

Notes on
Joshua
2003 Edition
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Introduction

TITLE

The name of this book in Hebrew, Greek, and English comes from the principle character in it 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, 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. Joshua is the first book in the first half of the Prophets, 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. We should recognize Joshua, therefore, 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."¹

DATE AND WRITER

The Book of Joshua evidently came into being several years after the events recorded in the book took place. A number of statements point to a time of composition beyond the conquest and perhaps 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; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10) refers to a time considerably after the events referred to happened. How much later is hard to say. These

¹Donald H. Madvig, "Joshua," in *Deuteronomy-2 Samuel*, vol. 3 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 245.

references point to a time of composition many years later than the actual occurrence of the events recorded.²

However the writer claims to have crossed the Jordan River when Israel entered the land (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 have added the account of Joshua's death (24:29-33) to the book later (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.³ Many modern conservative Old Testament scholars believe that he did.⁴ However other good, conservative scholars believe the writer was not Joshua but a contemporary of his, possibly one of the elders of Israel.⁵ Many more scholars are unsure.⁶ 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.

SCOPE

As I have explained previously, the date of the Exodus was about 1446 B.C. (cf. 1 Kings 6:1).⁷ 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.

Josephus said the conquest of the land took five years.⁸ However when Caleb received his town of Hebron he said God had promised that he would enter Canaan 45 years earlier (14:10; cf. Num. 14:24). Since God gave that promise 38 years before Israel crossed the Jordan the conquest seems to 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.

When Caleb said 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.⁹

²See Richard S. Hess, *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary*, pp. 110-11.

³Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p. 252.

⁴E.g., idem; John Davis and John Whitcomb, *A History of Israel* (Davis wrote the section on Joshua), pp. 22-23; George Bush, *Notes on Joshua*, p. viii; et al.

⁵E.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.

⁶E.g., Merrill Unger, *Introductory Guide to the Old Testament*, p. 281; et al.

⁷See my notes on Exodus 12:37-42.

⁸Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 5:1:19.

⁹If these figures are correct, Joshua would have led the Israelites in their battle with the Amelekites just after the Exodus (Exod. 17:8-13) when he was 35 years old. See Thomas L. Constable, "A Theology of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 93, n. 4.

The first half of the book (chs. 1—12) covers about seven years. Most of this material, specifically, chapters 1—9, deals with events that probably happened in less than one full year.

MESSAGE¹⁰

Joshua reveals that God hates sin because He loves people. (This is the message statement.) 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 be peacemakers (Matt. 5:9) how can we justify God's dealings with the Canaanites that this book records?

The righteous side of God's character is, of course, a consistent emphasis throughout Scripture. In the Pentateuch God dealt severely with all those who oppressed the patriarchs and their descendents (cf. Exod. 15:3). In the historical books we find the same thing. 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 destruction by sin and its consequences (cf. Rom. 6:23). If God is not a God of war, then He cannot be a God of love.

We can see God's hatred of sin 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 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.

¹⁰Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 1:1:98-115.

The Canaanites wrote them in the Ugaritic language in cuneiform script. These records reveal that Canaanite culture was extremely immoral and inhumane. The Canaanites practiced prostitution of both sexes, many kinds of sexual perversion, and human sacrifice widely. They were religious practices.

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 to remove a cancer from human society. He was not murdering an innocent primitive people as the 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. Because they did not repent, God used Israel as a broom to sweep away their filth and purify the land. He did not drive the Canaanites out simply to make room for Israel. He did so also to remove this cancerous society and its malignant influence. Israel exercised considerable restraint in dealing with the Canaanites compared with the way some other ancient Near Eastern countries dealt with people 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 her severely. Achan's sin (ch. 7) affected the whole nation. God judged Achan as He did 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 (Acts 17:30-31; 1 Cor. 11:31). God deals more severely with His own people than with others because privilege heightens responsibility.

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 in a day to accomplish His purposes. God rarely works in as direct ways to judge sin today. 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 when God is being patient with sinners (2 Pet. 3:9-10). Nevertheless that day will end, and He will bring judgment on our world 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 foolish to us. Therefore God asks that we simply trust and obey Him. Faith in Joshua means refraining from what

God forbids (e.g., at Ai) as well as doing all that God directs (e.g., at Jericho). 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, successful living. Joshua clarifies three characteristics of faith.

