him in these situations.

"Who is there that does not cry, 'The old is better'? The old furniture for the room; the old house where we spent so many happy days; the old familiar routine of life; the old ways of doing things. It is hard to part with them. But they have ceased to furnish the discipline we need; and we must leave them for the untried and unknown, where we obtain a new insight into the ways of God, and become workers together with him."¹⁰³

C. POSSESSION OF THE LAND 5:13—12:24

Before Israel entered the land of Canaan, God had been preparing for His people to take possession of it by sovereignly directing the political affairs of Egypt. Egypt had maintained control over Canaan for many years. However, shortly before and during the ascension of Pharaoh Amenhotep II (1417—1379 B.C.) to the throne, Egyptian interest in Canaanite affairs began to decline. Consequently, some of the Canaanite kings asserted their independence from Egyptian control, and began to increase their influence, and to dominate their neighbors. In addition, foreigners besides the Israelites invaded portions of Canaan. Some of the victims of oppression wrote letters to Pharaoh asking for Egyptian assistance. They sent these letters to Amarna, the capital of Egypt at this time, and they are known today as the "Amarna Letters." They wrote these documents in *cuneiform* script. Archaeologists discovered about 350 of them at Amarna in A.D. 1887. The Amarna Letters provide much valuable information on the political and military climate in Canaan during the period of Israel's conquests.¹⁰⁴

"While Akhenaten [Amenhotep III, 1379–1361 B.C., the son and successor of Amenhotep II] spent his life preoccupied with religious reform, Egyptian prestige in Asia sank to a low ebb. As the Amarna Letters abundantly show, no effort was made by the court to answer the frantic appeals for help made by some princes who still professed loyalty to Egypt. The most common complaint in these letters is that unless Egypt would send troops urgently the land would fall into the hands of the Khapiru. Some historians are inclined to see in these Khapiru the Hebrews of the Bible who at this time were overrunning Palestine."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰²Bush, p. 60.

¹⁰³Meyer, p. 62.

¹⁰⁴See Charles Pfeiffer, *Tell El Amarna and the Bible*; Finegan, pp. 108-13; and Davis and Whitcomb, pp. 18-21.

¹⁰⁵Siegfried Schwantes, *A Short History of the Ancient Near East*, p. 90. See also Nadav Na'aman, "Habiru and Hebrews: The Transfer of a Social Term to the Literary Sphere," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 45:4 (October 1986):271-88; and Douglas Waterhouse, "Who Are the Habiru of the Amarna Letters?" *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 12:1 (Spring 2001):31-42.

When the Israelites began their conquest, the Canaanite city-states did not have the protection of Egypt, or of any other strong world power, that they had enjoyed in the past.

1. The conquest of Jericho 5:13—6:27

5:13-15 "Despite Joshua's long military experience he had never led an attack on a fortified city that was prepared for a long siege. In fact, of all the walled cities in Palestine, Jericho was probably the most invincible. There was also the question of armaments. Israel's army had no siege engines, no battering rams, no catapults, and no moving towers. Their only weapons were slings, arrows, and spears—which were like straws against the walls of Jericho."¹⁰⁶

As Joshua contemplated attacking Jericho, the *Angel of the LORD* appeared to him and assured him of victory.¹⁰⁷

"The Canaanite spectre [*sic*] had hatched in Noah's tent (Gen. 9:20-27), had evolved for generations, and now in Joshua's day would be tolerated by God no longer [cf. Gen. 15:16]."¹⁰⁸

Evidently Joshua was reconnoitering near Jericho, which was only about two miles from Gilgal. He was planning his strategy when he met the Man ("a man") who identified Himself as "the [C]aptain (Prince) of the LORD's host" (i.e., the commander of God's angelic army; cf. 1 Kings 22:19; 2 Kings 6:8-17; Ps. 148:2; Matt. 26:53; Heb. 1:14). It is obvious that Joshua perceived this "Man" as a mighty warrior, standing before him "with [His] sword drawn in [H]is hand"—ready for battle (cf. Num. 22:23; 1 Chron. 21:16)! As soon as the Stranger identified Himself, Joshua bowed before Him acknowledging His superiority.

"The stranger's response put everything in proper perspective. God is sovereign. It is never a question whether God is on our side but whether we are on God's side. . . . The purpose of this encounter was not to impart commands but to inspire Joshua with humility and reverence and to instill in him the confidence that God was with him and was in control (cf. 1:9)."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶Campbell, "Joshua," p. 339.

¹⁰⁷Maps 54 (p. 43), 56 (p. 44), 58 (p. 45), and 62 (p. 47) in *The Macmillan Bible Atlas* illustrate the battles of Jericho and Ai, Gibeon, Southern Canaan, and Northern Canaan respectively.

¹⁰⁸Constable, p. 105.

¹⁰⁹Madvig, p. 276.

The fall of Jericho, and the subsequent defeat of the Canaanite tribes, was a result of God's celestial hosts, His angelic army, not the Israelites. It was God's unseen warriors who brought down the walls of Jericho, not the shouts of the Israelites. God used the Israelites in these battles, but the victory was supernatural, not natural.

The command to "remove" his "sandals" (v. 15) would have convinced Joshua that this was the same Person—*the LORD God Himself*—who had appeared to Moses at the burning bush (Exod. 3:5). Where God was, there was holiness, and where holiness was, there was a need for cleanness.

"Cleanness, rather than cleverness, is the prime condition of successful service."¹¹⁰

"As Moses went to investigate the bush (Exod 3:3), so Joshua goes to investigate the mysterious figure confronting him (5:13b)."¹¹¹

"The strange confrontation of 5:13-15 resembles that between Jacob and the man of God at Peniel (Gn. 32:22-32) and that between Moses and the burning bush (Ex. 3:1—4:17). In each case, the human protagonist encounters a divine messenger before facing a life-and-death conflict . . ."¹¹²

One could also cite God's visit to Abraham at the Oaks of Mamre (Gen. 18), and Jesus' self-revelation to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), though these were not life threatening encounters. Joshua would hardly have submitted *as he did*, if he did not believe that this Man truly was the "Angel of the LORD" (cf. Exod. 3:5; Num. 22:31)!

"The scene thus pictures Joshua as the totally obedient servant doing precisely what the divine messenger requires."¹¹³

God not only instructed Joshua concerning what he should do in the battle ahead, but this Theophany assured Joshua that Yahweh would also personally lead His people in battle. We need not conclude, however, that this divine Leader continued to be visible after this. There is no reference to Him in the record of the battle that follows. His appearance on this occasion simply impressed Joshua with the fact that God would be leading Israel.

¹¹⁰Meyer, p. 73.

¹¹¹Butler, p. 57.

¹¹²Hess, p. 126.

¹¹³Butler, p. 61.

"The whole sequence—circumcision, Passover, and theophany—emphatically declared that the Israel of conquest was the Israel of exodus. The God who had saved his people out of Egypt would now save them in Canaan."¹¹⁴

"The conquest of Canaan is too often treated as an enterprise of the Israelites, carried out with great cruelties, for which they claimed divine sanction. The Old Testament presents the matter in an entirely different light. The war is a Divine enterprise, in which human instruments are employed, but so as to be entirely subordinate to the Divine will."¹¹⁵

6:1-5 The parenthetic comment about Jericho that opens this chapter ("tightly shut"; v. 1) emphasizes the fact that the city had strong fortifications.

As in the previous section, the writer recorded the command of God *first* (vv. 2-5; cf. Ps. 108:12-13), and then Joshua's execution of the command (vv. 6-21; cf. 3:7-8; 4:1-3, 15-16).

"But they [the Israelites] had to learn that the land was a gift, to be received by faith, not won by effort [vv. 2, 16]."¹¹⁶

Unlike Moses, who, at the burning bush, argued at length with the LORD about His plan (Exod. 3:11—4:17), Joshua obeyed without question (vv. 6-8).

"Believing a promise is like accepting a check, but reckoning is like endorsing the check and cashing it."¹¹⁷

6:6-14 The terms "LORD" and "ark" occur interchangeably here (v. 8), yet they were different and distinct from each other. The LORD was *over* the ark (above the mercy seat, and between the cherubim), but the ark itself only represented the LORD's presence.

Evidently the whole Israelite nation did not march around the walls of Jericho. Only "warriors" and "priests" circled the city (vv. 3, 4, 6, 9, et al.). The "people" referred to in the context (v. 7, 16, et al.) were these two types of people, not all the Israelites. And probably only *representatives* of the tribal armies participated in this march, rather than *all* the soldiers of Israel. The line of marching order was as follows: soldiers, priests, the ark, and more soldiers (vv. 6-9, 13).

¹¹⁴Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, p. 109.

¹¹⁵Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, p. 72.

¹¹⁶Meyer, p. 75.

¹¹⁷Wiersbe, p. 43.

Jericho was not a large city. Archaeological excavations have revealed that its walls enclosed only about eight and one-half acres.

The "trumpets" the priests blew (vv. 4, 9, et al.) were not the long silver trumpets normally used for announcing marches and calls to battle, but "rams' horns" (*shophars*). The blowing of trumpets in Israel reminded the people of God's miraculous activity for them, in providing their needs and fighting their enemies. The priests also used them to call the people to follow God, who had led the way ahead of them, with the cloudy pillar, in the wilderness. Both functions were applicable on this occasion. The trumpet blasts signaled judgment to the Canaanites, but victory to the Israelites (cf. 1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 4:13-17).

"The first time that we read of a trumpet-blast is at Sinai, where the Lord announced His descent upon the mount to the people assembled at the foot to receive Him, not only by other fearful phenomena, but also by a loud and long-continued trumpet-blast (Ex. xix. 16, 19, xx. 14 (18)). After this we find the blowing of trumpets prescribed as part of the Israelitish worship in connection with the observance of the seventh new moon's day (Lev. xxiii. 24), and at the proclamation of the great year of jubilee (Lev. xxv. 9). Just as the trumpet-blast heard by the people when the covenant was made at Sinai was as it were a herald's call, announcing to the tribes of Israel the arrival of the Lord their God to complete His covenant and establish His kingdom upon earth; so the blowing of trumpets in connection with the round of feasts was intended partly to bring the people into remembrance before the Lord year by year at the commencement of the sabbatical month, that He might come to them and grant them the Sabbath rest of His kingdom, and partly at the end of every seven times seven years to announce on the great day of atonement the coming of the great year of grace and freedom, which was to bring to the people of God deliverance from bondage, return to their own possessions, and deliverance from the bitter labours of this earth, and to give them a foretaste of the blessed and glorious liberty to which the children of God would attain at the return of the Lord to perfect His kingdom (vid. Pentateuch, vol. ii, p. 466-7). But when the Lord comes to found, to build up, and to perfect His kingdom upon earth, He also comes to overthrow and destroy the worldly power which opposes His kingdom. The revelation of the grace and mercy of God to His children, goes ever side by side with the revelation of justice and judgment towards the ungodly who are His foes. If therefore the blast of trumpets was the signal to the

congregation of Israel of the gracious arrival of the Lord its God to enter into fellowship with it, no less did it proclaim the advent of judgment to an ungodly world."¹¹⁸

Josephus wrote that the priests carried the ark around Jericho, for the first march around, on the *first* day of the Feast of Passover.¹¹⁹ But the text does not say that.

6:15-21 The warriors and priests were to remain *silent* as they circled the city each time, except on the very last circling—the seventh time around on the seventh day. God evidently used this strategy to impress on the people of Jericho, as well as the Israelites, that the deliverance was not by human might or power. It was by the *Spirit of the LORD* ("the LORD shall give you the city"; cf. Zech. 4:6).

"Thus the destruction was not due to lust for blood."¹²⁰

The LORD commanded the final "shout"—to be raised on the last, seventh, circling around Jericho on the seventh day—to announce His destruction of the wall. It was a shout of victory and joy for the Israelites.

"To emphasize the divine intervention, no secondary causes for the collapse of the wall are mentioned. It would be no less a miracle were we to find that God used an earthquake to bring the walls down."¹²¹

The writer did not explain the reasons for Israel circling Jericho "once" a day for "six days," and then "seven times" the seventh day. This strategy did, however, give the king of Jericho an opportunity to surrender. The uniqueness of this approach undoubtedly impressed everyone with the supernatural character of the victory. It involved almost incredible faith for the Israelites (Heb. 11:30). There was probably also some significance to the number "seven." This may have impressed the Israelites further that the victory was a complete work of God, following the pattern of the "seven days" of creation.

"The emphasis on the number seven (fourteen times in this chapter [cf. Exod. 24:16; 2 Kings 3:9; Job 2:11-13; Ezek. 3:15]), the use of ceremonial trumpets (made from ram's horns), the presence of priests, and the prominence of the ark all indicate that the conquest of Jericho was more than a military campaign; it was a religious event. Israel must always remember that the land was God's gift to them."¹²²

¹¹⁸Keil and Delitzsch, pp. 69-70.

¹¹⁹Josephus, 5:1:5.

¹²⁰Rea, p. 213.

¹²¹Madvig, p. 281.

¹²²Ibid., p. 278.

"The significance of this repeated marching round the town culminates unquestionably in the ark of the covenant and the trumpet-blast of the priests who went before the ark. In the account before us the ark is constantly called the ark of the Lord, to show that the Lord, who was enthroned upon the cherubim of the ark, was going round the hostile town in the midst of His people; whilst in ver. 8 Jehovah himself is mentioned in the place of the ark of Jehovah."¹²³

Excavations at Jericho by John Garstang, between 1930 and 1936, and more recently by Kathleen Kenyon, between 1952 and 1958, have confirmed the collapse of the wall *under itself* as recorded.¹²⁴ They also reveal that the invaders burned the city (v. 24), though there was some disagreement between Garstang and Kenyon concerning when this took place. Garstang held that the collapse of the wall and the burning of the city took place at approximately the same time, as the text records. However, Kenyon believed the city burned at a much earlier date, and fell at a much later date.¹²⁵ After discussing the views of Garstang and Kenyon, Bruce Waltke concluded as follows:

"Although meager, yet the textual and the archaeological evidence regarding Jericho in Late Bronze IIA and B [1400–1200 B.C.] remarkably coincide, and once again the archaeological evidence suggests a conquest during the first quarter of the fourteenth century. Even more conclusive, however, is the evidence that the city was not occupied during the mid-thirteenth century B.C., thereby precluding the option of the commonly accepted late date for the Exodus [ca. 1280 B.C.]."¹²⁶

"On the basis of the scarabs and pottery found in the cemetery associated with City IV in Jericho, it is impossible to date the fall of that city subsequent to 1400 B.C., despite all of the negative findings of Kathleen Kenyon (as we have previously shown). On the other hand, there are absolutely insurmountable objections to the Late Date Theory [ca. 1280 B.C.] on the basis of archaeological discovery."¹²⁷

¹²³Keil and Delitzsch, p. 69.

¹²⁴See Finegan, pp. 140-42, 156-59; Rea, p. 213.

¹²⁵See Kathleen Kenyon, *The Bible and Recent Archaeology*, pp. 10, 36-38.

¹²⁶Bruce K. Waltke, "Palestinian Artifactual Evidence Supporting the Early Date of the Exodus," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129:513 (January-March 1972):42. See also Wood, pp. 44-59.

¹²⁷Gleason L. Archer, "Old Testament History and Recent Archaeology From Moses to David," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127:506 (April-June 1970):108. See also Leon Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, pp. 94-99, for a good discussion of the archaeology of Old Testament Jericho.

There are some things about Jericho that archaeology has not revealed:

"Jericho is a classic example of incompleteness in the archaeological record caused by the depredations of man and nature combined where—as at Dibon—the literary record (here, the Old Testament) retains phases of history lost to the excavator."¹²⁸

"Archaeological research thus leaves confusion and unanswered questions for the present generation. This does not lead us to abandon archaeological research. It reminds us of the great difficulties which stand in our way when we seek to utilize discoveries for historical reconstruction. Archaeology can rarely name sites. Seldom, if ever, can it determine precisely who destroyed a site. It often cannot tell who occupied a site; it can place only relative dates on sites. Only rarely can it excavate an entire site and secure all the evidence."¹²⁹

". . . modern archeology may be said to have had its beginning in 1798, when nearly one hundred French scholars and artists accompanied Napoleon on his invasion of Egypt. They gazed with wonder upon the impressive monuments of that ancient land, wrote out systematic descriptions, copied texts and prepared watercolor illustrations."¹³⁰

In general, archaeologists and historians have approached the relationship between archaeological and biblical evidence in three ways: First, some view archaeology as corroborating the Bible. Second, others see archaeology as providing a context for the Bible. Third, still others believe that archaeology tells its own story.¹³¹ I believe it does all three, though for me the clear statements of Scripture are more reliable than the claims of archaeologists, when these conflict.

¹²⁸Kenneth Kitchen, *The Bible In Its World*, p. 89. See also Michael A. Grisanti, "Recent Archaeological Discoveries That Lend Credence to the Historicity of the Scriptures," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56:3 (September 2013):475-97.

¹²⁹Butler, p. xxxviii. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 32-33. On the importance of regarding archaeological conclusions as tentative, see Eugene H. Merrill, "Palestinian Archaeology and the Date of the Conquest: Do Tells Tell Tales?" *Grace Theological Journal* 3:1 (Summer 1982):107-121; *Idem*, "Old Testament Archaeology: Its Promises and Pitfalls," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 13:39 (August 2009):5-19; Larry G. Herr, "What Archaeology Can and Cannot Do," *Ministry* 56:2 (February 1983):28-29; and Edwin M. Yamauchi, "The Proofs, Problems and Promises of Biblical Archaeology," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 36:3 (September 1984):129-38.

¹³⁰Finegan, p. 4.

¹³¹See Fredric Brandfon, "Digging a Hole and Telling a Tale," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 38:1 (January/February 2012):26, 71.

"It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference."¹³²

"Though archaeological research goes back over a century [from the 1940s] in Palestine and Syria, it is only since 1920 that our material has become sufficiently extensive and clearly enough interpreted to be of really decisive value."¹³³

"There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition. Divergences from basic historical fact may nearly all be explained as due to the nature of oral tradition, to the vicissitudes of written transmission and to honest, but erroneous combinations on the part of Israelite and Jewish scholars. These divergences seldom result in serious modifications of the historical picture."¹³⁴

Some Christians in recent years have taken to "prayer walking," in which they pray as they walk around a town, asking God to save the residents. While modeled after the battle of Jericho, there are some significant differences. The Israelites marched around Jericho in response to a God-given directive to do so. Christians have no such command. In fact, we have been told to do something quite different: to proclaim the gospel to every creature, as well as to pray for their salvation. God called the Israelites to announce *bad* news, and to *destroy* Jericho, but He has called Christians to announce *good* news, and to seek and to *save* the lost.

Whereas there is nothing wrong *per se* with walking around a town and praying for it—when this costs thousands of dollars, in some cases, and evangelism is not done—one wonders about the prudence of such an undertaking! Certainly we can and should pray for the lost, but there is no indication in Scripture that geographical proximity renders prayers more effective, though it may aid concentration in prayer. It might be better to stay home and pray, if we do not evangelize, and to spend our money equipping someone else to evangelize. Better still, go and do both: pray and evangelize.

6:22-25

God had commanded the Israelites to consecrate all the spoils of this battle to Him ("all that is in [Jericho] belongs to the LORD," v. 17), since He had given Jericho into their hands as the "firstfruits" of the land. They were to give Him the firstfruits of the conquest. The firstfruits always belonged to the Lord in Israel. They were to give Him the firstfruits, not the leftovers. So should Christians.

¹³²Nelson Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert*, p. 31.

¹³³Albright, p. 37.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 176.