1. 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).

2. 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 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.

3. 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 that He finds usable.

In summary, 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 and 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. They must also acknowledge that victories are the result of His might, not their own.

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Exposition

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

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 stopped.

"'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)."¹¹

Joshua was an Ephraimite (Num. 13:8; 1 Chron. 7:27).

1:2 The nation had mourned Moses' death 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).

1:3 God had promised all the land that the Israelites would tread under foot to the patriarchs and Moses (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 that God promised to Abraham and the other patriarchs (Gen. 15:18; et al.). The writer apparently referred to the Hittites in a representative sense to describe all the Canaanite tribes (as in 1 Kings 10:29; 2 Kings 7:6; Ezek. 16:3).¹²

1:5 Many students of the book have called this the key verse. Here God promised Joshua His unfailing power and presence so that he might be

¹¹Madvig, p. 255.

¹²This 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).

completely successful in subduing the enemy. 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."¹³

- 1:6 God exhorted Joshua on the basis of this promise (v. 5) to be "strong" and "courageous" (cf. Deut. 31:6). The first of these words in Hebrew implies strength in the hands for grasping and holding firmly. The second implies strength in the knees for standing solidly. Ownership of the land depended on God's faithfulness, but occupation of the land depended on Israel's faithfulness (cf. Deut. 30:20).

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.¹⁴

"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)."¹⁵

- 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 (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

¹³Hess, p. 68.

¹⁴Constable, p. 103.

¹⁵Martin H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, p. 61. The same Hebrew word (*nahal* [verb] or *nahala* [noun]) also appears in Deut. 1:38; 12:10; Josh. 11:23; 14:13; 16:4; and 17:6. 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.

conduct. It is in this chiefly that the fortitude of the Christian soldier is to evince itself."¹⁶

- 1:8 Moses had left Israel a written document that the Israelites regarded as authoritative law, namely, the Mosaic Law. The Lord commanded Joshua to keep this Word in mind constantly so he would remember his responsibilities under God and 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 one continually mutters God's Word to himself, he is constantly thinking about it."¹⁷

". . . [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."¹⁸

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."¹⁹

- 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.

Notice the chiasmic structure of God's charge to Joshua.

¹⁶Bush, p. 20.

¹⁷Madvig, p. 257.

¹⁸Keil and Delitzsch, p. 30.

¹⁹Bush, pp. 21-22.

- 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).

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 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 to gain victory over our spiritual adversaries.²⁰

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

Having received his marching orders from Yahweh, Joshua prepared to mobilize the nation.

1:10-11 Joshua expected to be able to cross the Jordan within three days.

"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."²¹

1:12-18 The concept of "rest" (vv. 13, 15) is an important one to grasp to understand what the conquest of the land gave 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).²² It was not rest in the sense of freedom from conflict but in contrast to journeying. Even after the seven-year conquest of the land there was still much land that the Israelites still had to take from the Canaanites and possess (13:1; 23:1-13; cf. 24:1-28; Judg. 1:1). Rather 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).²³

²⁰See Harry Foster, "Joshua, Walking into Battle," *Toward the Mark* 11:6 (November-December 1982):116-19.

²¹Trent C. Butler, *Joshua*, p. 17.

²²See Dillow, pp. 93-110, for a good exposition of the promises of rest that appear in Scripture.

²³See 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."²⁴

In Christian experience the crossing of the Jordan does not just 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 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 is walking in the flesh. When the Israelites crossed the Jordan they encountered enemies and had to contend with their spiritual adversaries just as a 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 blessings 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."²⁵

In another sense Canaan corresponds to the additional blessings that believers who follow God faithfully in this life will receive following death.²⁶

Not 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 rest evidently remained 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 commitment (Num. 32:25-27). 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 than it did in its former or later history.

To be successful in our corporate task of overcoming our spiritual enemies God's people must unite behind the leaders God has raised up to lead us. We should not complain or

²⁴Woudstra, p. 65.

²⁵Dillow, p. 79, n. 57. See also Donald K. Campbell, "Joshua," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 335.

²⁶Dillow, p. 57.

rebel against them (Heb. 13:17). Furthermore God's people must commit ourselves to entering into conflict with our spiritual enemies, rather than avoiding such conflict, 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).

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."²⁷

2:1 The two men sent out 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 incident.

"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."²⁸

Their mission was to explore the area Israel would enter, especially Jericho.²⁹

"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

²⁷Keil and Delitzsch, p. 33.

²⁸Davis and Whitcomb, p. 33.

²⁹Jericho is possibly the lowest city on earth lying about 750 feet below sea level.

build an inn (*arzana*) in which prostitutes live near the fortress wall, apparently because of the kind of danger described in Joshua 2."³⁰

Jericho was not a large city, but it had strong fortifications and a strategic location on the frontier of Canaan. It lay just a few miles west of the Jordan River in the 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.³¹ Josephus called Rahab an innkeeper, which she may have been.³² The writer recorded Rahab's name because she became an important person in Israel's history. She was 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 led her to place her trust in Him (vv. 9-12). The protection of one's house-guests was very important in the ancient Orient (cf. 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."³³

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."³⁴

". . . 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

³⁰Moshe Weinfeld, *The Promise of the Land: The Inheritance of the Land of Canaan by the Israelites*, pp. 141-43.

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

³²Josephus, 5:1:2, 7. See also Hess, pp. 83-84. See 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.

³³Donald K. Campbell, *No Time for Neutrality*, p. 19. See also R. Kent Hughes, *Living on the Cutting Edge*, p. 37.

³⁴Bush, p. 34.

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."³⁵

"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."³⁶

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).

"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."³⁷

2:7-14 Assuming the spies had fled back to the Israelite camp, the men of Jericho searched all along the road from their city to the place where travelers forded the Jordan (v. 7), about five miles.

Rahab's reference to the fear of the Israelites that God had put in the Canaanites' hearts (vv. 9-11) shows that the Lord had fulfilled His promise to make the Israelites' enemies fear them (Exod. 23:27; Deut. 2:25; 11:25).³⁸

"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."³⁹

³⁵Keil and Delitzsch, p. 35.

³⁶John Calvin, quoted by idem, p. 35.

³⁷Davis 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.

³⁸Hess, p. 88, noted that this is one of the longest uninterrupted statements by a woman in a biblical narrative.

³⁹Butler, p. 33.

"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).⁴⁰

"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."⁴¹

The melting of the heart (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 (cf. Heb. 11:31; James 2:25), but she did not become a mature believer immediately. No one does.

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 (v. 18).
2. She had to assemble her family into her home before the battle (v. 18).
3. She had to keep the mission of the spies a secret (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).⁴² Its unusual color would have marked Rahab's house for the Israelites. The color had symbolic significance, too, since red recalls blood and vigorous life.

"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."⁴³

"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."⁴⁴

⁴⁰Madvig, p. 262.

⁴¹Abraham Kuyper, *Women of the Old Testament*, p. 69.

⁴²Archaeologists have discovered houses within the ruined walls of ancient Jericho. See Bryant G. Wood, "Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 16:2 (1990):56.

⁴³Frances Schaeffer, *Joshua and the Flow of Biblical History*, p. 77. There is no Scriptural statement that the cord is a type, however.

⁴⁴Bush, pp. 39-40.

God spared the lives of Rahab and her household because of her faith. Any of Rahab's relatives that would have gathered with her before the Israelite siege would have done so because of their faith in God's promise through the spies. If they 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.).

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."⁴⁵ 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 Yahweh would give the Israelites the land, God's people would 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 (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). Her confidence 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?"⁴⁶

"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.

⁴⁵James Monson, *The Land Between*, p. 163.

⁴⁶Hess, pp. 96-97.

"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 . . ."47

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 of 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

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.⁴⁸

"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."⁴⁹

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 ark was carried in front of the people, not so much to show the road as to make a road by dividing the waters

⁴⁷Madvig, p. 264.

⁴⁸The best solution to the chronological difficulty that 1:11 and 3:2 pose that I have found, and a fine discussion of the problem, is that of David 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. He argued that 1:11 describes one three-day period during which the spies were in Jericho and the hills. A second 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).

⁴⁹Bush, p. 41.

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."⁵⁰

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 (cf. Matt. 3:2; 4:17). God had previously promised to do wonders (v. 5, awesome miracles) when they would enter 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 active for them and working through Joshua to give them victory (v. 7).