"Rahab," her relatives, and her possessions were exceptions, and were "spared," because she had aided the spies. The Israelites were to burn cities under the "ban" (Heb. *herem*, v. 17; cf. Deut. 20:16-18), and to kill their inhabitants, even including all the animals (Lev. 27:29). The only objects they were to spare were metals: "gold," "silver," and "articles of brass (bronze) and iron." These they were to place in the "treasury" of the tabernacle ("house of the LORD"; v. 19; Num. 31:54).

The Israelites *completely destroyed* only three Canaanite cities west of the Jordan along with their entire populations: Jericho, Ai, and Hazor (lit. "Enclosure"). They "captured" many others, and slew only *some* of their inhabitants.¹³⁵ Earlier they had devoted Hormah (Num. 21:3), Heshbon (Deut. 3:1-2), and Og's towns (Deut. 3:3) to complete destruction.

"Joshua is perhaps best known as a book of war. Israel was at war with the Canaanites, but behind these human soldiers God was waging war against sin. Earlier in Israel's history God was compared to a warrior (Ex. 14:14; 15:3; Deut. 1:30, 3:22; 20:4). But now Israel experienced His leadership in war as never before. God is constantly at war with sin because it is an affront to His holiness and because it destroys people whom He loves and desires to bless (cf. Rom. 6:23)."¹³⁶

6:26-27 The "curse" on whoever attempted to rebuild Jericho (v. 26), would have discouraged anyone from *fortifying again* this city, that was a symbol of military power. God wanted His people to trust in Him for their security, and not to rely on physical defenses primarily (cf. 11:6). We could interpret building the city as building the "fortifications" of the city, rather than as building houses on the site. The Israelites may have rebuilt and inhabited Jericho again during the period of the judges (18:21; Judg. 1:16; 3:13; 2 Sam. 10:5), but they might not have fortified it until much later. God executed Joshua's curse on Hiel when he rebuilt Jericho's fortifications during the reign of King Ahab of Israel (1 Kings 16:34). Another explanation could be that it was Canaanites first who rebuilt Jericho, but Hiel was the *first Israelite* to do so.

The miraculous victory over Jericho brought great honor to Joshua as Israel's leader ("his fame was in all the land," v. 27).

¹³⁵Merrill, *Kingdom of . . .*, p. 110. A major book on the subject of Israel's complete annihilation of the Canaanites is Peter Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament*. See also J. Andrew Dearman, "The Problem of War in the Old Testament: War, Peace, and Justice," *Austin Seminary Bulletin* (October 1983):5-14; and Ronald Goetz, "Joshua, Calvin, and Genocide," *Theology Today* 32 (October 1975):263-74. For insight into the depraved lifestyle of the Canaanites, see Charles Pfeiffer, *Ras Shamra and the Bible*; Peter Craigie, *Ugarit and the Old Testament*; and idem, "The Tablets From Ugarit and Their Importance for Biblical Studies," *Biblical Archaeology Review* (September-October 1983):62-72.

¹³⁶Constable, pp. 104-5.

"Nothing can more raise a man's reputation, nor make him appear more truly great, than to have the evidences of God's presence with him."¹³⁷

"In a letter to his missionary friend Rev. Daniel Edwards, the saintly Scottish preacher Robert Murray McCheyne wrote: 'Remember you are God's sword—His instrument—I trust a chosen vessel unto Him to bear His name. In great measure, according to the purity and perfections of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God.'"¹³⁸

Keil and Delitzsch explained the reason for the miraculous defeat of Jericho as follows:

". . . Jericho was not only the first, but the strongest town of Canaan, and as such was the key to the conquest of the whole land, the possession of which would open the way to the whole, and give the whole, as it were, into their hands. The Lord would give His people the first and strongest town of Canaan, as the first-fruits of the land, without any effort on their part, as a sign that He was about to give them the whole land for a possession, according to His promise; in order that they might not regard the conquest of it as their own work, or the fruit of their own exertions, and look upon the land as a well-merited possession which they could do as they pleased with, but that they might ever use it as a gracious gift from the Lord, which he had merely conferred upon them as a trust, and which He could take away again, whenever they might fall from Him, and render themselves unworthy of His grace. This design on the part of God would of necessity become very obvious in the case of so strongly fortified a town as Jericho, whose walls would appear impregnable to a people that had grown up in the desert and was so utterly without experience in the art of besieging or storming fortified places, and in fact would necessarily remain impregnable, at all events for a long time, without the interposition of God."¹³⁹

All the aspects of the battle at Jericho strengthened Israel's faith in Yahweh. God's people learned here, by personal experience, His strength and His ability to overcome all their obstacles. Now they were acting in faith, obeying His Word and trusting in the outcome He had promised. The day that Jericho fell, Israel reached a "high water mark" in her spiritual history. We should learn the same lessons from this record, as well as from the supernatural victories God has given each of us. Israel also became a *nation among nations*, in the ancient Near East, with this victory.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷Matthew Henry, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, p. 34.

¹³⁸Wiersbe, p. 41. His quotation is from Andrew A. Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of Robert Murray McCheyne*, p. 282.

¹³⁹Keil and Delitzsch, p. 68.

¹⁴⁰See Eugene H. Merrill, "The Late Bronze/Early Iron Age Transition and the Emergence of Israel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:606 (April-June 1995):145-62.; and idem, "The Conquest of Jericho: A Narrative Paradigm for Theocratic Policy?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169:675 (July-September 2012):304-16.

2. Defeat at Ai ch. 7

At Jericho, Israel learned God's strength. At Ai, she learned her own weakness. She could only conquer her enemies as she remained faithful to God's covenant.

"We are never in greater danger than right after we have won a great victory."¹⁴¹

"The pinching of the [east-west] ridge route by Ai . . . makes it a natural *first line of defense* for the Hill Country around Bethel. Therefore, tactically speaking, the strategic importance of the region and routes around Bethel . . . and Bethel's natural eastern approach from Jericho via Ai explain Joshua's choice of this region and this site as his first objective in the Hill Country. This basic fact cannot be ignored in any discussion of the identification of the location of Ai.

"In the Bible the site of Ai (*HaAi* in Hebrew means *the ruin* or *the heap of stones*) is linked with Bethel. The most prominent ruin in the entire area east of the Bethel Plateau is called in Arabic *et-Tell* . . . at the junction of the two main natural routes from Jericho to the Hill Country. . . . The site of et-Tell has no equal in the region both in terms of strategic importance and in terms of surface debris indicating an ancient city.

"Excavations at et-Tell have revealed a large city from the Early Bronze Age [3150–2200 B.C.] in the millennium prior to Joshua's conquest. A small village later than Joshua's conquest (later than both the early and the late dates for the conquest) does not provide the answer to the question of the lack of remains at et-Tell. Therefore, although the setting of et-Tell fits perfectly the detailed geographical information in Joshua 8 and 9, an archaeological problem exists due to the lack of remains from the period of Joshua at the site."¹⁴²

One scholar argued for et-Tell being the Ai of Abraham's time, el-Maqatir being the Ai of Joshua's time, and still another close site being the Ai of Nehemiah's time (Ezra 2:28; Neh. 7:32). El-Maqatir is less than a mile west of et-Tell.¹⁴³

7:1 "But" very significantly introduces this chapter. Chapter 6 is a record of supernatural victory, but chapter 7 describes a great defeat.

¹⁴¹Jacobsen, p. 62. Cf. Meyer, p. 86.

¹⁴²Monson, pp. 168-69. Cf. Finegan, pp. 159-60; Rea, p. 214. For a review of excavations in search of Ai and the problem of the lack of archaeological evidence for Ai's existence at et-Tell in Joshua's day, see Ziony Zevit, "The Problem of Ai," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 11:2 (March-April 1985):58-69. See also Archer, "Old Testament . . .," p. 111.

¹⁴³Peter Briggs, "Testing the Factuality of the Conquest of Ai Narrative in the Book of Joshua," a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Colorado Springs, Colo., Nov. 15, 2001.

Even though "Achan" was the individual who *sinned*, and even though his sin was private, God regarded what he did as the action of the whole nation ("the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully"). This was the case, because he was a member of the *community of Israel*, and his actions affected the rest of the Israelites. The Hebrew word translated "unfaithfully" (*maal*) means "treacherously" or "secretly."

Achan had not simply taken some things that did not belong to him. This would have been bad in itself. He stole what was "dedicated to God," and he robbed the whole nation of its innocence before God. The Lord's blazing anger against Israel fell on Achan, and literally consumed him ("all Israel stoned them [Achan's family] with stones; and they burned them with fire"; v. 25; cf. Heb. 12:29).

7:2-5

The spies who reconnoitered Ai based their advice on the *numbers* of these particular Canaanites versus the Israelites ("for they are few").

"East of Ai . . . one route descends due east to the pass across Wadi Makkuk. This pass affords the last crossing before the wadi deepens into a major canyon and obstacle. From there on, the unified stream bed of the wadi cuts a twisted path through the uplifted limestone resulting in rocky scarps of up to 200 meters or 660 feet before continuing east through the rough chalk wilderness. The difference between this rugged region and the pass just west of it is very dramatic. It may reflect what the Biblical writer states in Joshua 7.5 when he says that the defenders of the Hill Country pursued the Israelites *as far as the broken/fractured area (shebarim), striking them down along the descent* [from the pass]. (If this first attack came from the route southeast of Ai, the word *shebarim* may point to the same type of broken terrain, but the *descent* would refer to the steep slope off the eastern side of the uplifted limestone where this route to Jericho turns due east.)"¹⁴⁴

The spies in Numbers 13 and 14 lacked faith in God, because they did not believe that the Israelites were strong enough to defeat their enemies. They failed to reckon on God's help. The spies in Joshua 7 lacked faith in God, because they believed the Israelites were strong enough *in themselves* to defeat their enemies. They disregarded their need for *God's help*. The fact that "the people's (Israelites') hearts melted" (v. 5; cf. 2:11), strongly hints that Israel may have been trusting in her own strength rather than in the Lord.

¹⁴⁴Monson, p. 168.

"It is strange indeed that the description which was originally used for the Canaanites about to be defeated now describes the heart of the Israelites . . ." ¹⁴⁵

"Many a Christian, in his first experience of victory over sin, makes the same mistake. He is likely to take pride in himself and somehow think that he has achieved victory. This attitude is disastrous. No matter how often we have overcome temptation, it is still true that in our flesh dwelleth no good thing. A victory we won yesterday does not insure us against defeat today. We must go on trusting the Lord moment by moment to win our battles for us." ¹⁴⁶

7:6-9 Even Joshua had lost the divine perspective temporarily—and his courage ("they will surround us and cut off our name"). His complaining lament sounds like Israel's murmuring in the wilderness (cf. Exod. 16:3; Num. 14:2-3; et al.).

"This attitude is all too typical of believers in every age. When they fail, they at once question God's faithfulness rather than their own loyalty and obedience. They are tempted to abandon faith in God just when they need it most." ¹⁴⁷

Joshua, however, also had a concern for the continuing honor of Yahweh ("And what will You do for Your great name?" v. 9; cf. Exod. 32:11-12; Num. 14:13; Deut. 9:28). Like Moses, Joshua desired above everything that God would receive glory. Unfortunately he did not yet possess the stability and objectivity, that characterized Moses' later years, because he had not yet walked with God as closely or as long as Moses had.

"Joshua had fallen on his face once before, when he confronted the divine messenger (5:14). That was in the humility of worship. This is in the humility of defeat and shame." ¹⁴⁸

7:10-15 God reminded Joshua that he should not look for the reason for Israel's defeat *in God*—but *in Israel!* Israel needed to repent; Joshua did not need to pray ("Why is it that you have fallen on your face?"). Prayer is no substitute for repentance when repentance is needed.

¹⁴⁵Davis and Whitcomb, p. 54.

¹⁴⁶Jacobsen, p. 64.

¹⁴⁷Ibid.

¹⁴⁸Butler, p. 84.

". . . if Joshua had only prostrated himself amid the shoutings of victory over Jericho, there would have been no need for him to prostrate himself amid the outcry of a panic-stricken host!"¹⁴⁹

"The first three clauses [in v. 11] describe the sin in its relation to God, as a grievous offense; the three following according to its true character, as a great, obstinate, and reckless crime."¹⁵⁰

"Never underestimate the amount of damage one person can do outside the will of God."¹⁵¹

Israel resorted to the *casting of lots* when no eyewitness could testify against a criminal (cf. 1 Sam. 14:41-42; Jonah 1:7; Prov. 18:18). Probably the high priest used the "Urim and Thummim" to identify Achan (cf. Num. 27:21).

The *burning* of a criminal, after his stoning, was one way of emphasizing the wickedness of his crime (Lev. 20:14; cf. Deut. 13:15-16). It was a "disgraceful thing" (v. 15) to steal something "under the ban" (devoted to God).

7:16-26

Even though Achan's sin carried a punishment that he could not decrease or postpone, Achan could at least reduce his guilt by confessing his sin. This he did in response to Joshua's paternal entreaty ("My son . . . give glory to the LORD . . . tell me now what you have done. Do not hide it from me"; v. 19). Confessing one's sin is one way to glorify God.

Achan's confession clearly revealed the process involved in yielding to temptation ("I saw . . . I coveted . . . and took"; v. 21). He first allowed the sight of something attractive to grow into covetousness. Then he took the step from covert mental sin to overt physical sin. Finally he sought to cover up his action ("Behold, they are concealed in the earth"), rather than confessing it. The same progression appears in the story of the Fall, and in the story of David's sin with Bathsheba (Gen. 3:6-7, 10; 2 Sam. 11:2-4, 8). One shekel weighed about four ounces, thus "50 shekels of silver" was about *fifty pounds*, and the "gold bar" was *12 and a half pounds*. Josephus wrote that the mantle from Shinar that Achan took was "a royal garment woven entirely of gold."¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹Meyer, p. 89.

¹⁵⁰Keil and Delitzsch, p. 79.

¹⁵¹Wiersbe, p. 49.

¹⁵²Josephus, 5:1:10.

"When he [Achan] said 'I have sinned,' he joined the ranks of seven other men in Scripture who made the same confession, some more than once, and some without sincerity: Pharaoh (Ex. 9:27; 10:16), Balaam (Num. 22:34), King Saul (1 Sam. 15:24, 30; 26:21), David (2 Sam. 12:13; 24:10, 17; Ps. 51:4), Shimei (2 Sam. 19:20), Judas (Matt. 27:4), and the prodigal son (Luke 15:18, 21)."¹⁵³

The Israelites executed Achan's children with him (his "sons" and "daughters"; v. 24), evidently because they had participated in his sin (cf. Deut. 24:16; Prov. 15:27).¹⁵⁴ It would have been virtually impossible for Achan to hide the amount of spoil he took under his tent without his family's knowledge. The people also destroyed all of Achan's animals and possessions (cf. Deut. 13:16-17). Achan's sin was high-handed defiance against God (cf. Num. 15:30, 35).

"Achan, in stealing devoted objects, placed himself in the devoted status, i.e., under the doom of destruction. Whoever touches *herem* becomes *herem* and thus devoted to death (cf. I Kgs 20:42)."¹⁵⁵

The "great heap of stones" the people raised over Achan, his family, and his possessions (v. 26), memorialized this act of rebellion for the Israelites and their children (cf. 8:29; 2 Sam. 18:17). They named the valley in which the execution took place "Achor" (lit. "Troubling" or "Disaster"), as a further reminder (cf. Hos. 2:15; Isa. 65:10). Note the wordplay with Achan's name.

"Whilst they [the Israelites] learned from his mercies how greatly he was to be loved, they needed also to learn from his judgments how greatly he was to be feared."¹⁵⁶

Israel's defeat at Ai graphically illustrates the far-reaching impact of sin. The private sin of one or a few individuals can affect the welfare of many other people who do not personally commit that sin. Really there were three causes of Israel's defeat: (1) the Israelites were self-sufficient because Ai was small, (2) they failed to wait on God, and (3) they committed a trespass in the things devoted to the Lord.¹⁵⁷

Achan and his family were, to Israel at this time, what Ananias and Sapphira were to the early church (Acts 5). They were a strong warning of the consequences of sin among God's people. Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10), and Korah and his cohorts (Num. 16), were similar examples. The fact that God does not judge sin today, *exactly* as He did on these

¹⁵³Wiersbe, p. 53.

¹⁵⁴Woudstra, p. 130.

¹⁵⁵Rea, p. 214.

¹⁵⁶Bush, p. 85.

¹⁵⁷

occasions, does not mean He feels any less strongly about it. He mercifully withholds, delays, or sometimes cancels judgment in most instances. Nevertheless sin still produces the same destruction and death.

"God's first revenges are so much more fearful, because they must be exemplary."¹⁵⁸

God's punishment on Achan was not unfair. It is only by God's mercy that any sinner lives to old age. God can judge any sinner—at any time in his or her life—and yet be perfectly just. No sinner has any claim on God's grace. God is no man's debtor, and owes nobody an explanation for His judgments.

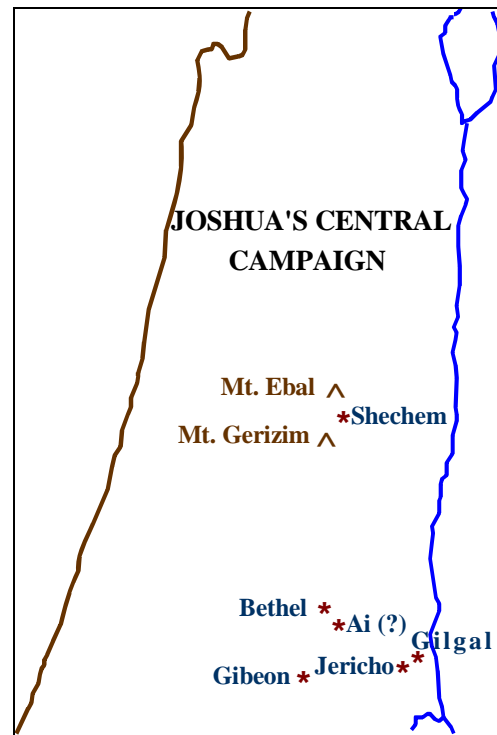
"As we read in ch. vii the story of Israel's first fight and first failure, we shall see that there were in the main, two causes of defeat: *self-confidence*, and *covetousness*; and these are still prime causes of failure in a Christian life."¹⁵⁹

Chapters 1—7 form a unit of text: the Jericho siege narrative. Rahab and Achan open and close this section, respectively, forming its "bookends." Rahab was a female Canaanite prostitute; Achan was an Israelite man. Rahab hid the spies under her roof; Achan hid stolen loot under his tent. Rahab, her house, and her family were saved; Achan, his tent, and his family were destroyed. The writer was teaching theology by the way he constructed his narrative.¹⁶⁰

3. Victory at Ai 8:1-29

When the people had dealt with the sin of Achan as God commanded, Israel was ready to engage the enemy again.

8:1-2 In view of Israel's recent defeat, God's encouraging words were necessary to strengthen Joshua's resolve (cf. 1:9). God promised to give victory, but He specified the strategy. This time the Israelites could keep the spoil themselves. "You shall take only" (v. 2) means, "Only (Except) you shall take." If Achan had only waited, he could have had all the spoil that he wanted.



¹⁵⁸J. Hall, *Contemplations on the Old and New Testaments*, p. 99.

¹⁵⁹W. Graham Scroggie, *The Land and Life of Rest*, p. 38.

¹⁶⁰J. Daniel Hays, "An Evangelical Approach to Old Testament Narrative Criticism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166:661 (January-March 2009):12.

"Henry . . . Ford defined a mistake as 'an opportunity to begin again, more intelligently.'"¹⁶¹

8:3-13 Out of the 40,000 Israelite soldiers, Joshua "chose 30,000" for this battle. Of these, he sent "5,000" to hide in ambush the night before the attack, west of the town of Ai. The remaining 25,000 (double the population of Ai, v. 25) approached Ai from the north. "Took" (v. 12) makes better sense if read "had taken."

8:14-23 Evidently all the fighting men from Bethel, Ai's neighbor, joined with all the soldiers of Ai, to repulse Israel's attack ("not a man was left in Ai or Bethel who had not gone out," v. 17). These two cities had apparently made a treaty for mutual defense.

"Since the Israelite ambush was stationed between Bethel and Ai, they [the men of Bethel] may have felt threatened by the Israelites. Or it may be that Ai was a small outpost for the larger city of Bethel (7:3) and an attack on Ai was understood to be an attack on Bethel. The text does not record Bethel's defeat, although its king is listed among those conquered by Joshua (12:16). It may be that in the defeat of Ai, Bethel was also defeated and no further reference was needed."¹⁶²

Stretching out his "javelin" (v. 18) was Joshua's prearranged signal to his men in ambush to attack. It also symbolized, like Moses' upraised staff, that victory came from the Lord (cf. Exod. 14:16; 17:8-12).

"Joshua's signaling weapon actually was his scimitar (*kidon*), the large blade more readily reflecting the gleaming sun to the thirty men hidden in ambush."¹⁶³

8:24-29 Joshua carefully obeyed all the Lord's directions, both those given here and previously in the Law. He killed "all the inhabitants" of the town, "utterly destroyed" and "burned" Ai (except for the "spoil"), and killed its king—whose body he also "hanged . . . on a tree until . . . sunset" (Num. 25:4; Deut. 21:22-23). Furthermore, he erected "a pile (great heap) of stones" as a monument, at the former gate of the city (cf. 7:26).

"The Hebrew word (*tel*) for *heap* is found only a few places in the Bible ([Josh.] 8:28; Deut. 13:16; 11:13; Jer. 30:18; 49:2), and in such place names in the Bible as Tel Melah and Tel Harsha (Ezra 2:59) or Tel Abib (Ezek. 3:15). The

¹⁶¹Wiersbe, p. 54.

¹⁶²*The Nelson . . .*, p. 367.

¹⁶³Rea, p. 215.

equivalent Arabic word *tell* is used today as part of the names of many sites in Israel."¹⁶⁴

This section, in contrast to the previous one, shows that God gives victory when His people acknowledge their dependence on Him—by trusting Him and obeying His Word.

"It is interesting to note again that this first victory in the Hill Country was in the region of Ai and Bethel, exactly where some of the most significant promises had been given to Abraham and Jacob hundreds of years earlier, (. . . Genesis 13 and 28:10-22). In addition to the strategic nature of the region, these earlier promises may have played a part in Joshua's decision to begin his campaign precisely here. Joshua's bold move toward this part of the Hill Country may have been just what was needed to unify the Canaanites in the Bethel region. Up to this point they appear to have been in disarray in the face of the Israelite threat (Joshua 5:1). What better place to make their stand than here at the entrance to the strategic region of Bethel and the Central Benjamin Plateau?"¹⁶⁵

One writer observed similarities between Joshua 7:1—8:29 and Deuteronomy 1:19—3:11; 9:7—10:11; Judges 10:6—11:33; and 20:1-48. He concluded that the biblical writer used similar motifs and terminology, in these passages, in order to impress on his readers, by repetition, three major lessons: First, Israel's occupation of the Promised Land was not a sure thing, but depended entirely on her obedience to God. Second, defeat in the land need not be final and irreversible. Third, to regain the land, the people had to deal with (administer justice to) the *guilty* (Law violators) in Israel, and they had to return to obeying the Lord.¹⁶⁶

4. Renewal of the covenant 8:30-35

Israel had now obtained a substantial enough foothold in the land, to journey north to Shechem ("Mount Ebal" and "Mount Gerizim"), in order to carry out God's instructions for the renewal of the covenant in the land (Deut. 27). Shechem stood about 30 miles north of Ai. It was a significant place for this ceremony, because it was there that God first told Abraham that He would give him the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:7). Also, Jacob had buried his idols there (Gen. 35:2). Moreover, Shechem had always been a busy site, because of its geographical location at a crossroads in northern Palestine.

"The story of the building of an altar on Mount Ebal and of the solemn reading of the blessings and curses of the covenant at that site is strategically important for understanding the message of the Book of Joshua. . . . In unmistakably clear symbolism the reader is told that the right of possessing the promised land is tied to the proclamation of, and

¹⁶⁴*The Nelson . . .*, p. 368.

¹⁶⁵Monson, p. 170.

¹⁶⁶Christopher Begg, "The Function of Josh. 7, 1-8, 29 in the Deuteronomistic History," *Biblica* 67:3 (1986):420-34.

subjection to, God's covenant claims upon his people (and upon the world)."¹⁶⁷

Mt. Ebal is the northern of the two mountains with an elevation of about 3,085 feet, and Mt. Gerizim is the southern at 2,890 feet. From the top of Mt. Ebal, the Israelites could see almost the entire Promised Land. The order of events the writer recorded here, varies slightly, from the order Moses gave in Deuteronomy. Probably the order here represents what actually took place. This ceremony established Yahweh as "the God of Israel" (v. 30)—in the sight of the Canaanites as well as the Israelites. It amounted to Israel's "Declaration of Dependence." The people had offered "burnt" and "peace offerings" previously on Mt. Sinai, when God first gave the Law to Israel. Offering these sacrifices again here, recalled the former incident, and shows that this ceremony constituted a covenant renewal.¹⁶⁸

"The method of plastering stones and then printing on them came originally from Egypt; thus, the letters were probably painted in red. So we can imagine large whitewashed monoliths with red Hebrew characters spelling out the Ten Commandments, and possibly the blessings and curses of the Law as well (cf. Deuteronomy 28). This structure was the *first* public display of the Law."¹⁶⁹

"This made it palpable even to strangers entering the land what God was worshipped in it, and all excuse for error was taken away."¹⁷⁰

"The religion of Israel at its best has always been a missionary religion."¹⁷¹

The extent of the passages from the Mosaic Law, that the people copied onto the stone monuments, is not clear from this passage. Deuteronomy 27 seems to imply just the Ten Commandments. Also, "the blessing and the curse" (v. 34) could be a synonym for "all the words of the law" (i.e., the Ten Commandments), rather than being a reference to the specific blessings and curses listed previously and recited here (Deut. 28). However, another possibility is that "the blessing and the curse" may refer to Deuteronomy 28. Some scholars even believe the Israelites inscribed the *whole* Book of Deuteronomy on a stone.¹⁷² This is possible, since the Behistun Inscription, also written on a stone monolith in Iran, is three times the length of Deuteronomy.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷Woudstra, p. 144.

¹⁶⁸See Adam Zertal, "Has Joshua's Altar Been Found on Mt. Ebal?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 11:1 (January-February 1985):26-42; Aharon Kempinski, "Joshua's Altar—An Iron Age I Watchtower," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 12:1 (January-February 1986):42, 44-49; Adam Zertal, "How Can Kempinski Be So Wrong!" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 12:1 (January-February 1986):43, 49-53; Hershel Shanks, "Two Early Israelite Cult Sites Now Questioned," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 14:1 (January-February 1988):48-52; and Milt Machlin, "Joshua and the Archaeologist," *Reader's Digest* 137:821 (September 1990):135-40.

¹⁶⁹Hughes, p. 101.

¹⁷⁰John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Joshua*, p. 133.

¹⁷¹Madvig, p. 294.

¹⁷²E.g., Merrill, "Joshua," p. 169.

¹⁷³Rea, p. 216.

This ceremony confronted all the Israelites—men, women, and children—with the demands of their covenant God, as they began this new phase of their national history. Obedient response would guarantee future rest, prosperity, and happiness in the land.

It is important for God's people to declare their allegiance to His revealed will, publicly, among the unbelievers with whom we live (cf. Act 1:8). This helps them understand why we live as we do, and it brings glory to God—when His people then proceed to live upright lives, and to demonstrate His supernatural power (cf. Matt. 5:16). A *wedding ring* similarly declares one's commitment to the bride's or groom's spouse, publicly, and each ring memorializes God's leading and provision. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are likewise memorials for Christians.

5. The treaty with the Gibeonites ch. 9

The residents of the town of Gibeon decided that if they could not defeat the Israelites, they would join them. This has been a strategy that enemies of believers have employed for centuries (cf. Num. 25:1-2).

9:1-2 "Israel" is the probable antecedent of "it" in verse 1 ("heard of it"), namely Israel's defeat of Jericho, Ai, and Bethel, rather than the renewal of the covenant at Shechem. Israel's success led several Canaanite kings to ally against God's people. While this alliance was taking shape, the Gibeonites initiated a different tactic. Until now in Joshua, Israel had chosen its military targets, but now others defined their military objectives.

"The following chapters introduce the transition from a victorious people of God whose occupation of the land could have been the relatively simple matter of defeating those already discouraged to an unending history of battle, bloodshed, and idolatry that would haunt Israel throughout its history. As in the opening chapters of Genesis, so also in the opening chapters of Israel's dwelling in the Promised Land, a single transgression has cosmic ramifications."¹⁷⁴

9:3-5 Gibeon stood seven miles south of Bethel. It was "one of the largest towns in the central part of Canaan,"¹⁷⁵ larger than Ai (10:2), and possibly the Hivite capital.¹⁷⁶ It later became a Levitical town (18:25; 21:17). The Israelites eventually pitched the tabernacle there, and it remained at that site until Solomon built his temple (1 Kings 3:4-5; 1 Chron. 16:39; 21:29). "Hivites" inhabited Gibeon at the time of the conquest (v. 7).

When the leaders of Gibeon learned of the crafty methods the Israelites had used at Jericho and Ai, they determined to use deception too.

¹⁷⁴Hess, p. 176.

¹⁷⁵Keil and Delitzsch, p. 95.

¹⁷⁶Bush, p. 99. Cf. Finegan, pp. 160-61.

9:6-15 God had not forbidden the Israelites from making peace treaties with non-Canaanite peoples (Deut. 20:11), but He had expressly commanded them not to make treaties with the native Canaanite tribes (Exod. 23:32; 34:12; Num. 33:55; Deut. 7:2).

The Gibeonites deceived the Israelites with their diffident spirit ("We are your servants"; v. 8), as well as with their "dry" and "crumbled" food and their "worn" and "torn" clothing (vv. 12-13). They pretended to fear Yahweh, too, the highest motive for allying with Israel (vv. 9-10), but their objective was to save their own lives.

On the surface, granting the Gibeonites' request seemed within the Mosaic Law. Consequently the Israelites "took some" of their food, possibly to inspect it at least (v. 14). If they ate it with them, this eating may have been part of a covenantal agreement. This custom was common in the ancient Near East (v. 15; cf. Gen. 31:54).¹⁷⁷ The Israelites sealed the treaty with a solemn promise to preserve the Gibeonites ("made a covenant with them, to let them live"; v. 15). The writer clearly identified the reason the Gibeonites were successful in deceiving Israel: the Israelites "did not ask for the counsel of the Lord" (v. 14; Num. 27:21; cf. James 4:2). Though they had learned that obedience was necessary for victory, at Jericho and Ai, they had not yet learned that they needed divine guidance *at every step* (cf. John 15:5).

"Ironically, of all people, Joshua failed to inquire of the Lord. Joshua had gone up the mountain of revelation with Moses (Exod 24:13-14); and in his preparation for leadership, he had been trained in the use of the Urim and Thummim for determining the will of God (Num 27:18-21). How easy it is even in the service of the Lord to take God's guidance and blessing for granted!"¹⁷⁸

"Similarly, many Christians have found themselves in difficult or disastrous circumstances because they rushed to a decision without properly consulting the Lord, His Scriptures, and His people for guidance."¹⁷⁹

"Before entering into any alliance—taking a partner in life, going into a business with another, yielding assent to any proposition which involves confederation with others—be sure to ask counsel at the mouth of the Lord. He will assuredly answer by an irresistible impulse—by the voice of a friend; by a circumstance strange and unexpected; by a

¹⁷⁷Livingston, p. 157.

¹⁷⁸Madvig, p. 297.

¹⁷⁹*The Nelson . . .*, p. 370.

passage of Scripture. He will choose his own messenger; but he will send a message."¹⁸⁰

". . . no proposed course of conduct can be so clear to a Christian as to excuse him from the duty of seeking direction from above."¹⁸¹

9:16-27 The leaders of Gibeon controlled four towns ("Gibeon and Chephirah and Beeroth and Kiriath-jearim"; v. 17). These towns acted jointly in many of their dealings, including making the treaty with Israel. The possession of these cities by the Israelites gave God's people a more secure foothold in central Canaan.

"Here the wilderness motif had been turned upside down, for in the wilderness the leaders were justified, while the congregation was guilty. Here the congregation is justified, while the leaders are at fault."¹⁸²

The Israelites considered their "oath" to the Gibeonites as binding, especially since it was a promise given in the name of Yahweh ("the LORD, the God of Israel"; v. 19).

"The 'oath' was made in the name of the Lord. Consequently fidelity was owed, not to the Gibeonites, but to the Lord. The form of the oath called on the Lord to punish the Israelites if they failed to keep their agreement (cf. vv. 18-20). This explains why Israel felt bound to the treaty even though it had been made under false pretenses (cf. Gen 27:35; Ps 15:4)."¹⁸³

Ancient Near Easterners regarded all treaties as sacred agreements.¹⁸⁴ If Israel had violated this oath, she would have brought great reproach on the nation and her God. Israel's leaders were wise not to break their promise.¹⁸⁵ Later in Israel's history, King Saul put some of the Gibeonites to death, in his misguided zeal, and God sent a famine on Israel as punishment (2 Sam. 21:1-2).

The reason God forbade His people from allowing the Canaanites to live, and subsequently become incorporated into Israel, was that they might lead the Israelites into idolatry. The leaders of Israel therefore *punished*

¹⁸⁰Meyer, p. 119.

¹⁸¹Bush, p. 105. Italics eliminated.

¹⁸²Butler, p. 104.

¹⁸³Madvig, p. 299.

¹⁸⁴Davis and Whitcomb, p. 63.

¹⁸⁵See F. Charles Fensham, "The Treaty Between Israel and the Gibeonites," *Biblical Archaeologist* 27:3 (1964):98-100.

the Gibeonites for their deception, in a way designed to minimize the possibility of their ever doing this: they made them servants ("slaves") in the tabernacle, "hewers of wood and drawers of water."

This plan undoubtedly reinstated the leaders in the good favor of the Israelites. Nevertheless this was not a wise move, because the LORD wanted only *authorized Israelites* (Levites) to assist in tabernacle worship. By bringing these foreigners into tabernacle service, the leaders of Israel violated the holiness of God (cf. Num. 3:10; Ezek. 44:7).

"*Servants* should be taken in the most pejorative sense here. As *woodcutters and water carriers* the Gibeonites will perform only menial services (see Deut. 29:11)."¹⁸⁶

"They are foreigners permitted to live, but their very presence is a living lesson for both Israel and for foreigners. Foreigners learn that they cannot trick their way into the people of Yahweh, even with pious confessions of faith. Israel learns the supreme danger which threatens its life and leadership when decisions are made without consulting Yahweh and when the Mosaic law [*sic*] is not followed."¹⁸⁷

"It is true that the natural consequences of our sin may have to run their course. The hand of the reclaimed drunkard will still tremble. The constitution of the prodigal will never be able to throw off the effects of the fever contracted from the swine-troughs. The Gibeonite will always, in this world at least, be tied to you. But these things shall not rule, but serve; shall not impede, but promote. They shall hew the wood and draw the water for the inner shrine of character, and for the promotion of the loftiest standard of Christian attainment [cf. Ps. 76:10]."¹⁸⁸

This action partially fulfilled Noah's prophecy concerning the Canaanites in Genesis 9:25. The Gibeonites received tasks in the service of the tabernacle where, hopefully, they would have had exposure to the best spiritual influences. The Gibeonites never led the Israelites into idolatry, as far as the text records, but their presence in the tabernacle displeased the Lord (Ezek. 44:7).

Some commentators regarded the Gibeonites as sincere *converts* to Yahweh, rather than as enemies of Israel, as the following quotation illustrates:

¹⁸⁶Woudstra, p. 164.

¹⁸⁷Butler, pp. 104-5.

¹⁸⁸Meyer, p. 121.

"So there really are exact parallels between Rahab the individual and the Gibeonites the corporate unit. Rahab (plus her family) was the only individual saved out of Jericho. The Gibeonites were the only people saved out of the land. Rahab believed, left Jericho and came among the people of God. The Gibeonites were the only people in the land who turned to God, and they flowed on through all the years of Jewish history."¹⁸⁹

Were the Gibeonites genuine converts to Yahweh, who were sympathetic with the Israelites' cause, or enemies who believed the best way to survive was to yield rather than resist? Most commentators have concluded that they were *enemies*, and that their craftiness (v. 4) extended even to their profession of the fear of Yahweh. There are no direct statements in Scripture that indicate that the Gibeonites were converts as Rahab was. Their motivation is simply not clear enough for us to make a dogmatic judgment, though I think the majority of interpreters is correct.¹⁹⁰

Unbelievers usually oppose believers as they seek to carry out God's purposes in the world. They sometimes resort to deception and become "attached" to the fellowship of God's people, but only for their own selfish advantages. Some of these advantages are: a good reputation, business contacts, or finding a spouse.

"This account,' as *O. v. Gerlach* says, 'is a warning to the Church of God of all ages against the cunning and dissimulation of the world, which often seeks for a peaceable recognition on the part of the kingdom of God, and even for a reception into it, whenever it may be its advantage to do so.'"¹⁹¹

If God's people make covenants with unbelievers, we may end up disobeying God, as Israel did (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14-18). We need to seek the will of God *before* we make these commitments. We should look for it in prayer (James 1:5; 4:2-3, 15) and in Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16-17; cf. Num. 27:21). We should also consult other godly people who understand God's ways, who can help us avoid overlooking important scriptural revelations that are pertinent (Prov. 11:14). If we do make an unwise commitment, we should make the best of the situation, if breaking the covenant would be contrary to God's will (e.g., marriage to an unbeliever, et al.).

6. Victory over the Amorite alliance at Gibeon 10:1-27

Israel's continuing success led her enemies to exert increasing opposition against the people of God. This chapter records the Canaanites' first aggressive action against the Israelites.

¹⁸⁹Schaeffer, p. 151. See pp. 148-151 for his defense of this view. See also Hess, p. 179.

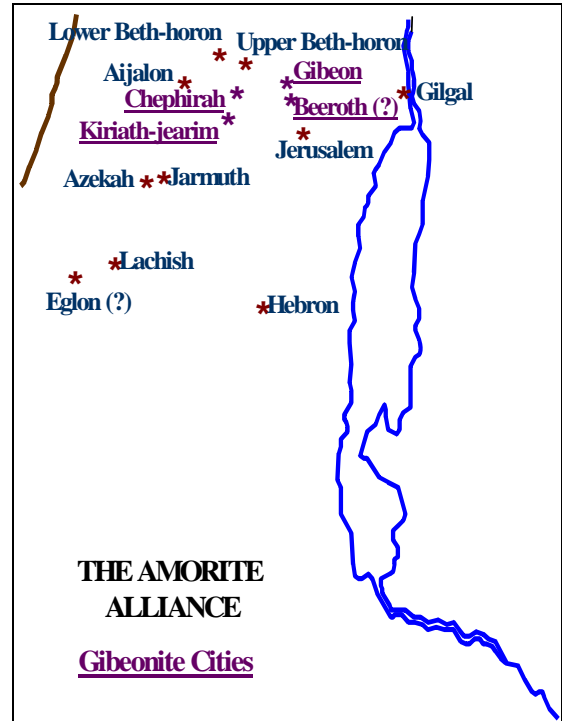
¹⁹⁰For some parallels between this chapter and others in Deuteronomy and Kings, see Peter J. Kearney, "The Role of the Gibeonites in the Deuteronomistic History," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 35:1 (1973):1-19.