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 that had become the divinely appointed symbol of God's presence since God 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 (v. 10). The title "the Lord of all the earth" occurs here (v. 11) first in Scripture indicating Yahweh's absolute sovereignty over this planet. Because He was "the Lord of all the earth" 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 10-12 feet and floods to a width of 300-360 feet at this point today. Normally it is only 150-180 feet wide here. However, in Joshua's day the river may only have been full up to its banks, as the Hebrew suggests. The people considered

⁵⁰Keil and Delitzsch, p. 41.

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.

Two million Israelites could have crossed the river in half a day if the procession was a mile or more wide. 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. The conquest of the land would continue God's 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."⁵¹

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 river bed. They served as a memorial of this event for generations to come (vv. 6-7).⁵²

4:1-14 The piling up of stones was a covenant ritual in the ancient Near East.⁵³ It was a common method of preserving the memory of important events (cf. Gen. 8:20; 12:7; 35:7; et al.).

There were two piles of 12 stones each, one at Gilgal (vv. 3-8, 20) and one in the Jordan River bed (v. 9).⁵⁴ The Israelites probably constructed two memorials because the crossing was so miraculous that God wanted to be sure their children and the Canaanites believed it really happened. The monument at Gilgal probably consisted of large stones that people could not normally remove from the river bed. Building a monument in the river was impossible under normal circumstances due to the volume and current of the water there. Thus the Israelite children and the Canaanites had a double proof, two witnesses, of God's faithfulness and power. God specified 12 stones for each monument to represent the 12 tribes.

⁵¹Butler, p. 52.

⁵²For 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.

⁵³G. Herbert Livingston, *The Pentateuch in its Cultural Environment*, p. 157.

⁵⁴Some scholars (e.g., Hess, p. 109) believe there was only one pile of stones, which the NIV translation also suggests.

"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."⁵⁵

"It is doubtful whether there was either city or town in that place before the arrival of the Israelites."⁵⁶

4:15-24 The text carefully clarifies that it was the presence of God, which the ark symbolized, that held back the waters of the Jordan. When the priests removed the ark from the river bed, the waters resumed their flow (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."⁵⁷

There are many references to the fact that all Israel crossed over the Jordan in this chapter (vv. 1-5, 8-9, 12, 14, 20, 24). This, too, highlights the faithfulness of God to His promises to bring the whole nation into the Promised Land.

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 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."⁵⁸

The purposes of the memorial stones were the same as the purpose of the miracle at the Red Sea. They manifested the power of Yahweh to all people (v. 24; cf. Exod. 14:4, 18), and they caused God's people to fear

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 115.

⁵⁶Bush, p. 52.

⁵⁷Woudstra, p. 91.

⁵⁸Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 216.

Him (v. 24; cf. Exod. 14:31). "Fear the Lord" is the most common expression calling for faith in God in the Old Testament.⁵⁹

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. 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—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.'

⁵⁹Madvig, p. 272, suggested that God may have supernaturally used a natural phenomenon, a landslide, near Adam to cut the waters of the Jordan off as they flowed south. Such landslides in this geological fault have blocked the flow of water at other times. One in 1267 dammed the river for about 10 hours, and another in 1927 interrupted its flow for 21 hours. See also Campbell, "Joshua," p. 335, who thought the phenomenon was supernatural.

"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?"⁶⁰

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

"This chapter [five] 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)."⁶¹

God guaranteed Joshua's success only as he kept the Mosaic Law (1:7). It was necessary therefore that all the males who had been born in the wilderness and had not undergone circumcision should do so. Circumcision included the individual male in the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 17). It was a prerequisite for partaking in the Passover that God required of all Israelites yearly (Exod. 12). As 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 it explains how the Israelites were able to take several days to perform an operation that rendered them very vulnerable to their enemies militarily. Israel's foes feared them greatly as a result of the miracle of the Jordan crossing, and they did not attack.

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 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 traders rather than warriors. The writer sometimes put all the native people in one or the other of these two groups. This depended on the area in which they lived (South

⁶⁰Idem, *No Time . . .*, pp. 36-37.

⁶¹Irving Jensen, *Joshua: Rest-Land Won*, pp. 49-51.

or North, highlands or lowlands) or the general characteristic of the people that occupied most of that area (warlike or peaceful).⁶²

"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."⁶³

5:2-9

"The book of Joshua continues as a dialogue between the divine and human commander."⁶⁴

Flint knives (v. 2) were sharp flint rocks (obsidian). The first mass circumcision of the Israelites evidently took 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."⁶⁵

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

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).