¹⁹¹Keil and Delitzsch, p. 95.

10:1-5

The *Jebusites* lived in and around "Jebus," ancient "Salem" (Gen. 14:18). The writer called this town "Jerusalem" here, for the first time in Scripture. "Jerusalem" means "The Founding (or Possession) of Peace." "Adonizedek" (lit. "lord of righteousness") and "Melchizedek" ("king of righteousness," Gen. 14:18) were *titles* of the Jebusite kings, as "Pharaoh" was a title of the Egyptian kings. Jerusalem lay closer to Gibeon than any of the other towns that allied with Jerusalem against Gibeon. Probably for this reason, Adonizedek took the initiative in this alliance.

"The Amarna letters indicate that Jerusalem was the center of political activity in the fourteenth century B.C. and was always conscious of its own security."¹⁹²



10:6-11

Here the writer used the name "Amorites" (v. 6), in a general sense, of the Canaanites who were living in the nearby hills, including the Jebusites. The Amorites who lived in the mountains were the strongest of all the Canaanites.¹⁹³

This was the first time that Israel went into battle against an *alliance* of city-states. God reassured Joshua that he would be victorious ("I have given them into your hands"; v. 8).

"Their night march covered about 20 miles up steep terrain, with gear, under stress, in the middle of the night, and with a battle still before them."¹⁹⁴

God's strategy included an early morning surprise attack that caught the Amorites off guard ("came upon them suddenly by marching all night"; cf. Exod. 23:27). Israel was able to gain the advantage, and "pursued" the fleeing Amorites for several miles—"as far as Azekah and Makkedah." God also sent a *hailstorm* ("large stones from heaven . . . hailstones"; cf. Exod. 9:24), as the Amorites scurried and descended from Upper Beth-horon to Lower Beth-horon, along the ridge route that connects these towns (the "descent," v. 11).

¹⁹²Davis and Whitcomb, p. 63.

¹⁹³Keil and Delitzsch, p. 104.

¹⁹⁴*The Nelson . . .*, p. 371.

"The name *Beth-horon* denotes the sanctuary of a god Horon, known from theophoric names in the Execration Texts and from the Ras Shamra texts."¹⁹⁵

This storm ("hailstones") killed many "more" of the enemy than even the Israelites' swords, but hurt none of God's people. Storms with large hailstones have been recorded in Istanbul in August of 1831, and on the Austrian army at the battle of Salferino in 1859.¹⁹⁶ Because of the large number of deaths from the hailstones, the Amorites and the Israelites realized that the victory came as a result of the supernatural help of Yahweh, and not simply by Israel's own power. Yahweh, not just Israel, had devoted the Amorites *to destruction!*

"The crossing of the Jordan at high flood and the cyclonic hail storm at Aijalon are of special theological significance, for Baal was the great Canaanite storm god who was supposed to control the rain, the hail, the snow and the floods of Palestine. These episodes proved that Baal was as powerless before Yahweh in Palestine as he had been in the episode of the plagues in Egypt."¹⁹⁷

Note, in verses 9-15, how the writer alternated between references to the activities of the Israelites and God. He seems to have wanted to impress the reader with the fact that God and men were laboring *together* to secure the victory (cf. 1 Cor. 3:9).

"There is a judgment-seat for nations as well as for individuals."¹⁹⁸

10:12-15 Joshua based his impressive petition (v. 12) on God's promise (v. 8). It was a public prayer that he "spoke to the LORD" in the hearing of the Israelites.

There are three basic explanations for this miracle among evangelical scholars:

1. God slowed or stopped the earth's rotation, or He tilted its axis—thereby lengthening the period of daylight. Most of those who hold this view believe God counteracted the worldwide effects of this miracle by His supernatural power.¹⁹⁹ The main problem with this view is its improbability. Would God (He could, of course)

¹⁹⁵Gray, p. 107.

¹⁹⁶Jacobsen, p. 79.

¹⁹⁷J. L. Kelso, *Archaeology and Our Old Testament Contemporaries*, p. 53. Cf. Finegan, p. 173.

¹⁹⁸Meyer, p. 128.

¹⁹⁹Schaeffer, p. 142; Campbell, *No Time . . .*, pp. 81-83; idem, "Joshua," p. 351; et al.

perform such a worldwide miracle simply to give Israel more daylight? Advocates reply that this is the normal meaning of the words the writer used.

2. This may have been a *local* miracle, whereby God provided additional light just for Israel. Some advocates of this view believe God created unusual atmospheric conditions, that resulted in the refraction of sunlight after the sun had set.²⁰⁰ Others feel that God provided a *special* light for Israel, that may even have looked *like the sun*, but was a different source of light, such as the *shekinah*.²⁰¹ The main problem with this view is the language used in the text, that seems to imply *an actual alteration of the earth's rotation*. Advocates reply that this is the language of *appearance*, and they point to similar miracles in Scripture (e.g., Exod. 10:21-23; 2 Kings 20:10-11). Some also cite God's promise to provide "day and night" regularly, which seems to favor this view (Gen. 8:22; cf. Jer. 33:20-21).
3. Since the Hebrew verb translated "stand still" (v. 12) and "stood still" (v. 13) can also mean "cease" or "stop," some scholars believe that Joshua asked God to keep the sun from *shining*, not from moving. In other words, Joshua was asking God to stop the sun from beating down on his soldiers, before heat exhaustion overcame them. Joshua therefore may have requested a *cooler* day, not a longer day.²⁰² The main problem with this view is that Joshua also prayed that the "moon" would behave as the sun. This reference to the moon seems unnecessary, if all that Joshua wanted was more shade. In response, one could argue that this is simply "poetic parallelism": that is, the reference to the moon is the language of poetry, a natural counterbalance to the reference to the sun.

Various writers have suggested many other views and variations of these views.²⁰³ For example, John Holladay Jr. believed Joshua was voicing belief in astrology, and was calling for a favorable alignment of the heavenly bodies.²⁰⁴ David Howard Jr. suggested that *God* spoke the words in verses 12b and 13a, rather than Joshua.²⁰⁵ Most interpreters take verses 12b and 13a as Joshua's words, and believe he was *praying* to Yahweh.

²⁰⁰E.g., Meyer, p. 127.

²⁰¹Bush, p. 119; Davis and Whitcomb, pp. 69-70; Keil and Delitzsch, pp. 109-112; et al.

²⁰²E.g., Robert Dick Wilson, "Understanding 'The Sun Stood Still,'" in *Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation*, pp. 61-65.

²⁰³See Davis and Whitcomb, pp. 66-70, for several.

²⁰⁴John S. Holladay Jr., "The Day(s) the Moon Stood Still," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 87 (1968):167-78.

²⁰⁵Howard, *An Introduction . . .*, p. 88.

Occasionally one reads that an astronomer discovered 12 extra hours in history. As far as I have been able to discover, this claim has not been proven conclusively.

The Canaanites regarded the "sun" and "moon" as deities. Their control by Yahweh must have deeply impressed Israel's enemies.²⁰⁶ The "[B]ook of Jashar" ("The Righteous," v. 13) seems to have been a collection of stories of Israel's heroes. Some of these stories, if not all of them, were in verse (poetry), and commemorated God's great acts for Israel (cf. 2 Sam. 1:18). An additional note, that Yahweh "fought for Israel" (v. 14), reemphasized God's initiative for His people—in faithfulness to His promises.

"This is plain proof that one person can gain God's attention in prayer."²⁰⁷

"God fights for Israel. He also fights with and through Israel. She cannot expect the victory, however, if she does not do her part."²⁰⁸

". . . while interpreters of Josh 10:14 have traditionally linked the narrator's comments about the singularity of the events described in Joshua 10 directly to events related to the sun and the moon, the thesis forwarded here [in this article] suggests that the uniqueness in view in this verse relates better to Joshua's role in seizing the prerogatives of Yahweh, the divine warrior. Joshua, rather than Yahweh, sets out the parameters of Yahweh's intervention and dictates divine battle strategy and Yahweh accedes to Joshua's initiative. The chronological arrangement of Josh 10:7-14 seems to recognize the unusual nature of Joshua's role by first relating two clear instances of Yahweh's decisive battle intervention (10:10, 11) before relating Joshua's unique request (10:12-13) and Yahweh's compliance (10:14), thereby securing Yahweh's decisive role in the victory."²⁰⁹

10:16-27 The Israelites suffered no significant losses in the mopping up operation that followed. "No one uttered a word against" (v. 21) means no one lifted a finger in resistance against the Israelites (cf. Exod. 11:7).

²⁰⁶See Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "The Polemic against Baalism in Israel's Early History and Literature," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:603 (July-September 1994):276-77.

²⁰⁷*The Nelson . . .*, p. 371.

²⁰⁸Butler, p. 117.

²⁰⁹Gordon Oeste, "'A Day Like No Other' in the Context of Yahweh War: Joshua 10:14 and the Characterization of Joshua," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57:4 (December 2014):702.

Putting one's foot on the "necks" of one's enemies was a symbolic act that represented complete subjugation of, and total defeat over, the enemy in the ancient Near East (v. 24; cf. 1 Kings 5:3; Ps. 8:6; 110:1).²¹⁰ Performing this act and understanding its significance also gave the Israelites greater confidence. Joshua strengthened the impact of this act with an encouraging exhortation ("Be strong and courageous, for thus the LORD will do to all your enemies"; v. 25).

"There is truth in the old saying, 'Heaven helps those who help themselves.' There *are* times when we are to 'stand still and see the salvation of our Lord' (Exod. 14:13), but usually we are to do our human best with complete dependence on God for the outcome.

"The Lord doesn't usually work a miracle for a lazy student at examination time, or for a slovenly housekeeper when unexpected visitors knock on the door of a disordered house, nor for a careless bookkeeper when the auditors arrive. God is always sufficient, and miracles will come when weakness needs them, but God will not usually do for us what we ought to do for ourselves."²¹¹

Israel's leaders placed "large stones" over the grave ("mouth of the cave") of the Canaanite kings (v. 27) for the benefit of future observers (cf. 7:25). This constituted still another memorial to God's faithfulness and power.

As believers experience increasing success in their spiritual warfare, they normally experience increasing opposition from spiritual enemies, as Israel did. Still, the Lord fights alongside His people (2 Cor. 12:9). We have spiritual responsibilities to meet that enable us to secure victory (e.g., trust, obedience, using our resources, etc.; cf. Eph. 6:14-18).

The Lord *Himself* also provides assistance, both naturally and supernaturally. He enables us to use the strength, wisdom, and endurance He has given us. He also does miracles, things we cannot possibly do for ourselves: like when He gave the Israelite army extra light, and sent hail from the sky. He gives us material gifts, He changes the hearts of people, and He opens up new opportunities for us, to name a few of His mighty acts.

7. Other conquests in southern Canaan 10:28-43

To this point, Israel's victories had taken place in central Canaan. God's strategy was to first give His people a base of operations, a central headquarters as it were, in the middle part of the land. From there, they could then advance to the South, and then to the North. The writer summarized the southern campaign in this section of verses.

²¹⁰Gray, p. 110.

²¹¹Jacobsen, p. 83.

10:28-39

Seven other victories followed the battle at Gibeon.²¹² In the record of these encounters, the writer highlighted two important facts: First, Israel was obedient to God's command to exterminate the Canaanites in these cities. Second, it was the LORD, Yahweh, who gave Israel's enemies into her hands (vv. 30, 32).

". . . Yahweh has shown himself to be a God who accepts a people who follow him despite their past mistakes."²¹³

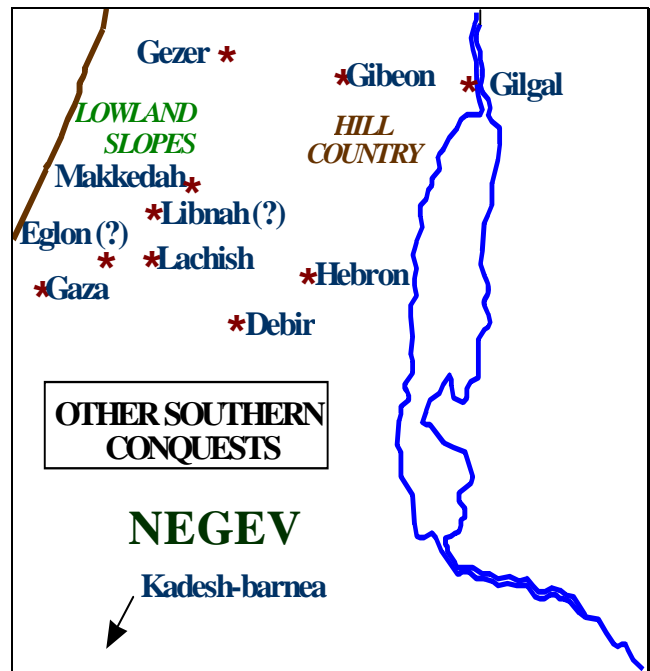
The purpose of Joshua's raids was to destroy the military capability of these city-states, and to instill fear and confusion in the remaining

Canaanites. Archaeology has confirmed that many of these cities did not suffer violent destruction at this time.²¹⁴

"Joshua, at this stage of the campaign, did not seem to be interested in completely destroying each one of the sites, or in occupying them."²¹⁵

"But beyond inflicting immediate loss, this campaign achieved little else by itself—it was a sweep, not an occupation: 'Joshua *returned* and all Israel with him, to the camp, to Gilgal' (Joshua 10:15, 43). *Occupation* of the land, to live in it, keep livestock and cultivate crops in it, etc., was a far slower process, visible in part later in Joshua and in Judges."²¹⁶

According to Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831), a philosopher of war, there are three principle military objectives in any war: First, the aggressor must destroy the military power of the enemy, so that he cannot continue or resume war. Second, he must conquer the land of the enemy so



²¹²See Finegan, pp. 182-83, for information about the Gezer Calendar.

²¹³Butler, p. 119.

²¹⁴See Finegan, p. 163.

²¹⁵Davis and Whitcomb, p. 70.

²¹⁶Kitchen, p. 89.

thoroughly that a new military force cannot arise from it. Third, he must subdue the will of the enemy.²¹⁷ Joshua accomplished all three of these basic objectives.²¹⁸

10:40-43 These verses summarize the conquest of the whole southern portion of Canaan. As we shall see later, Israel did not defeat every town or kill *every* Canaanite without exception. However, Joshua effectively removed the military threat to Israel that the cities in the south posed. "All" (v. 40) has a limited meaning. In this context, it means all *parts* (geographical regions) of the land, all the "kings" of the *cities* that Joshua *destroyed*, and all "who lived (breathed)" in *those* destroyed cities (cf. 13:1).

"Goshen" (v. 41) here was a town on the southern frontier of Israel (cf. 11:16; 15:51); it is not referring to the section of Egypt that bore this name.

The writer again emphasized God's fighting for Israel ("the God of Israel, fought for Israel"; v. 42).

God's people do not have to *immediately* engage every enemy that exists, any more than the Israelites had to *immediately* kill every individual Canaanite or attack every city. At this stage in their national life, God's will was that they attack only certain selected targets. Sometimes we can experience *discouragement* when we look at the host of wicked people that surrounds us, or the many sins that plague us. We may think, "What can one individual do to stem such a tide of wickedness?" We may even think it is useless to do *anything*, in view of the huge task we face (Matt. 28:19-20). In those situations, we need to do what God puts before us to do—day by day—rather than taking on more responsibility than God wants us to assume at that moment (cf. Matt. 6:25-34).

8. Conquests in northern Canaan 11:1-15

The kings of the northern Canaanite cities also decided to unite to withstand the threat of Israelite expansion.

11:1-3 "Hazor" (lit. "Enclosure") was the leading city in northern Canaan, with an area of 175 acres and a population of 30,000 to 40,000 people.²¹⁹ Archaeologists calculate that the population of walled cities in Canaan was about 200 people per acre. Hazor was at one time the head of an alliance of all the northern cities (v. 10).²²⁰ "Jabin" (v. 1) may have been a title

²¹⁷Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 101, cited by Craigie, *The Problem of War . . .*, p. 46.

²¹⁸See David Ussishkin, "Lachish—Key to the Israelite Conquest of Canaan?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 13:1 (January-February 1987):18-39; and Finegan, pp. 161-63.

²¹⁹Davis and Whitcomb, p. 74. See also *The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Hazor," by T. C. Mitchell; and Finegan, pp. 164-65.

²²⁰See Mary Rattigan, "Hazor and Its Significance," *The Bible Today* 23:1 (January 1985):44-50; Waltke, "Palestinian Artifacts . . .," pp. 42-46; and Merrill, *Kingdom of . . .*, p. 120.

rather than a proper name (cf. Judg. 4:2), or it may have been a personal name.²²¹

11:4-9 The text records that it was only in the battles against Jericho and Ai that the Israelites initiated the action. In all the other battles described in this book, the enemy attacked the Israelites.

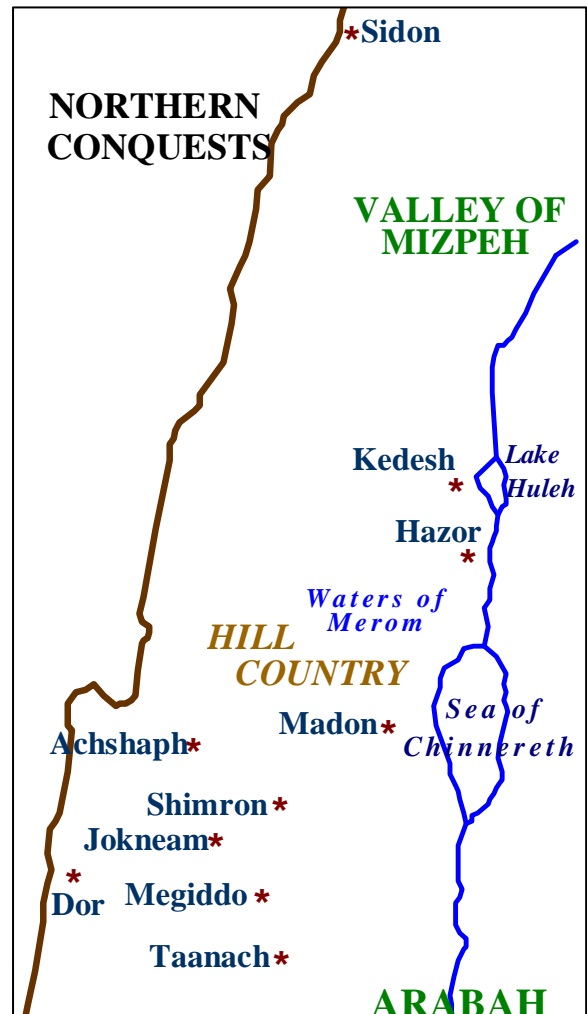
According to Josephus, the combined armies of the Canaanite tribes totaled 300,000 armed footmen, 10,000 horsemen, and 20,000 chariots.²²²

"The northern coalition was Israel's most formidable foe in terms of both numbers and weaponry. Each successive battle that Israel fought was more difficult than the last."²²³

The "waters of Merom" (v. 5) were evidently small lakes close to the village of Merom, located west of Hazor. Some scholars equate the waters of Merom with Lake Huleh. Lake Huleh lay to the north of the Sea of Chinnereth (Galilee). Others equate Merom with Madon, about five miles west of modern Tiberias.²²⁴ These locations seem less likely.

Hamstringing involved cutting the hamstring muscle of the horses' legs. Hamstringing the horses and burning the chariots (vv. 6, 9) had two effects. The enemy could not use them again, and the Israelites could not use them or trust in them.

11:10-15 Archaeological evidence supports a fifteenth-century B.C. destruction of Hazor.²²⁵ The meaning of the phrase "cities that stood on their mounds" (v. 13) is unclear.



²²¹Hess, p. 208.

²²²Josephus, 5:1:18.

²²³Madvig, p. 309.

²²⁴Hess, p. 209.

²²⁵Douglas Petrovich, "The Dating of Hazor's Destruction in Joshua 11 by Way of Biblical, Archaeological, and Epigraphical Evidence," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51:3 (September 2008):489-512.

"It would be difficult to point out any single expression in the whole book of Joshua, perhaps in the whole Scriptures, more difficult of explanation than this."²²⁶

Perhaps these were the older, more influential towns, that previous generations had rebuilt on their former ruins.²²⁷ If this is the meaning, probably Joshua did not burn them because he wanted to preserve these towns associated with historical, time-honored sites, for the Israelites' occupation.

The phrase "They left no one who breathed" (v. 14) has sounded to some readers like excessive punishment. However, God had clearly commanded Moses and Joshua to completely annihilate the Canaanites (v. 15). The Bible justified this severe treatment on several counts.

First, the gross sins of the Canaanites—including incest, adultery, child sacrifice, homosexuality, and bestiality—resulted in a thoroughly debased society in Canaan (cf. Lev. 18; Deut. 9:4-5). God had waited to execute judgment, allowing the Canaanites time to turn from their wicked ways, but they had not changed (cf. Gen. 15:16). By Joshua's time, their sins, which had permeated their whole culture, deserved judgment.

Second, by wiping out the Canaanites, God was protecting His people, the Israelites, from those sins.

Third, God had promised to bless those nations that blessed Israel, and to curse those nations that cursed Israel (Gen. 12:3). The Canaanites had sought to destroy the Israelites on at least two occasions, already (9:1-2; 11:1-5), and God would not permit that.

Fourth, God's command to annihilate the Canaanites was very focused; the Israelites did not *ever* have a mandate to kill *everyone* living in *all* of Canaan. It was only the Canaanites, at this time in history, who were the objects of God's special judgment, and the Israelites were His instrument to bring about that judgment.

The secret of Joshua's remarkable success, from the human viewpoint, was his consistent obedience to the Lord (v. 15). We too will experience victory over our spiritual enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil—to the extent that we do God's will as He has revealed that in His Word.

²²⁶Bush, p. 134.

²²⁷Keil and Delitzsch, p. 122.

9. Summary of Joshua's conquests 11:16—12:24

This summary is in three parts: the land, the kings east of the Jordan, and the kings west of the Jordan.

The conquest of the land 11:16-23

"Mount Halak" (v. 17) was near Kadesh Barnea (10:41) to the south. "Seir" (v. 17) is the hill country of Edom, southeast of the Dead Sea. "Baal-gad," at the northwest base of "Mount Hermon" (v. 17), was at the northern extremity of the conquest.

The writer referred to Canaan as "the land of the sons of Israel," here, for the first time in Scripture (v. 22). The "Anakim" were the extra-large up to giant-sized, mighty warriors that the 10 spies had feared (Num. 13:28). Israel destroyed most of them.

"The hardening of their [the kings Joshua defeated] hearts [v. 20] was punitive. Their iniquity was now full (cf. Gen. 15:16). The long respite granted to them by a long-suffering God wrought no repentance in them."²²⁸

"Here is a biblical lesson which has always been difficult for the people of God to learn. Deuteronomy commanded Israel to obey God, destroy the inhabitants, have no mercy, make no covenant, make no marriages (7:1-3). Such a command had a divine purpose. It removed the temptations to follow other gods. From the days of the Judges and especially from the period of Solomon onward, the great temptation was to make political alliances through covenants and political marriages between royal families (1 Kgs 11:1-8; 16:31; 20:30-43). To protect Israel against the major sin of idolatry, God commanded her not to show mercy to the enemy. To enable her to keep his commandment, God caused her enemies to fight her rather than seek mercy and peace."²²⁹

Joshua "subdued (took) the whole land" (v. 23) in the sense that, following Joshua's conquests, there were no more pitched battles by the combined Israelite tribal forces. From then on, God expected *individual tribes* to subdue the remaining towns and pockets of resistance (cf. 13:1; Judg. 1:1).

"The taking of the *whole* land does not imply that all the towns and villages to the very last had been conquered, or that all the Canaanites were rooted out from every corner of the land, but simply that the conquest was of such a character that the power of the Canaanites was broken, their dominion overthrown, and their whole land so thoroughly given into the hands of the Israelites, that those who still remained here

²²⁸Armerding, p. 108. See also Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Divine Hardening in the Old Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:612 (October-December 1996):429-30.

²²⁹Butler, p. 130.

and there were crushed into powerless fugitives, who could neither offer any further opposition to the Israelites, nor dispute the possession of the land with them, if they would only strive to fulfil [*sic*] the commandments of their God and persevere in the gradual extermination of the scattered remnants."²³⁰

"The error of contrasting Joshua's rapid campaigns (misread as permanent conquest) with slower occupation in Judges 1 misses the point entirely. And how often the proponents of this theory omit even to read Joshua 13! Thirty-one dead kinglets (Joshua 12) were not a conquest in depth, merely a cropping of the leadership. At the end of Joshua's career, there still remained 'very much land to be possessed' (13:1)—both the areas listed (13:2-6) largely unreached by Joshua's vigour, as well as the in-depth settlement of most of the districts already raided. That process was more painfully slow, even in Joshua's lifetime; cf. the remarks in Joshua 18:2-3 (Joshua's rebuke), besides the frustrated efforts recorded here and there (Josh. 15:63; 16:10; 17:12, 16)."²³¹

The words of God to Moses which the writer alluded to (v. 23) are probably those in Exodus 23:27-33 (cf. Deut. 7:22). There, God told Moses He would "not drive . . . out" all the Canaanites from the land "in one year," but "little by little." This was how the conquest of the land had advanced thus far, and how it should have continued to its completion.

The major war with the Canaanites was ended ("the land had rest from war"; v. 23), but minor battles and mopping up operations were still necessary. Not only did the Israelites obtain the land, but they defeated the Canaanite kings and broke their power. Jensen considered 11:23 the key verse of the book.²³²

"There has never been a greater war for a greater cause. The battle of Waterloo decided the fate of Europe, but this series of contests in far-off Canaan decided the fate of the world."²³³

The slaughter of the eastern kings 12:1-6

"Sihon" and "Og" were the first two Canaanite kings that the Israelites (under Moses) had defeated.

The slaughter of the western kings 12:7-24

The writer here identified 31 more kings that were conquered, in the essential order in which Joshua defeated them.

²³⁰Keil and Delitzsch, p. 125.

²³¹Kitchen, pp. 90-91.

²³²Jensen, p. 17.

²³³Henry T. Sell, *Bible Study by Periods*, p. 83.

"Many of the same names appear in the Amarna letters, thus confirming the historicity of our text."²³⁴

"The description was not complete. Shechem is not mentioned, and the hills of Ephraim are sparsely represented, as is the territory north of Hazor. Completeness is not the object. The writer seeks to compile a list that will impress the readers with the greatness of the feat of God in working for Israel and of the greatness of the leadership of Joshua in following the example of Moses and completing the task first given to Moses. Still, the writer is aware that much remains to be done."²³⁵

This summary concludes the record of the *conquest* of the land (chs. 1—12), Joshua's first major responsibility. He was now able to *divide* the land among the Israelites (chs. 13—21), his second great work (1:6).

Joshua's conquest of the land anticipated the work of Jesus Christ. Both men defeated the enemies of their people. Both men had names that mean "God saves." Both victories were long in coming, and were preceded by Israel's apostasy. Both victories were God's work through human instruments. Both victories only occurred because of trust and obedience. And both victories made possible an inheritance and rest for God's people.

II. THE DIVISION OF THE LAND CHS. 13—21

Chapters 13—24 describe how Joshua divided the land, and the events following that division, including the settlement of the tribes and national rededication. Many, if not all, of the Israelite tribes did not conquer or control all the land allotted to them (15:63; 16:10; 17:12-13). The record of the actual division of the land is in chapters 13—21, and the arrangements for settlement in it follow, in chapters 22—24.²³⁶

At the end of the seven-year period of conquest, Israel occupied very little of the Promised Land. "Very much" of it "remained" for them to possess (v. 1).²³⁷ Consequently, dividing all the land among the tribes required great faith, that God would eventually "give" His people *all* of it. Joshua had removed the significant military threats to Israel's existence. From now on, each tribe was responsible to conquer and colonize its own designated territory.

"The Israelites came to look on the presence of the Canaanite remnant in the land as normal. Christians look on carnal, half-hearted Christian living, as the best they can expect of themselves and others."²³⁸

²³⁴Davis and Whitcomb, p. 75.

²³⁵Butler, p. 139.

²³⁶For a summary of the modern geographical history of Palestine, see the Appendix at the end of these notes.

²³⁷For maps showing the areas as yet unpossessed, see L. Wood, map 8, p. 209; or Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, maps 68 and 69, pp. 50 and 51.

²³⁸Jacobsen, p. 92.

"Resisting the temptation to skip over this section of Joshua [chs. 13—21] can result in an appreciation of important features of God's covenant with Israel. Beyond the obvious detail of the content of these chapters and the means by which God blessed those who remained faithful in the conquest of the land, this passage also addresses the question why the land formed so significant a part of God's promises to the patriarchs and remained a key feature of the covenant."²³⁹

A. THE LAND YET TO BE POSSESSED 13:1-7

13:1 Joshua was probably in his 80s at this time ("old and advanced in years"). Even though much of the land had been conquered, much of it still remained to be possessed by the Israelites.

"God has given us in Christ all things which pertain unto life and godliness; let us claim the whole of our inheritance by a living faith, so that we may enter on the enjoyment of all that is possible for us on this side of heaven."²⁴⁰

13:2 The "Philistines" were not native Canaanite people. They had migrated to Canaan from the northwest. They had by this time displaced the Canaanites in the southwest portion of the Promised Land. Because the land they occupied was part of what God had promised Israel, the Israelites were responsible to drive them out too.

The Israelites were not successful in doing this. The Philistines increased in power and influence over the Israelites, eventually becoming *the major enemy* of Israel, during King Saul's reign, more than three centuries later. In Joshua's time, however, they were a smaller, secondary target of the Israelites.

The "Geshurites" lived in the city of "Geshur," which was located to the northeast of Bashan, in Aram (later called Syria; cf. 2 Sam. 3:3; 13:37; 14:23, 32; 15:8; 1 Chron. 3:2).

13:3-5 The "Shihor" (v. 3) was probably the "[B]rook of Egypt," or the modern "Wadi el Arish," that marked the southwestern boundary of the Promised Land.

"The word *lords* [v. 3] here translates a Philistine word, not a Hebrew word; it is the only clearly Philistine word recorded in the Bible. It is related to the Greek word that means 'tyrant.'"²⁴¹

²³⁹Hess, pp. 53-54.

²⁴⁰Meyer, p. 158.

²⁴¹*The Nelson . . .*, p. 378.

"The Sidonians" (v. 4) may represent the inhabitants of the Phoenician coast and of the Lebanon mountains.²⁴² The "land of the Gebalite" (v. 5) refers to the city-state of Byblos.²⁴³

- 13:6 God's promise to "drive out" all the remaining Canaanites depended on Israel's obedience to the Mosaic Covenant ("I will drive them out"; cf. 1:6-7: "you shall divide as an inheritance the land . . . only . . . observe . . . all the law").²⁴⁴
- 13:7 The land referred to here ("this land") included all the territory that God had promised west of the Jordan River.

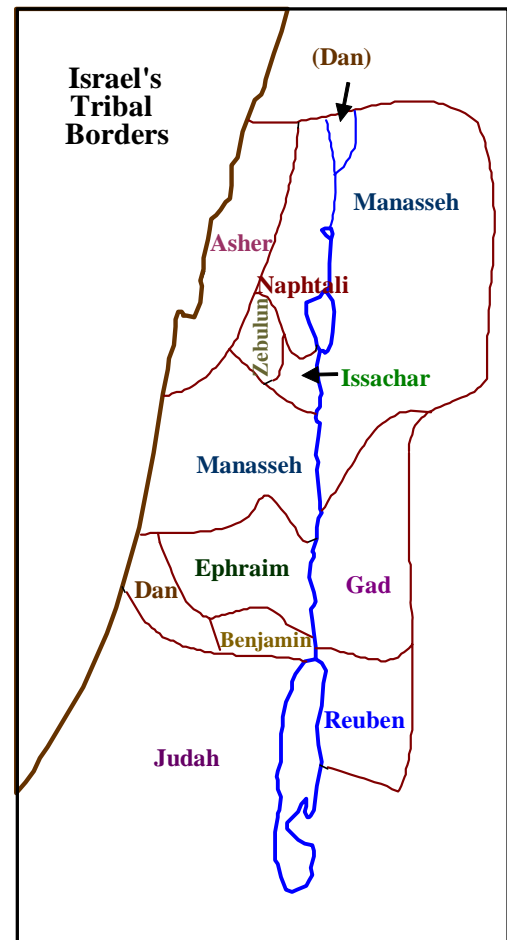
"The word *inheritance* is found over fifty times in these nine chapters [13—21] and is a very important word. The Jews *inherited* their land. They didn't *win* their land as spoils of battle or *purchase* their land as in a business transaction. The Lord, who was the sole owner, leased the land to them. . . . Imagine having God for your landlord!"²⁴⁵

B. THE LAND EAST OF THE JORDAN 13:8-33

This portion of the Promised Land went to the two and one-half tribes that had requested it previously (Num. 32).

- 13:8-14 This pericope of verses records the boundaries of Israel's whole Transjordanian territory. The peoples the Israelites did *not* annihilate, and their land that they did *not* possess, were in the northern part of this area ("Geshurites" and Maacathites"; cf. 12:5). "Gilead" (v. 11) included land on both sides of the Jabbok River, east of the Jordan.

"The Transjordanian tribes receive a disproportionate amount of attention in this book that records the Conquest



²⁴²Butler, p. 152.

²⁴³Hess, p. 231.

²⁴⁴See W. B. Riley, "The Challenge to Carry On," reprinted in *Fundamentalist Journal* 2:2 (February 1983):39-41.

²⁴⁵Wiersbe, p. 68.

and division of the land *west* of the Jordan (cf. 1:12-15; 4:12; 12:1-6; 13:8-33; 22:1-34). The author was eager to uphold the unity of the Twelve Tribes in spite of the geographic separation and an undercurrent of feeling that only the land west of the Jordan was truly the Promised Land."²⁴⁶

- 13:15-23 "Reuben's" portion was the southern part of this area. In this tribe's territory "Balaam" (v. 22) had lost his life, during Israel's battle with the Midianites (Num. 31:8).
- 13:24-28 The allotment of "Gad" lay in the middle of Israel's territory east of the Jordan, roughly between the Jabbok River and the northern end of the Dead Sea. The Amorites formerly controlled the land east of the Jordan River.²⁴⁷
- 13:29-31 The "[eastern] half-tribe of Manasseh" settled in the northern portion of Transjordan, in the greater part of "Bashan," the former "kingdom of Og."
- 13:32-33 The description of the Transjordanian territory ends with a reminder of the Levites' inheritance, who received a special relationship to God rather than a tract of land ("the LORD . . . is their inheritance").

"The two and one-half tribes chose, as Lot did, on the basis of appearance (cf. Gen. 13:10-11), and their inheritance was ultimately lost to them [cf. 1 Chron. 5:26]. On the other hand the Levites, requesting no portion, were given an inheritance of abiding spiritual significance."²⁴⁸

"Don't become a 'borderline believer.'"²⁴⁹

C. THE LAND WEST OF THE JORDAN CHS. 14—19

The account of the Israelites' settlement west of the Jordan, here in these chapters, received more attention by the writer, since it was the primary area where Israel settled.

1. The rationale for the allotments 14:1-5

Eleazar the high priest, Joshua, and the heads of the tribes took the leadership in dividing this portion of the land (v. 1). These men determined the division of the land by "casting lots" (v. 2; 18:6). Apparently the casting of lots established the general location of each tribe within Canaan, but the population of that tribe affected the size of each tribe's

²⁴⁶Madvig, p. 318.

²⁴⁷Josephus, 5:1:23.

²⁴⁸Campbell, "Joshua," p. 356.

²⁴⁹Wiersbe, p. 69.

inheritance (cf. Num. 26:52-56).²⁵⁰ Josephus believed that the goodness of the land (for farming or grazing) also played some part in the allotment: the better land being more valuable than the poorer land.²⁵¹

"The people of God are not called to act on their own initiative and desire, nor to set their own goals. God has set the goals and issues the commands which lead to their achievement."²⁵²

2. Caleb's inheritance 14:6-15

Before the casting of lots began, Caleb came to Joshua with his fellow tribesmen from Judah to request the inheritance that Moses had promised him (v. 9; Deut. 1:36; cf. Num. 14:26-38). Moses had promised Caleb "land" in Canaan, but had not specified its location. The reason for this special blessing was Caleb's *faithfulness* to God ("because you have followed the LORD . . . fully"), when he served as one of the 12 spies. Joshua himself also received a personal allotment, later (19:49-50).

"Caleb represents all of Israel as one who receives an allotment and takes the land for himself."²⁵³

Caleb, "the grand old man of Judah, the outspoken minority leader of the twelve spies,"²⁵⁴ was probably a member of the clan in Judah called the "Kenizzites" (vv. 6, 14). He was probably *not* a descendant, though, of the other "Kenizzites," who were early inhabitants of Canaan and descendants of Esau (Gen. 15:19; 36:11, 15, 42). Another view is that the early Canaanite Kenizzites joined the tribe of Judah shortly before the Exodus (cf. Num. 13:6).²⁵⁵ This would make Caleb just a generation removed from a non-Israelite family.²⁵⁶

The references to Caleb's age enable us to determine the length of the conquest of Canaan. Caleb had received the promise of a *portion* in the land at "Kadesh-barnea," 38 years before the Israelites crossed the Jordan and entered Canaan ("the land on which your foot has trodden will be an inheritance"; cf. Num. 14:24). Caleb was only "40 years old" back then (v. 7). He was now 85 (v. 10). Forty-five years had elapsed, and Caleb had spent 38 of them in the wilderness. Therefore the conquest must have taken the remaining seven years.

The portion that Caleb requested was within the tribal allotment of Judah, his tribe. He now asked for part of the "hill country," that the giants, who had discouraged his fellow spies, still inhabited. In making his request (v. 12), Caleb referred to the very things that

²⁵⁰See L. Wood, map 6, p. 186.

²⁵¹Josephus, 5:1:21.

²⁵²Butler, p. 172.

²⁵³Hess, p. 239.

²⁵⁴Rea, p. 223.

²⁵⁵Campbell, "Joshua," p. 357.

²⁵⁶*The Nelson . . .*, p. 380.

the *unbelieving spies* had pointed out, which had discouraged the Israelites from entering the land: "hill country," "Anakim," and large "fortified cities" (cf. Num. 13:28-29)—as his *incentives* for wanting this territory! In answer to Caleb's reminder and request, Joshua blessed him and gave him the town of "Hebron" that was, and still is, an important city. The notation that the ancient name of Hebron was "Kiriath-arba," meaning the "city of Arba," named after "Arba," the greatest man among the Anakim (giants), is significant (v. 15). It recalls God's faithfulness in giving this giant's city to Caleb, who had believed God could do so 45 years earlier.