"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

⁶²Reference to the Amorites and Canaanites is a merism, a figure of speech in which two extremes represent the whole (e.g., "heaven and earth" means the universe).

⁶³Carl Armerding, *Conquest and Victory*, p. 62.

⁶⁴Butler, p. 58.

⁶⁵Keil and Delitzsch, p. 55.

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?"⁶⁶

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 negated or "rolled away" this criticism. Gilgal means "rolling" as well as "circle." The Israelites seem to have 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 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).⁶⁷

God specified knives of flint even though this was the bronze age, 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).

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

⁶⁶Bush, p. 56.

⁶⁷Jay D. Fawver and R. Larry Overstreet, "Moses and Preventive Medicine," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:587 (July-September):277.

"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."⁶⁸

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

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 with 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 them at Amarna in A.D. 1887. They provide much valuable information on the political and military climate in Canaan during the period of Israel's conquests.⁶⁹

"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."⁷⁰

When the Israelites began their conquest, the Canaanite city-states did not have the protection of Egypt or 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

⁶⁸Bush, p. 60.

⁶⁹See Charles Pfeiffer, *Tell El Amarna and the Bible*; and Davis and Whitcomb, pp. 18-21.

⁷⁰Siegfried 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.

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."⁷¹

As Joshua contemplated attacking Jericho, the Angel of the Lord appeared to him and assured him of victory.⁷²

"The Canaanite spectre 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."⁷³

Evidently Joshua was reconnoitering near Jericho only about two miles from Gilgal. He was planning his strategy when he met the Man who identified Himself as the Captain (Prince) of the Lord's host (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 sword drawn 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)."⁷⁴

The command to remove his sandals (v. 15) would have convinced Joshua that this was the same God who appeared to Moses at the burning bush (Exod. 3:5).

"As Moses went to investigate the bush (Exod 3:3), so Joshua goes to investigate the mysterious figure confronting him (5:13b)."⁷⁵

"The strange confrontation of 5:13-15 resembles that between Jacob and the man of God at Peniel (Gn. 32:22-

⁷¹Campbell, "Joshua," p. 339.

⁷²Maps 54 (p. 43), 56 (p. 44), 58 (p. 45), and 62 (p. 47) in *The Macmillan Bible Atlas* are very good. They illustrate the battles of Jericho and Ai, Gibeon, Southern Canaan, and Northern Canaan respectively.

⁷³Constable, p. 105.

⁷⁴Madvig, p. 276.

⁷⁵Butler, p. 57.

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 . . ."76

Joshua would hardly have submitted as he did if he had not believed that this Man 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."⁷⁷

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.

"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."⁷⁸

6:1-5 The parenthetic comment about Jericho that opens this chapter (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). 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.

6:6-14 The terms "Lord" and "ark" occur interchangeably here (v. 8). The Lord was over the ark, and the ark 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 people, not all the Israelites. Probably representatives of the tribes participated in

⁷⁶Hess, p. 126. 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 way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35).

⁷⁷Butler, p. 61.

⁷⁸Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, p. 109.

this march rather than all the soldiers of Israel. The line of march was as follows: soldiers, priests, the ark, and more soldiers (vv. 6-9, 13).

Jericho was not a large city. Archaeological excavations have revealed that its walls enclosed only about eight and one-half acres. The main part of the Dallas Seminary campus covers about 12 acres.

The trumpets the priests blew (vv. 4, 9, et al.) were not the long silver trumpets but rams horns (shopbars). The blowing of trumpets in Israel reminded the people of God's activity for them. The priests used them to call the people to follow God who was going before them 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; 1 Thess. 4:10-17).

"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."⁷⁹

6:15-21 The warriors and priests were to remain silent as they circled the city each time except the last. 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 (cf. Zech. 4:6). He commanded the final shout on the seventh day to announce His destruction of the wall. It was a shout of 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."⁸⁰

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 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."⁸¹

"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

⁷⁹Keil and Delitzsch, pp. 69-70.

⁸⁰Madvig, p. 281.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 278.

in the midst of His people; whilst in ver. 8 Jehovah himself is mentioned in the place of the ark of Jehovah."⁸²

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. 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.⁸³

After discussing the views of Garstang and Kenyon, 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.]."⁸⁴

"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."⁸⁵

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

⁸²Keil and Delitzsch, p. 69.