Caleb was "still as strong" *in faith*, as well as in body, as he had been 45 years earlier, even though he was now much older. He was continuing to trust in God to fulfill His promise, concerning the land, rather than in his personal physical ability to take it from the enemy. His name means "according to the heart."

"It would have been natural for Caleb to ask for a 'soft spot'—a portion of land already conquered where he could settle down and spend the rest of his life raising a few vegetables or flowers. Instead, at 85, he asked for the very section that had struck terror into the hearts of the ten spies. . . .

"This courageous old warrior, who did not expect to receive his inheritance without exerting himself, is a splendid example for an age which increasingly looks for cradle-to-casket protection."²⁵⁷

"Consecration is the source of undecaying strength; because it allows the soul to draw on the strength of God [cf. 2 Cor. 4:16]."²⁵⁸

John Cawood identified Caleb's outstanding features as: uncompromising convictions, unreserved commitment, unalterable courage, and unwavering confidence.²⁵⁹

"Joshua 14 thus sets forth two major points, which continue to have value for the people of God. Life in all its dimensions is to be lived according to the plans set forth by God, not by the greedy, selfish plans designed by man. Blessing comes ultimately to the man who totally follows God."²⁶⁰

"One of the remarkable things about the Bible is its attention not only to nations and peoples but also to individuals. This underscores the fact that He who 'loved the world' provided the means of redemption whereby 'whoever believes' may be saved. In a generation of apostates Caleb remained true to the Lord, and for his faithfulness he was singled out as a recipient of God's gracious blessings."²⁶¹

²⁵⁷Jacobsen, p. 100.

²⁵⁸Meyer, p. 165.

²⁵⁹John Cawood, "The Godly Features of Caleb," *Confident Living* 44:10 (November 1986):53-55.

²⁶⁰Butler, p. 175.

²⁶¹Merrill, "Joshua," p. 172.

3. Judah's inheritance ch. 15

The tribe of Judah probably received first consideration in the text, because it was this tribe that had received Jacob's special patriarchal blessing. It was also the largest tribe.

Ancient Near Easterners used natural landmarks (rivers, mountains, deserts, towns, etc.) to comprise borders, as well as artificial boundaries that they made by drawing lines between sites. Virtually all nations have used these methods, and they are still common today.

Judah was the southernmost tribe west of the Jordan. Caleb's family and the Simeonites, and not just the regular Judahites, lived within Judah's territory. Simeon was the smallest tribe except Levi, and lost its territorial identity within Judah shortly after the conquest (cf. Gen. 49:5-7). For this reason, some maps of the tribal allotments do not include Simeon.

Judah's boundaries and Caleb and Othniel's inheritances 15:1-20

15:1-12 The writer recorded the boundaries of the whole tribal territory first. The description proceeds counterclockwise from the south border (vv. 2-4), to the east (v. 5), to the north (vv. 5-11), to the west border (v. 12).²⁶²

15:13-19 The writer probably included the record of Caleb's success in driving out the Canaanites, in his land-inheritance area, in order to highlight the effect of *faith* in the settling of the land. "Othniel" (v. 17) later became one of Israel's prominent judges (Judg. 3:9), probably the first one whom God raised up in Israel after Joshua's death. He was Caleb's younger brother (Heb. *'ah*, cf. Judg. 1:13; 3:9), and bore the same spiritual characteristics of his sibling. Some translators and commentators have believed Othniel was Caleb's nephew, but this seems unlikely.

"Acsah's request for the springs is reminiscent of Rebekah's meeting with Isaac (Gn. 24:61-67) in which she also (1) approaches riding on an animal; (2) descends; (3) makes a request; and (4) receives the desired result from the person whom she approaches. Both accounts involve an inheritance of the blessing that God had promised to Abraham. This is probably the reason for the inclusion of this particular note."²⁶³

15:20 This verse concludes the description of the tribal boundaries of Judah given in verses 1-19: "This (the preceding text) is the inheritance of the tribe . . . of Judah."

²⁶²See Finegan, pp. 170-71, for archaeological information about Beth-shemesh.

²⁶³Hess, p. 245.

The towns in Judah 15:21-62

The writer grouped the towns in Judah according to that tribe's four districts. This part of Canaan contained four distinct regions: the southern Negev, the lowland plain (Shephelah), the mountains (hill country), and the desert.

15:21-32 The "Negev" ("south" *land*) formed a region between the more fertile parts of Judah, to the north, and the desert to the south. The writer listed four groups of towns: the first with nine (vv. 21-23), the second with five (vv. 24-25), the third with nine (vv. 26-28), and the fourth with 13 (vv. 29-32).

15:33-47 The "Shephelah" ("lowland") was the area between the Coastal Plain to the west, and the hill country of Judah to the east. The Negev lay to its south. The writer grouped the towns in this area also. He named 14 towns in the northern part of the Shephelah (vv. 33-36): 16 in the northwest (vv. 37-41), nine in the south (vv. 42-44), and three in the southwest (vv. 45-47).

15:48-60 Five groups of cities stood in the mountainous "hill country" of Judah, north of the Negev, east of the Shephelah, and west of the wilderness of Judah. This area became home to a large number of Judahites. Eleven towns stood in the southwest section (vv. 48-51), and nine to the north of these (near Hebron, vv. 52-54). Ten more stood to the east of both former groups, and were closer to the desert wilderness (vv. 55-57), six to the north of Hebron (vv. 58-59), and two on Judah's northern border (v. 60).²⁶⁴

15:61-62 The "wilderness" of Judah was the northeastern part of the tribal inheritance. It bordered the hill country to the west, the Dead Sea to the east, and the Negev to the south. Six cities occupied this area.

"It is . . . thought that Khirbet Qumran was the 'Ir-Hammelah or City of Salt of Joshua 15:62."²⁶⁵

15:63 Even though the Israelites defeated the king of Jerusalem (10:1-27), they were not able to exterminate ("drive out") the "Jebusites" who lived there. The city of "Jebus" (not called "Jerusalem" until later in history) remained an island of Canaanite domination on the northern border of Judah.

4. Joseph's inheritance chs. 16—17

The writer may have dealt with the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh together, since Jacob had given Joseph the second largest blessing after Judah (Gen. 49). Moreover, the eastern half-tribe of Manasseh had already received its inheritance, and the remaining "half-inheritance" would have been small compared with the other tribes. These one and one-

²⁶⁴See Finegan, pp. 165-67.

²⁶⁵Ibid., p. 274.

half tribes together formed a large group of Israelites. Their lot fell in central Canaan, and their territory consisted of two parts: with Ephraim settling in the southern portion, and Manasseh in the northern. A single lot determined the inheritance of both Ephraim and Manasseh, which resulted in Ephraim complaining later (17:14-18).

- 16:1-4 The writer described the combined territory of Joseph west of the Jordan, that is, of Ephraim and the western half-tribe of Manasseh, first.
- 16:5-10 He traced the borders of Ephraim's allotment next. Ephraim lay north of the areas later given to Dan and Benjamin, and south of western Manasseh. The Ephraimites failed to drive out the inhabitants of "Gezer" (v. 10).²⁶⁶
- 17:1-13 These verses describe the territory of the western half-tribe of Manasseh, situated west of the Jordan and north of Ephraim. It extended north to the "valley of Jezreel" (v. 17) The Manassites also failed to exterminate all the Canaanites in their area (vv. 12-13).²⁶⁷
- 17:14-18 The extent of the territory given these two tribes was not sufficient for them, in their opinion, so they asked Joshua for more land. He dealt with them very diplomatically, by complimenting and encouraging them (v. 18). Their complaint seems to have sprung from a spirit of carnality (cf. v. 16; Judg. 8:1-3; 12:1-7; 2 Sam. 20:1-5).²⁶⁸ They surely did not share Caleb's spirit (14:6-15). Evidently they counted as their land only the parts that were then easily accessible to them, and not populated by Canaanites. They discounted the forested areas, that needed clearing, as well as the parts dominated by the Perizzites and the Rephaim (v. 15). Joshua assured them, however, that when they eventually subdued their inheritance territory, it would prove adequate for them ("you shall clear it . . . it shall be yours; for you shall drive out the Canaanites"; v. 18).

"That the Central Ridge was once heavily forested is attested by acorns and terebinth seeds and deer antlers found in many excavations and a wild boar's tooth at Gezer, as well as cypress and pine lumber in King Saul's fortress at Gibeah (Tell el-Ful)."²⁶⁹

"The purpose of inserting this episode at the conclusion of the description of Joseph's portion may be to alert the reader to the fact that the promised land, if it is to be possessed, requires the activity of the tribes, who must not be deterred by the threats of Canaan's superior military force."²⁷⁰

²⁶⁶See *ibid.*, p. 170.

²⁶⁷See *ibid.*, p. 168, for archaeological information about Taanach.

²⁶⁸See John H. Paterson, "The Touchy Tribe," *Toward the Mark* 16:6 (November-December 1987):110-13.

²⁶⁹Rea, p. 225.

²⁷⁰Woudstra, p. 267.

The writer of the Book of Joshua noted carefully the failures of the tribes to drive the Canaanites out of their territories, as well as their successes in doing so (e.g., Caleb). The extent of their occupation of their land depended on the extent of their ability to annihilate the Canaanites by God's power.

5. Survey of the remaining land 18:1-10

After the process of assigning land to the three Cisjordanian tribes mentioned above (those on the western side of the Jordan River), Israel's attention turned to relocating the tabernacle in a more central location (v. 1). God undoubtedly made the choice of "Shiloh" (lit. "rest"; cf. Deut. 12:11).²⁷¹ The name of this town was significant because of Jacob's prophecy about Shiloh ("the scepter shall not depart from Judah . . . until Shiloh comes"; Gen. 49:10) and the association of God's *name* with the Israelites' "rest." God's people could find rest "in the place where He abode" (the tabernacle proper and its environs).

The tabernacle was headquartered at various places throughout its history: Gilgal (5:10; 10:15, 43), Shiloh (18:1, 9-10), Bethel (Judg. 20:18-28; 21:1-4), Shiloh (1 Sam. 1:3), Mizpah (1 Sam. 7:5-6), Gilgal (1 Sam. 10:8; 13:8-10; 15:10-15), Nob (1 Sam. 21:1-9; 22:11, 19), and finally at Gibeon (1 Chron. 16:39-40; 21:29; 1 Kings 3:4; 2 Chron. 1:3). These may not be all the places where it stood, but these are the places that the text names. "Solomon's Temple," the first of four Jerusalem temples mentioned in Scripture, later replaced the tabernacle.

Perhaps the break in the allotment proceedings, plus the ever-present Canaanite intimidation, influenced the leaders of the remaining tribes to delay distributing the rest of the land. Joshua had to scold them for procrastinating ("How long will you put off entering to take possession . . .?" v. 3). He then appointed a special group of men, three from each of the seven remaining tribes, to act as a surveying crew. These men studied and surveyed the land, and divided it into seven parts ("You shall describe the land in seven divisions"). This may be the earliest instance of land surveying on record.²⁷² This may have been the same method they used to determine the earlier allotments, though the writer did not state this in the text. The casting of lots proceeded when this work was complete (v. 10), to determine which of the seven allotments each tribe would inherit. This evidently took place at the tabernacle (i.e., "before the LORD," v. 6).

"For the Christian, the establishment of a sanctuary and centre at Shiloh testifies to how God fulfils his promises. God has given his people the blessing of his presence among them. They must respond in obedience by occupying the land and living according to the divine covenant. The fundamental importance of the sanctuary is illustrated by its central position among the tribes (in the central hill country) and by its position in the midst of the allotments of Joshua 13—21. Christians are also called upon to see the worship of God as central to their lives. As with the

²⁷¹See Israel Finkelstein, "Shiloh Yields Some, But Not All, of Its Secrets," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 12:1 (January-February 1986):22-41. See also Finegan, pp. 174-75.

²⁷²See Bush, p. 174.

gatherings at the Shiloh sanctuary so regular meetings for worship are a chief means to provide unity and common encouragement for faithful living (Heb. 10:25)."²⁷³

6. The inheritance of the remaining tribes 18:11—19:51

First, the two and one-half tribes east of the Jordan had, years earlier, received their land. Then Judah, the primary recipient of Jacob's patriarchal blessing, and Joseph, the recipient of Jacob's patriarchal birthright, had just received their allotments (chs. 15—17). Finally, the remaining seven tribes would now receive their inheritances in the land.

The inheritance of Benjamin 18:11-28

Benjamin shared its territorial boundaries (vv. 11-20) with Judah, on the south, and Ephraim on the north. The Jordan River formed Benjamin's eastern border. On the west side, about halfway to the Mediterranean Sea, Israel's leaders drew a border separating Benjamin from Dan.

The towns of Benjamin (vv. 21-28) fell into two groups. Twelve towns stood in the eastern part of the territory (vv. 21-24), and 14 in the western (vv. 25-28).

The inheritance of Simeon 19:1-9

Simeon's lot fell within the southern portion of Judah's inheritance, because Judah's portion proved to be "too large" for it to manage (v. 9). Simeon received certain towns within Judah's territory. In this manner, God fulfilled Jacob's prediction, at least initially, that Simeon would experience *dispersion* ("I will disperse them . . . I will scatter them"; Gen. 49:5-7).

The Simeonites received two groups of towns (vv. 2-8). The first group consisted of 13 towns in the Negev (vv. 2-6). The second group included four towns: two in the Negev, and two in the Shephelah (v. 7). The names of these Simeonite towns are also included in Judah's inheritance list of cities and towns (25:26-32, 42).

The inheritance of Zebulun 19:10-16

Zebulun's territory lay north of the plain of Jezreel, that marked Manasseh's northern border, and southwest of the hills of Naphtali. On the northwest, its neighbor was Asher, and on the southeast, Issachar. Zebulun's land was very fertile. Zebulun received 12 towns, though the writer identified only five here (v. 15). Probably some of the towns in verses 10-14 were the other seven towns belonging to Zebulun, but which ones is not known.

²⁷³Hess, p. 264.

The inheritance of Issachar 19:17-23

The writer did not give the boundaries of Issachar in as much detail as the preceding tribes. The Jordan River on the east, the borders of Manasseh on its south and southwest, Zebulun on its northwest, and Naphtali on its north, prescribed its territory. Issachar received 16 towns (vv. 18-22).

The inheritance of Asher 19:24-31

Asher's territory stretched along the Mediterranean coastline, from where the Carmel mountain range meets the Plain of Sharon, northward to the northern border of Canaan. The Phoenicians lived north of Asher on this coast. Asher's neighbor on the southeast was Zebulun, and on the east it was Naphtali. The writer mentioned 22 towns, but recorded the names of only a few (v. 30).

The inheritance of Naphtali 19:32-39

The Sea of Chinnereth (Galilee), combined with the Jordan River north of that lake, formed Naphtali's eastern border. Naphtali's territory extended north up to Phoenician territory. Naphtali shared borders on the west with Asher, on the southwest with Zebulun, and on the south with Issachar. Nineteen fortified cities belonged to this tribe (vv. 35-38).

The inheritance of Dan 19:40-48

Dan received territory primarily in the Shephelah and Coastal Plain—west of Benjamin, and between Judah and Ephraim. Its land was extremely fruitful.

"The Amorites, who settled portions of the Philistine plain (Judg. 1:34), drove the Danites out of the plains and into the hills. This led to a migration of part of the tribe of Dan northward to Leshem near the northern part of Naphtali (cf. Judg. 17-18)."²⁷⁴

Dan possessed 19 towns (vv. 41-47). The record of the conquest of "Leshem" (v. 47, also called "Laish" and later "Dan") is in Judges 18.²⁷⁵

The inheritance of Joshua 19:49-50

Like Caleb, Joshua received *a city*, "Timnath-serah" (called "Timnath-heres" in Judg. 2:9), within his tribal allotment of Ephraim, for being faithful to God.

"Caleb and Joshua were the two faithful spies who believed God was able to give Israel the land (Num 14:6-9, 30). The receiving of their inheritances frames the story of the dividing of the land among the nine and a half tribes, with Caleb's at the beginning [14:6-15] and Joshua's at

²⁷⁴Davis and Whitcomb, p. 83.

²⁷⁵See John C. H. Laughlin, "Dan," *Biblical Illustrator* 9:4 (Summer 1983):40-46.

the end. Caleb and Joshua are living examples of God's faithfulness in fulfilling his promises made more than forty years earlier."²⁷⁶

The conclusion of the allotment 19:51

Israel's leaders completed this division of the land at Shiloh, the new location of the tabernacle.

"The gift of the land brought blessings not only to the nation as a whole and to the individual tribes. It also brought blessing to the faithful leader. God commanded Israel to reward the individual for his faithfulness. Thus the Deuteronomic understanding of blessing and curse is expressed not only on the corporate, but also on the individual level. This, too, stands as a source of encouragement to Israel through the years as many of her people become dispersed from the main body of the people of God."²⁷⁷

Readers of this section of the text (chs. 14—19) will notice that the writer gave much more space to the first five tribes he described, but progressively less attention to the remaining seven tribes. There seems to be several reasons for this:

First, he gave the tribes of Judah and Joseph special attention, because Judah and Joseph received Jacob's *blessing* and *birthright*, respectively. This made them the preeminent tribes among the others.

Second, Judah and Joseph, because of their special blessing or birthright status, became more significant in the *history* of Israel, as the nation matured, so the historical importance of their territories was greater than that of less influential tribes. Benjamin, likewise, became quite important, and this is probably a reason the writer gave this territory some attention.

Third, the writer clearly did not intend that the listing of tribal boundaries and towns should be complete. His record of the allotment that each tribe received, considering all the tribes together, seems intended more to stress the *faithfulness of God in giving Israel what He had promised*. This purpose is especially clear in the listing of Simeon's towns.

Similarly, Moses chose only selected laws to record, in Exodus through Deuteronomy, in order to make certain impressions on the reader—not that these were the only laws that God gave His people.

D. THE SPECIAL CITIES CHS. 20:1—21:42

God also set aside special cities for special purposes within the Promised Land.

²⁷⁶Madvig, p. 324.

²⁷⁷Butler, p. 208.

1. The cities of refuge ch. 20

At this time, the tribal leaders formally designated the six cities of refuge, about which Moses had received instructions (Num. 35). Three stood west of the Jordan: "Kadesh (or Kedesh) in . . . Naphtali," "Shechem in . . . Manasseh," and "Hebron (formerly Kiriath-arba) in Judah" (v. 7). Three more were east of the Jordan: "Bezer in . . . Reuben," "Ramoth in . . . Gad," and "Golan in . . . Manasseh" (v. 8). Their placement meant that no Israelite would have to travel far to reach one of them.²⁷⁸

"The Christian community must take seriously its responsibility to examine penal institutions and practices and seek to find the ways God would lead us to reform such practices. The innocent man should not suffer unduly and the guilty man should be given sufficient protection and hope for new opportunities as well as sufficient punishment."²⁷⁹

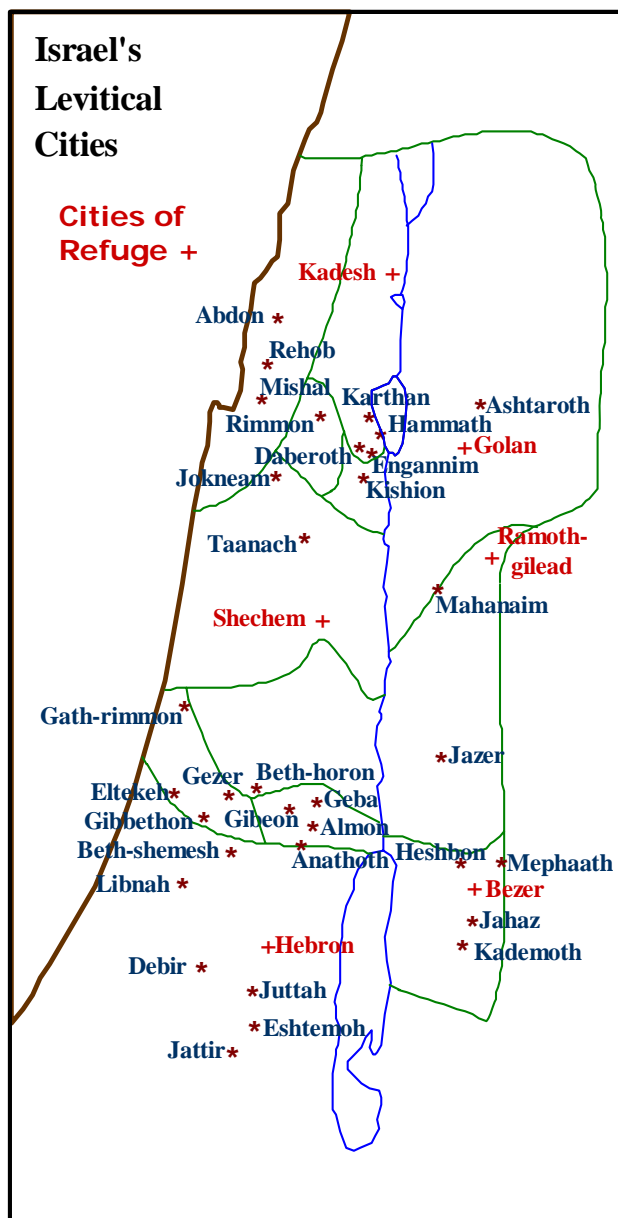
"The cities of refuge . . . seem to typify Christ to whom sinners, pursued by the avenging Law which decrees judgment and death, may flee for refuge."²⁸⁰

2. The cities of the Levites 21:1-42

The tribes also had to set aside 42 additional cities for the priests and Levites to inhabit (cf. Num. 35:1-8).

The casting of lots 21:1-8

Probably Joshua, Eleazar, and the tribal clan leaders identified the 42 towns first, and then assigned the four clan groups of Levites to particular cities by lot (vv. 3-4). The priests, or Aaronic "Kohathites" (Aaron's descendants), received "13 cities" within the



²⁷⁸See my notes on Numbers 35:9-34 for further explanation of the cities of refuge.

²⁷⁹Butler, p. 218.

²⁸⁰Campbell, "Joshua," p. 363.

tribal territories of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin (v. 4). The "rest of the Kohathites"—Aaron was a descendant of Kohath—obtained "10 cities" in Ephraim, Dan, and western Manasseh (v. 5). The "Gershonites" received "13 cities" in Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and eastern Manasseh (v. 6). The "Merarites" inherited "12 cities" in Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun (v. 7). The names of these Levitical towns appear in the following verses (vv. 9-40).

The priests' towns 21:9-19

The Lord spread out the priests' 13 towns as follows: nine were in Judah and Simeon (vv. 9-16), and four were in Benjamin (vv. 17-19). The Aaronic priests' inheritance included one city of refuge: "Hebron" from the tribe of Judah.

The other Kohathites' towns 21:20-26

There were 10 of these towns: four in Ephraim (vv. 21-22), four in Dan (vv. 23-24), and two in western Manasseh (v. 25). The non-Aaronic priests' inheritance included one city of refuge: "Shechem" from the tribe of Ephraim.

The Gershonites' towns 21:27-33

The Gershonites occupied 13 towns: two in eastern Manasseh (v. 27), four in Issachar (vv. 28-29), four in Asher (vv. 30-31), and three in Naphtali (v. 32). The Gershonites' inheritance included two cities of refuge: "Golan" in Bashan from the tribe of Manasseh, and "Kedesh" in Galilee from the tribe of Naphtali.

The Merarites' towns 21:34-42

There were 12 towns in which the Merarites resided: four in Zebulun (vv. 34-35), four in Reuben (vv. 36-37), and four in Gad (vv. 38-39). The Merarites' inheritance included two cities of refuge: "Bezer" from the tribe of Reuben, and "Ramoth" in Gilead from the tribe of Gad.

In all, the Levites received 48 cities with their surrounding pasturelands, including the six cities of refuge (vv. 41-42). God arranged the distribution of the 48 Levitical towns in such a way that the Levites, whose responsibilities included the teaching and counseling of the other Israelites in the Law, were not far from anyone in Israel. They needed to be able to provide a positive spiritual influence on the whole nation, and thereby fulfill their divine function.²⁸¹

"For Christians, the allotment of Levitical towns from each tribe illustrates the principle of returning to God a portion of what has been given to them. These gifts are then used to support others in need and to encourage the

²⁸¹See Jacob Milgrom, "The Levitical Town: An Exercise in Realistic Planning," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33:1-2 (Spring-Autumn 1982):185-88; and B. S. J. Isserlin, "Israelite Architectural Planning and the Question of the Level of Secular Learning in Ancient Israel," *Vetus Testamentum* 34:2 (April 1984):169-78.

proclamation of the faith (cf. Acts 2:44-47; Rom. 15:26-27; Phil. 4:10-18)."²⁸²

"Take special care of the poor clergy! This is the theme of the complex formed by Num 35 and Josh 21, along with the relevant Deuteronomic laws."²⁸³

E. THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD 21:43-45

These verses conclude the account of the division of the land proper (chs. 13—21; cf. 1:2-6; 11:23). They bind the two parts of the second half of the book together, and they form a theological conclusion to the entire book up to this point. Some interpreters regard this passage as the key passage in the book, since it emphasizes the theme of God's faithfulness in keeping His promises to Joshua (cf. 1:5-9; Ps. 44:2-3).²⁸⁴

These statements may seem at first to mean that at this time the Israelites had obtained everything God had promised the patriarchs. Such was not the case.

"Notwithstanding the fact that many a tract of country still remained in the hands of the Canaanites, the promise that the land of Canaan should be given to the house of Israel for a possession had been fulfilled; for God had not promised the immediate and total destruction of the Canaanites, but only their gradual extermination (Ex. xxiii. 29, 30; Deut. vii. 22). And even though the Israelites never came into undisputed possession of the whole of the promised land, to the full extent of the boundaries laid down in Num. xxxiv. 1-2, never conquering Tyre and Sidon for example, the promises of God were no more broken on that account than they were through the circumstance, that after the death of Joshua and the elders his contemporaries, Israel was sometimes hard pressed by the Canaanites; since the complete fulfillment of this promise was inseparably connected with the fidelity of Israel to the Lord."²⁸⁵

"The Canaanites, it is true, were yet in possession of some parts of the country, but they were so far subdued, that they gave them [the Israelites] no serious molestation, and they were enabled to sit down in their possessions in the enjoyment of comparative rest and quiet. They had as much of the land in actual possession as they could occupy; and as they increased God enabled them, according to his promise, Ex. 23.30, to carry forward the work of extermination, and obtain further room for their settlement. All the assurances given to Joshua, ch. 1.5, of a successful tide of victories during his life, were accomplished, and as to the subsequent annoyance and occasional prevalence of their enemies, it was owing solely

²⁸²Hess, p. 281.

²⁸³Butler, p. 232.

²⁸⁴E.g., Rea, p. 227.

²⁸⁵Keil and Delitzsch, p. 216.

to the supineness and infidelity of Israel. So long as they were obedient, they were uniformly triumphant and prosperous."²⁸⁶

In 23:5, Joshua indicated that there was more land that the Israelites needed to possess. In 24:1-28, he urged the people to commit themselves anew to the Mosaic Covenant, so they might possess and experience all that God had promised their forefathers. These passages confirm that Joshua did not mean, by his statement of God's faithfulness here, that Israel had already possessed all that God had promised her forefathers.

"The meaning of the Deuteronomist's rest theology is clearly seen here [in v. 44]. Rest is peace, absence of enemies and war. See Josh 1:12-18. The verse is a counterpart to chap. 12, which concluded the first section of the book. It is the fulfillment of God's promise in Exod 33:14. Both major sections of the book thus end with a statement about God's faithfulness in totally defeating the enemy."²⁸⁷

The point Joshua was making, in verse 45, was that God had been *faithful* to His "promises" up to that moment. He had promised *possession of* "the land," "rest on every side," and *victory over* enemies ("I will drive out your enemies from before you"). Israel had experienced all of these to some degree. God had been faithful to the "good promises" He had made to them seven years before, when they had prepared to cross the Jordan (1:1-9). But there was still much promised land to be possessed (23:4-5).

It was common among the Semites to regard a part of the whole as the whole (cf. Deut. 26:5-10; 1 Kings 13:32; Jer. 31:5; 2 Sam. 5:6-10; Rev. 14:1; 22:2; Rom. 15:19-24). The name for this viewpoint is "representative universalism." Some students of this passage believe that Joshua was taking this view here. He was speaking in universal terms. He regarded the individual kings, towns, and areas that he had subdued—as representative of the entire land of Canaan.²⁸⁸

"The small section summarizes the theological point of the book of Joshua. The entire book is to be read in light of these three verses, particularly the last."²⁸⁹

III. JOSHUA'S LAST ACTS AND DEATH CHS. 22—24

The main part of the second half of the Book of Joshua, dealing with the division of the land, ended with the appointment of the Levitical cities (chs. 13—21). The rest of the book deals with settlement in the land (chs. 22—24). There is much emphasis in these

²⁸⁶Bush, p. 189. See also Campbell, "Joshua," pp. 364-65.

²⁸⁷Butler, p. 235.

²⁸⁸For development of this very helpful insight, see A. J. Mattill Jr., "Representative Universalism and the Conquest of Canaan," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 35:1 (1967):8-17. For a short history of the control of Palestine since the time of Christ through 1986, see Ronald Stockton, "Possessing the Land: a chronology of events in the dispute over Palestine," *Christianity Today*, April 18, 1986, p. 19.

²⁸⁹Butler, p. 236.

chapters on the importance of remaining faithful to God (22:5, 16, 18-19, 25, 29, 31; 23:6, 8, 11; 24:14-16, 18, 21, 23-24). This emphasis grows out of the record of God's faithfulness, that 21:43-45 affirmed.

"Each of the final three chapters describes a single event. At first glance, these events seem to be a random collection of leftovers: a dispute between the tribes about an altar, a farewell address, and another covenant ceremony. However, upon closer examination it becomes apparent that they all focus on a single matter, the proper worship of Israel's God—how to offer it and what will happen if Israel does not do so."²⁹⁰

A. THE RETURN OF THE TWO AND ONE-HALF TRIBES TO THEIR INHERITANCES

CH. 22

Joshua's preparations for the conquest of Canaan began much earlier, with his summoning of the two and one-half tribes to join their brethren, in order to help them in the battles ahead (1:12-18). Now Joshua dismissed the two and a half tribes, and allowed them to return to their tribal land-inheritances east of the Jordan River. This ended the task of conquering and dividing the land.

22:1-8 Joshua commended these Israelites for their faithfulness to their promise to go to war with their brothers ("You have kept all that Moses . . . commanded you . . . You have not forsaken your brothers"; vv. 2-3; cf. 1:16-18). He also charged them to remain faithful to the Mosaic Law ("be careful to observe . . . the law which Moses . . . commanded you, to love the LORD . . . and hold fast to Him and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul"; v. 5). Obedience included complete devotion to Yahweh.

"This [v. 5] is the key verse in this chapter. It is another statement of the theme of the book that the people must be faithful to the Lord and obey his laws if they wish to be blessed and live in the land."²⁹¹

Joshua then dismissed these Israelites with his blessing (vv. 6-8).

22:9-12 The writer used the terms "the land of Canaan" and "the land of Gilead" to refer to the lands west and east of the Jordan River, respectively, in this section, called "Cisjordan" and "Transjordan" in the notes. The altar, then, stood on the west side of the Jordan.

These tribes evidently intended the altar they built to be a *replica* of the brazen altar in the tabernacle courtyard at Shiloh ("a copy"; cf. v. 28). If they did, it is easy to understand why the other tribes reacted to its

²⁹⁰Hess, p. 287.

²⁹¹Madvig, p. 355.

construction so violently, since they perceived it to be some kind of idol, or at least an unauthorized altar for unauthorized worship. God had prohibited the building of altars in the land apart from the ones He ordained (Deut. 12:1-14).²⁹² The Canaanites built many altars, but this was not to be Israel's practice.

When the other Israelites learned what the two and one-half tribes had done, they prepared to go to "war" against them (v. 12). This was what God had commanded the Israelites to do in the event that any of their brethren should seek to lead others in Israel away from God and His law (Deut. 13:12-18).

22:13-20 To their credit, the main body of Israelites did not impulsively attack and then ask questions later. Instead, the western, Cisjordanian Israelites, sent a delegation of their leading men, to persuade their brethren to take a different course of action.

"A noble example of moderation, forbearance, and charity, shines forth in this conduct. How many an unhappy strife might be prevented by similar precaution, by simply staying to inquire calmly into that which constitutes the avowed matter of offence! How often would a few words of candid explanation smother in embryo the most angry controversies, violent quarrels, and embittered persecutions! By barely adopting the prudent conduct of Israel on this occasion, individuals, families, churches, and communities, might, in a thousand instances, be saved a world of jealousy, enmity, discord, war and bloodshed."²⁹³

"Phinehas" accompanied this group (v. 13). His presence would have impressed the two and one-half tribes with the importance of the delegation. It also would have reminded them of the war with the Midianites, in which Phinehas figured as a prominent person (Num. 25; 31). The Israelites referred to that war here ("the iniquity of Peor"; v. 17). They also mentioned Achan's transgression (v. 20), in order to warn the Gileadite (Transjordanian) tribes that God would punish disobedience to the law. The western Israelites believed that the whole nation would experience God's discipline if this act of rebellion went unpunished ("He will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel").

22:21-29 The leaders of the Gileadites explained that their motive was not to use the altar to promote departure from Yahweh or the tabernacle. It was to memorialize the unity of the 12 tribes for future generations. The Israelites had, of course, erected other memorials for this purpose: in the Jordan

²⁹²Woudstra, p. 320.

²⁹³Bush, p. 194.

River, at Gilgal (ch. 4), and on Mt. Ebal (8:30-35). However, God had not ordered the building of *this altar*, as He had the other monuments. He had, on the other hand, made provision for preserving the unity of the nation, by calling all the males in Israel back to the tabernacle three times each year. He had also done so through the stone memorials and altars that He had ordained.

"The combination of the three names of God—El, the strong one; Elohim, the Supreme Being to be feared; and Jehovah, the truly existing One, the covenant God (ver. 22)—serves to strengthen the invocation of God, as in Ps. 1.1; and this is strengthened still further by the repetition of these three names."²⁹⁴

22:30-34 The Gileadites' explanation relieved and satisfied Phinehas and his companions. They were glad to discover that their brethren were not apostatizing, and that the nation would not therefore fall under God's discipline. So the delegation allowed this altar to remain in place, and apparently felt its presence would do more good than harm.

Probably the Israelites should not have allowed this altar to stand. God had not ordained it. In the future, *other people* would misunderstand its existence—as some had already done. Though there is no record in Scripture that this particular altar became an idolatrous snare to the Israelites, the practice of building altars continued in Israel. It resulted in the weakening of tribal ties and allegiance to Yahweh, rather than strengthening them (e.g., Judg. 17:5).

"What kind of 'witness' was this huge pile of stones? Was it a witness to the unity of the nation and to the obedience of the Transjordanic tribes? No, it was a witness to *expediency*, the wisdom of man in trying to enjoy 'the best of both worlds.' The two and a half tribes talked piously about their children, but it was their wealth that really motivated their decision to live east of the Jordan."²⁹⁵

This incident illustrates the fact that, sometimes, action taken with the best of motives and for worthy purposes, can result in *worse* rather than better conditions. This can be the outcome if people do not clearly understand and carefully obey the *whole revealed will of God*. This kind of mistake often results from enthusiasm over a previous blessing, as was true here.

Nevertheless, the major lessons of this chapter are positive. The *zeal* of the two and one-half tribes for the unity of their nation and the purity of their faith was commendable. The other Israelites' unwillingness to judge their brethren's motive on the basis of circumstantial evidence is also admirable. Furthermore, we have learned that a gentle

²⁹⁴Keil and Delitzsch, p. 220.

²⁹⁵Wiersbe, p. 79.

confrontation, combined with a candid discussion of a problem, can often result in the resolution of the misunderstanding (cf. Prov. 15:1).²⁹⁶ The Israelites dealt wisely with a situation that could have split up the people of God. Fortunately they were able to continue to follow God faithfully and in unity.

B. JOSHUA'S FAREWELL ADDRESS TO THE ISRAELITES CH. 23

Joshua had reached what he believed were the final days of his life. Before he died, he wished to address the whole nation, as Moses had done before his death (Deut. 31). So he assembled all the leaders of the people from every tribe in Israel (v. 2).

Joshua's experiences duplicated those of Moses in several particulars. Both men led the Israelites across a body of water. Both met God in a theophany. Both held out their staffs at a crucial time in battle. Both built altars to the Lord. Both gave farewell addresses to the Israelites that were similar in their content.

"The content [of Joshua's address here] . . . relates to that of a covenant renewal ceremony, but again in a distinctive manner. The liturgy of covenant renewal has become the sermon of a dying leader."²⁹⁷

Compare the Book of Deuteronomy, which features Moses' sermons just before he died. Joshua's address also consists of two parts. The structure of the two parts is parallel, and the contents are similar.

"Unlike other narrative texts, this one has no specific setting in time or space. It simply connects to 13:1, when Joshua was old, and 21:44, when God had given rest. The setting thus marks Israel at the moment she had dreamed of from the Exodus onward (Exod 33:14). But it also marks the crisis of leadership transition. The message which follows is at the same time one for prosperity, and also for crisis."²⁹⁸

1. A reminder of past blessings 23:1-13

Joshua reminded the Israelites of God's continuing faithfulness in fighting for them and giving them victory over their enemies, as He had promised, as long as they kept His covenant with them. Joshua urged the people to remain loyal, and he promised them that God would faithfully "drive out" the Canaanites that still remained in the land (vv. 4-7, 12-13).

"Joshua passed on to Israel the secret of success and prosperity that the Lord had given him at the beginning of the Conquest [1:6-7, 9, 18]. God's promise [concerning *occupation* of the land] was not unconditional; Israel's faithfulness was required."²⁹⁹

²⁹⁶Campbell, *No Time . . .*, p. 131.

²⁹⁷Butler, p. 253.

²⁹⁸Ibid., p. 254.

²⁹⁹Madvig, p. 362.

"To make mention of the names of the idols [v. 7] (Ex. xxiii. 13), to swear by them, to serve them (by sacrifices), and to bow down to them (to invoke them in prayer), are the four outward [false] forms of divine worship."³⁰⁰

"For Israel, Yahweh claimed to fulfill all the functions for which other nations needed a multitude of gods. The problem was that Israel could never really come to believe the claim totally. She constantly sought the favors of the gods who had claimed to give fertility to the land long before Israel entered it or the gods who seemed at the moment to have military power."³⁰¹

"Joshua's one anxiety appears to have been about the nations that were left. Seven times he refers to the nations of the land."³⁰²

Occasionally you may see a monarch butterfly chase a bird. This is very unusual, since birds normally chase and eat butterflies. But God has protected monarch butterflies by giving them a flavor that makes the birds sick. Likewise, He can make His children able to rout their natural enemies—even if they are greatly outnumbered.