⁸³See Kathleen Kenyon, *The Bible and Recent Archaeology*, pp. 10, 36-38.

⁸⁴Bruce K. Waltke, "Palestinian Artifactual Evidence Supporting the Early Date of the Exodus," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129:513 (January-March 1972):42.

⁸⁵Gleason 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.

and nature combined where—as at Dibon—the literary record (here, the Old Testament) retains phases of history lost to the excavator."⁸⁶

"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."⁸⁷

6:22-25 God commanded the Israelites to consecrate all the spoils of this battle to Him since He had given Jericho into their hands as the firstfruits of the land. Rahab and her possessions were exceptions 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 including the cattle (Lev. 27:29). The only objects they were to spare were metal, gold, silver, and vessels of brass and iron. These they were to place in the treasury of the tabernacle (v. 19; Num. 31:54). The Israelites completely destroyed only three Canaanite cities west of the Jordan along with their populations, namely, Jericho, Ai, and Hazor. They captured many others and slew some of their inhabitants.⁸⁸ 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

⁸⁶Kenneth Kitchen, *The Bible In Its World*, p. 89.

⁸⁷Butler, 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; 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.

⁸⁸Merrill, *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.

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)."⁸⁹

6:26-27 The curse on the person tempted 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 may 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). A better explanation may be that Canaanites 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 (v. 27).

"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."⁹⁰

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

⁸⁹Constable, pp. 104-5.

⁹⁰Matthew Henry, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, p. 34.

remain impregnable, at all events for a long time, without the interposition of God."⁹¹

All the aspects of the battle at Jericho strengthened Israel's faith in Yahweh. God's people learned His strength and ability to overcome all their obstacles by personal experience here. They acted in faith obeying His Word and trusting in the outcome He had promised. This day Israel reached a high water mark in her spiritual history. We should learn the same things from this record as well as from the supernatural victories God has given each of us. She also became a nation among nations in the ancient Near East.⁹²

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."⁹³

"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

⁹¹Keil and Delitzsch, p. 68.

⁹²See Eugene H. Merrill, "The Late Bronze/Early Iron Age Transition and the Emergence of Israel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:606 (April-June 1995):145-62.

⁹³Henry Jacobsen, *Claiming God's Promises: Joshua*, p. 62.

archaeological problem exists due to the lack of remains from the period of Joshua at the site."⁹⁴

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

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. This was so because he was a member of the community of Israel. The Hebrew word translated "unfaithfully" (*maal*) means "treacherously" or "secretly."

Achan had not just taken some things that did not belong to him. This would have been bad in itself. He stole what was God's, and he robbed the whole nation of its purity before God. The Lord's blazing anger against Israel fell on Achan and literally consumed him (v. 25; cf. Heb. 12:29).

7:2-5 The spies based their advice on the numbers of these Canaanites and the Israelites.

"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.)"⁹⁵

⁹⁴Monson, pp. 168-69. 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. Peter Briggs, "Testing the Factuality of the Conquest of Ai Narrative in the Book of Joshua," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Colorado Springs, Colo., Nov. 15, 2001, 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.

⁹⁵Monson, p. 168.

The spies in Numbers 13—14 lacked faith because they did not believe that they were strong enough to defeat their enemies. These spies lacked faith because they believed that Israel was too strong for their enemies.⁹⁶

The fact that the people's hearts melted (v. 5; cf. 2:11) hints that Israel may have been trusting in her own strength rather than in the Lord.

"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 . . ."⁹⁷

7:6-9 Even Joshua had lost the divine perspective temporarily. His complaining lament sounds like Israel's murmuring in the wilderness (cf. Exod. 16:3; Num. 14:2-3; et al.). However, he also had a concern for the continuing honor of Yahweh (v. 9; cf. Exod. 32:11-12; Num. 14:13; Deut. 9:28). As 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."⁹⁸

7:10-15 God reminded Joshua that he should not look for the reason for Israel's defeat in God but in Israel.

"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."⁹⁹

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 (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 from God.

⁹⁶Hess, p. 146.

⁹⁷Davis and Whitcomb, p. 54.

⁹⁸Butler, p. 84.

⁹⁹Keil and Delitzsch, p. 79.