The nation *as a whole* had been faithful to God during Joshua's administration. Therefore he did not mention individual sins and failures here. Joshua, like Moses, instructed the people to "love" Yahweh as well as obey Him (v. 11). He also reminded his hearers of the dire consequences of failing to obey God out of love ("If you ever go back and cling to . . . these nations . . . God will not continue to drive these nations out . . . they will be a snare and a trap . . . a whip . . . and thorns . . . until you perish"; vv. 12-13).

"If Israel does not do her part, then God will not do his. Here is the danger of freedom. God seeks man's free response of love. God does his part to deserve and receive such love. God does not force his attentions upon man. But the man who ignores God's claims finds God's punishment."³⁰³

Joshua's generation was probably the most faithful in all the history of Israel.

2. A warning of possible future cursing 23:14-16

In this summary section, Joshua concisely restated the main ideas previously expressed in more detail. His warning to the people was strong. God would be just as "faithful" in sending *discipline* on His people, if they transgressed His covenant in the future, as He had been in sending *blessing* because they had been obedient in the past.

³⁰⁰Keil and Delitzsch, p. 224.

³⁰¹Butler, p. 255.

³⁰²Meyer, p. 194.

³⁰³Ibid., p. 256.

The initial success of the conquest had been due to God's blessings on His *obedient* people. The complete extermination of the Canaanites, and the Israelites' full possession and enjoyment of the land, would require the same obedience and blessing.

The motive for obedience should be *gratitude*. Our *present* obedience, loyalty, and love (vv. 6, 8, 11) should spring naturally, from appreciation for God's faithfulness in the *past*, as well as from confidence in His promises for the *future*.

C. ISRAEL'S SECOND RENEWAL OF THE COVENANT 24:1-28

"Joshua did not merely settle for a series of public admonitions in order to guide Israel after his death. The twenty-fourth chapter describes a formal covenant renewal enacted at the site of Shechem [cf. ch. 8] for the purpose of getting a binding commitment on the part of the people of Israel to the written Word of God."³⁰⁴

The structure of this covenant renewal speech is similar to the typical Hittite suzerainty treaty. It includes a preamble (vv. 1-2a), historical prologue (vv. 2b-13), stipulations for the vassals with the consequences of disobedience (vv. 14-24), and the writing of the agreement (vv. 25-28).

"Joshua 24 completes the book by giving the theological definition of the people of God. Here we suddenly find highly loaded theological language, defining God and the God-man relationship. This makes the chapter one of the most important chapters in the OT for biblical theologians."³⁰⁵

1. Preamble 24:1

"Shechem" was a strategic location for this important ceremony. Joshua now called on the Israelites to formally renew their commitment to the Mosaic Covenant, at such a historical site that it was very motivating to them to do so.

"If you were to put Plymouth Rock and Yorktown and Lexington and Independence Hall together, you would not have what Shechem is to Israel."³⁰⁶

It was at Shechem, that God had first appeared to Abraham when he had entered the land, and where He promised to give him the land of Canaan. In response to that promise, Abraham built his first altar to Yahweh there in the land (Gen. 12:7). Jacob buried his idols at Shechem, after returning to the Promised Land from Paddan-aram. He made this his home, and built an altar to Yahweh there (Gen. 33:18-20); later God moved him to Bethel (Gen. 35:1-4), where he built another altar.

³⁰⁴Davis and Whitcomb, pp. 87-88.

³⁰⁵Butler, p. 278.

³⁰⁶Clarence Macartney, *The Greatest Texts of the Bible*, pp. 74-75.

"As Jacob selected Shechem for the sanctification of his house, because this place was already consecrated by Abraham as a sanctuary of God, so Joshua chose the same place for the renewal of the covenant, because this act involved a practical renunciation on the part of Israel of all idolatry."³⁰⁷

It was also at Shechem, that the same generation of Israelites which Joshua now addressed, had pledged itself to the Mosaic Covenant shortly after they had entered the land (8:30-35). They themselves had also built an altar at this place.

"For the Christian, regular presentation before God in worship is an essential feature of a life of faith (Heb. 10:25)."³⁰⁸

2. Historical prologue 24:2-13

Joshua introduced what follows as the words of Yahweh, Israel's God ("Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel"; v. 2). Then he proceeded to review God's great acts on behalf of His people, going back to the call of "Abraham" (Abram) in Mesopotamia.

The "River" (v. 2) is the Euphrates River. Abraham's family members were idolaters in Mesopotamia ("they served other gods"), and we may safely assume that Abram was one, too.

"The words of this verse are used in the Passover celebration of the Jews all over the world today."³⁰⁹

God's call of Abraham (Abram) was purely of grace ("I took your father Abraham . . . and multiplied his descendants"; v. 3); there was nothing in Abraham that resulted in God choosing him for special blessing. Joshua probably mentioned "Nahor" because Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel descended from him. Two of the nations that had come from Abraham were *Israel* and *Edom* ("Jacob" and "Esau"; v. 4).

The Exodus was a second great proof of God's grace to Israel (vv. 5-7). The provision of "Moses" and "Aaron," as well as the sending of the plagues, were special "gifts" for His people to set them free from Egyptian slavery. Israel's deliverance from Egypt, including the Red Sea crossing and the drowning of Pharaoh's army, as well as her preservation in the wilderness, were also highlights of God's faithfulness during this period of Israel's history.

God's third great act for Israel was the Israelites' victory over the "Amorites" east of the Jordan (vv. 8-10). During that time, God also frustrated Moab's (King Balak's) hostility toward God's people by turning Balaam's "curse" oracles into *blessings* ("he had to bless you").

³⁰⁷Keil and Delitzsch, pp. 226-27.

³⁰⁸Hess, p. 300.

³⁰⁹*The Nelson . . .*, p. 393.

The fourth divine provision was the crossing of the Jordan River and the consequent victory over the Canaanites (vv. 11-13). God probably routed Israel's enemies for her by using various *hornet-like* terrors (v. 12; cf. Exod. 23:28; Deut. 7:20), perhaps even the terrifying news of Israel's previous conquests.³¹⁰ Other views are that the *Pharaoh of Egypt*—whose symbols included a "bee" or "hornet"—is in view, or perhaps *literal* "hornets."³¹¹

In this section of verses (vv. 2-13), God said 17 times "I" *did such and such for* "you." The emphasis is clearly on God's great acts for Israel (cf. Deut. 6:10-11).

3. Covenant stipulations 24:14-24

On the basis of God's great acts for them (vv. 2-13—"Now, therefore, . . ."; v. 14), Joshua appealed to the Israelites to commit themselves to Him anew ("Fear the LORD and serve Him"; cf. Rom. 12:1-2). Though Israel was not *as* guilty of idolatry at this stage in her history as she was later, this sin existed in the nation to some degree ("put away the gods"; cf. Lev. 17:7).

Joshua's offer to "choose" which "gods" they would serve ("the gods which your fathers served beyond the River . . . or the gods of the Amorites"; v. 15) was not, of course, an encouragement to consider the idols as an equally acceptable option. It was simply an oratorical device (i.e., polarization) to help the Israelites distinguish their choices, and to make the right alternative more obvious. As a true leader, Joshua announced *his* commitment and choice, and in so doing, he encouraged the people to follow his example.

"So we find throughout the entire book of Joshua an emphasis on choice—choice that makes a tremendous difference in history, for individuals, for groups, for future generations."³¹²

The people responded by committing themselves to Yahweh ("We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God"; vv. 16-18). They were committing themselves, at least vocally, to join Joshua in serving the Lord. Joshua did not want the people to make a superficial decision, however.

"The great need of most Christians is to learn that in themselves they simply *cannot* be the people God wants them to be."³¹³

Therefore Joshua reminded them of the difficulties involved in following the Lord (vv. 19-20). They would "not be able to serve the Lord" (v. 19) *in their own strength*, simply by determining to do so using their willpower (cf. Exod. 19:8). They would always have to remember that their God was "holy" and "jealous" (i.e., allowing no rival god in His peoples' affections). He would "not forgive your transgressions or your sins" (v. 19).

³¹⁰Wiersbe, pp. 84-85.

³¹¹*The Nelson . . .*, p. 394.

³¹²Schaeffer, p. 213.

³¹³Jacobsen, p. 114.

"When does God not spare (forgive)? (1) When transgression and sin is wilfully [*sic*] committed, and when (2) forgiveness would, as He foresees, lead to no amendment."³¹⁴

The people confirmed their earlier decision ("we will serve the LORD"; v. 21), and Joshua reminded them that they were "witnesses against [themselves]" in the renewal of this covenant (v. 22). They would therefore condemn themselves—by their own sworn testimony that day—if they ever forsook the LORD.

Joshua then repeated his command to "put away" all idols ("foreign gods"), physical and mental, and to "turn (incline) [their] hearts" to follow Yahweh exclusively (v. 23). Again, now for the third time, the Israelites committed themselves to follow the LORD *faithfully* ("We will serve the LORD our God and *we will obey His voice*" (emphasis added); v. 24).

As Israel's history proceeded, the Israelites proved unfaithful to their promise to serve and obey the Lord wholeheartedly, as the following books of the Old Testament document. They should have learned from their parents' past failure to follow the Lord faithfully. Their fathers had made the same promises when God gave them the Mosaic Law (Exod. 24:3, 7), but they had proved unfaithful at Mt. Sinai and in the wilderness.

4. Provisions for the preservation of the covenant 24:25-28

The "covenant" that Joshua made with the people on this day was not a brand new one, but another *renewal* of the "Mosaic Covenant," which was made for the first time at Mt. Sinai (v. 25). The Israelites had renewed this covenant, from time to time, after God first gave it (cf. 8:30-35). The "statute" Joshua made was the *written commitment* of the people to obey the Law ("Joshua wrote these words . . ."; v. 26). The "ordinance" (right) was the *written record* of the blessings Israel would enjoy as the fruits of her obedience.

The "book of the law of God" (v. 26) appears to have been the document in which Joshua wrote the record of this renewal of the covenant. He evidently placed it with the previously written covenant itself.³¹⁵ The "large stone" (v. 26) he erected became a permanent memorial of, and monument to, the renewal of the covenant undertaken this day (cf. Gen. 28:18; Deut. 27:2). Joshua set up the stone under "the oak" that was the same tree as, or one that represented, the oak under which Abraham had built his altar and worshipped Yahweh. Jacob had buried his idols under an oak tree in Shechem, perhaps the same one ("the oak [*terebinth*] of Moreh"; Gen. 12:6-7; 35:2-4). "The sanctuary" (v. 26) in this verse was *this* unique memorial "holy place," not the tabernacle that was then at Shiloh.

The memorial "stone" itself had not *literally* "heard all" that had taken place that day ("heard all the words . . . spoken"; v. 27), but it would remain in the same place from then on, as a *silent* "witness" to the proceedings. Joshua here rhetorically ascribed *human* characteristics to "the stone" (i.e., personification: it "heard all the words")—in order to

³¹⁴J. P. Lange, ed., *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, 2:187.

³¹⁵Cf. Merrill, "Joshua," p. 177.

reinforce the seriousness of the commitment the Israelites had made to Yahweh. He then "dismissed" the nation (v. 28).

"A large standing stone that dates to the Late Bronze Age (that is, roughly the time represented in this story) has been found at Shechem, and is possibly the stone mentioned here."³¹⁶

This ceremony was very important to the Israelites because *in it*, the whole nation reaffirmed its commitment to **Yahweh** as *their God* and to **His covenant** as *their law*. Israel now prepared to begin another phase of her national existence—but this time *without a God-appointed leader*, such as Moses and Joshua had been. It was important that Israel remember the *faithfulness* of her God, and that she rededicate herself to exclusive allegiance to Him.

Each tribe was to proceed now to exterminate the Canaanites in its own inheritance territory, trusting in Yahweh and obeying His covenant. God would raise up local tribal leaders (called "judges"), as He saw the particular need for these, to provide special leadership in difficult situations. Committed as the Israelites were to their God, at this time, there was no reason they should fail to possess and experience all God had promised them in the years ahead.

NINE MEMORIAL CAIRNS IN JOSHUA	
The stones in the middle of the Jordan River	4:9
The stones on the western bank of the Jordan River	4:20-24
The stones in the Valley of Achor	7:26
The heap of stones at Ai	8:29
The altar on Mt. Ebal	8:30
The stones of the Law on Mt. Ebal	8:32
The stones at the cave at Makkedah	10:27
The altar built by the Transjordanian tribes	22:10
Joshua's stone of witness	24:26-28

D. THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF JOSHUA AND ELEAZAR 24:29-33

These final verses record the end of Joshua's life and ministry, that terminated an important and successful era in Israel's history. Israel's success continued as long as the elders, who had served Israel and Israel's God, contemporaneously with Joshua, lived (v. 31).

³¹⁶*The Nelson . . .*, p. 395.

Joshua died shortly after the renewal of the covenant just described (vv. 1-28). He was "110 years old" (v. 29), the same age as Joseph when he died (Gen. 50:26). Joshua evidently died about 1366 B.C.,³¹⁷ though Josephus wrote that he served as Israel's commander for 25 years after Moses' death.³¹⁸ God had greatly used Joshua, just as greatly as He had used Joseph, in delivering His people. God recorded zero moral blemishes in the lives of these two remarkable men in Scripture.

"Perhaps the outstanding characteristic of the man Joshua was his unqualified courage. . . . The real success of Joshua, however, probably lies in the fact that he was a Spirit-filled man (Num. 27:18; cf. Deut. 34:9)."³¹⁹

"Joshua's epitaph was not written on a marble gravestone. It was written in the lives of the leaders he influenced and the people he led. They served Yahweh. Here is the theological climax to the theme introduced in 22:5 and repeated like a chorus in 23:7, 16; 24:14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24. Ironically, the minister of Moses brought the people to obey Yahweh, while Moses saw only the perpetual murmuring and rebellion of the people (cf. Deut 31:27). Even Moses had to die outside the Land of Promise."³²⁰

Evidently the writer included the record of the burial of Joseph's bones here ("they buried the bones of Joseph . . . at Shechem"; v. 32), because the Book of Joshua is a remarkable testimony to the faithfulness of God. Joseph had counted on God's faithfulness in bringing the Israelites into the land, and had requested that, when that took place, his descendants would "lay (carry) [his] bones" to rest there. The burial of Joseph's bones may have taken place earlier, when Joseph's descendants received Shechem as their inheritance. This *burial* fulfilled the promise that Joseph's heirs had made to him before he died, that they would bury him in Canaan ("you shall carry my bones up [to Canaan] from here [Egypt]"; Gen. 50:25). God was now rewarding Joseph's faith.

Eleazar's death and burial were also significant because, as Israel's high priest and co-leader with Joshua, during this recent period of history, Eleazar was a very important person. As Israel's *high priest*, he was more important than the brief references to his ministry might suggest.

"Three burials—it seems a strange way to end the Book of Joshua! But these three peaceful graves testify to the faithfulness of God, for Joshua, Joseph, and Eleazar once lived in a foreign nation where they were the recipients of God's promise to take His people back to Canaan. Now all three were at rest *within* the borders of the Promised Land. God kept His

³¹⁷Merrill, *Kingdom of . . .*, p. 147.

³¹⁸Josephus, 5:1:29.

³¹⁹Davis and Whitcomb, p. 25.

³²⁰Butler, p. 283.

word to Joshua, Joseph, Eleazar—and to all Israel. And by this we are encouraged to count on the unfailing faithfulness of God."³²¹

Thus the era of Joshua came to a close. This period of Israel's history was its greatest so far. This generation of Israelites had followed the Lord more faithfully than their fathers, though not completely, "100 percent" faithfully. Consequently they experienced God's blessing more greatly than the previous generation, or the many generations that followed theirs, did.

"After Joshua, the history of Israel goes downhill [until David]. Joshua 24 thus marks the high point of Israel's history, the full realization of her identity as people of God."³²²

³²¹Campbell, *No Time . . .*, p. 142.

³²²Butler, p. 269.

Conclusion

The Book of Joshua demonstrates that God is perpetually at war with sin. He hates it and will judge it, not only because it is an offense to His character, but because it destroys the people He created for fellowship with Himself.

Joshua is a very positive book. It is a book of victory, success, and progress, and it teaches the reasons for these blessings. God had chosen the Israelites, by His grace, to receive blessing from His hand, and to be a blessing to many other people. As Israel anticipated entering into what God had for her, she possessed special promises from God. God had promised them His presence (1:5; cf. Matt. 28:20) and His power (1:5; cf. 2 Cor. 12:9). To the extent that they accepted His standard of holiness, abandoned themselves to His will, and acknowledged His might, they succeeded. To the extent that they committed themselves to the person and covenant of Yahweh, they prospered.

"So the book of Joshua is a wonderful book of success, with little record of suffering by God's people, because they were obeying the Lord. However, the few incidents of lack of complete obedience mentioned above [i.e., Achan, and the Gibeonites] show that full blessing by all requires full obedience by all."³²³

The perennial principles of victory, revealed and illustrated in the Book of Joshua for all who seriously study its text, still apply to all who are God's people.

"The practical message of the Book of Joshua is that God keeps His promises and enables His servants to succeed if they will trust Him and obey His Word."³²⁴

³²³Stephen J. Bramer, "Suffering in the Historical Books," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and the Church*, pp. 102-3.

³²⁴Wiersbe, p. 90.

Appendix

A MODERN GEOGRAPHICAL HISTORY OF PALESTINE

Before 1948, Palestine was under the control of the British Empire and was administered under the so-called British Mandate. In 1948, the United Nations created the State of Israel. In 1967, Israel won the Six-Day War, which took place June 5 - 10, 1967. Israel fought this war on three fronts simultaneously: against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. Victory gave Israel the Golan Heights, the West Bank, The Gaza Strip, and the Sinai Peninsula.

The Sinai front was against Egypt and President Nassar. Before the war, Israel's southern border ran from the Gaza Strip to Elat. The Sinai belonged to Egypt. At the end, all of the Sinai Peninsula was in Israel's hands.

The West Bank offensive was against Jordan. For 19 years before the war, Jerusalem had been partitioned (like Berlin under Communism) with Jordan and Israel controlling different parts. Israel did not have access to the Western (Wailing) Wall then. At the end, the West Bank was all under Israel's control as a result of the fighting. Hebron, in the southern part of the West Bank, had been under Jordan's control—but it surrendered without a shot.

The Golan Heights front was against Syria. Syria had dominated the area to the east and north of the Sea of Galilee, all the way to Mt. Hermon, for 20 years. Israel captured it through bitter fighting.

As a result of the Six-Day War, Israel almost quadrupled its land area.

The Yom Kippur War took place October 6 - 24, 1973. Egypt and Syria attacked Israel simultaneously and unexpectedly to regain the Sinai and the Golan Heights.

Egypt attacked the Bar Lev line on the east coast of the Suez Canal and began penetrating into the Sinai, all of which belonged to Israel before 1973. After several days, Israel recovered strength, held Egypt, pushed the Egyptian soldiers back, and even crossed the Suez Canal into Egypt. In other words, Israel lost and then regained the Sinai Peninsula during this war.

Syria penetrated the Golan Heights, but was unable to retake it after hard fighting on both sides. Israel pushed Syria back as far as Damascus. The United Nations Security Council ended this war. Menachem Begin, of Israel, and Anwar Sadat, of Egypt, both claimed victory. Sadat reopened the Suez Canal in June of 1975. At the Camp David Accords in 1978, President Carter led Begin and Sadat in reconciling. Israel and Egypt then split the Sinai between them. Arab extremists assassinated Sadat shortly after this compromise.

During the years since 1973, the Palestinians have increasingly occupied the State of Israel and gained more power. Today it is very dangerous to venture into many of the main towns, particularly in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, because of Arab/Israeli hostilities there. Hebron, Jericho, and Shechem (Nablus) are currently Palestinian strongholds. Egypt controls all of the Sinai Peninsula.

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