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 (v. 19). Confessing one's sin is one way to glorify God.

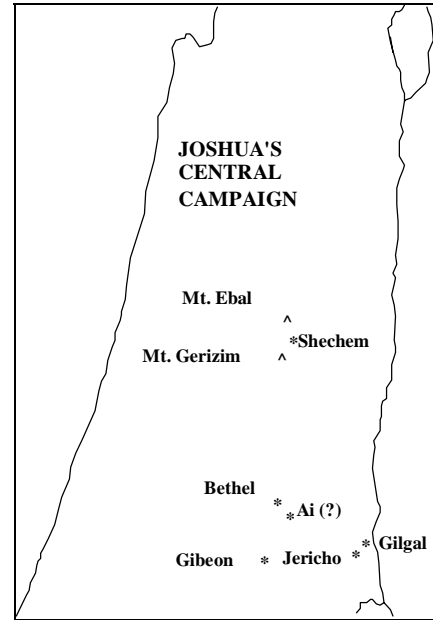
Achan's confession clearly revealed the process involved in yielding to temptation (v. 21).¹⁰⁰ He allowed the sight of something attractive to grow into covetousness. Then he took the step from covert mental sin to overt physical sin.¹⁰¹ Finally he sought to cover his action rather than confessing it. The same three verbs "I saw," "I coveted," and "I took" appear in the story of the Fall (Gen. 3:6-7, 10; cf. 2 Sam. 11:2-4, 8).

The Israelites punished Achan's children with him (v. 24) evidently because they had participated in his sin (cf. Prov. 15:27).¹⁰² It would have been difficult for Achan to hide the amount of spoil he took under his tent without raising the suspicions of his family. The people also destroyed all of his possessions (cf. Deut. 13:16-17). Achan's sin was high-handed defiance against God (cf. Num. 15:30, 35).

The 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. 2:7; Isa. 65:10). Note the word play 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."¹⁰³

Israel's defeat at Ai graphically illustrates the far-reaching influence of sin. The private sin of one or a few individuals can affect the welfare of many other people who do not personally participate in that sin.



¹⁰⁰One shekel weighed about four ounces.

¹⁰¹Josephus, 5:1:10, wrote that the mantle from Shinar that Achan took was "a royal garment woven entirely of gold."

¹⁰²Woudstra, p. 130.

¹⁰³Bush, p. 85.

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. Korah and his cohorts as well as Nadab and Abihu were similar examples. The fact that God does not judge sin today as He did on these occasions does not mean He feels any less strongly about it. He mercifully withholds 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."¹⁰⁴

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 be perfectly just. No sinner has any claim on God's grace. God is no man's debtor.

"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."¹⁰⁵

3. Victory at Ai 8:1-29

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

8:1-2 In view of Israel's 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 you shall take."

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 west of the town. 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 men from Bethel, Ai's neighbor, joined with the men of Ai to repulse Israel's attack (v. 17). These two cities had apparently made a treaty for mutual defense.

Stretching out his javelin (v. 18) was Joshua's prearranged signal to his men in ambush to attack. It symbolized that victory came from the Lord (cf. Exod. 17:8-12).

8:24-29 Joshua carefully obeyed the Lord's directions given here and previously in the law. He killed all the inhabitants of the town, utterly destroyed Ai, and

¹⁰⁴J. Hall, *Contemplations on the Old and New Testaments*, p. 99.

¹⁰⁵W. Graham Scroggie, *The Land and Life of Rest*, p. 38.

killed the king whom he also hanged on a tree until sunset (Num. 25:4; Deut. 21:22-23). He also erected a memorial pile of stones at the former gate of the city (cf. 7:26).

This section, in contrast to the previous one, shows that God gives victory when His people acknowledge their dependence on Him by trusting 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?"¹⁰⁶

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 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 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 the guilty in Israel, and they had to return to obeying the Lord.¹⁰⁷

4. Renewal of the covenant 8:30-35

Israel had now obtained a substantial enough foothold in the land to journey north to Shechem to carry out God's instructions concerning 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). Moreover Shechem had always been a busy site because of its geographical situation 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

¹⁰⁶Monson, p. 170.

¹⁰⁷Christopher 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)."¹⁰⁸

The order of events the writer recorded here varies slightly from the order Moses gave in Deuteronomy. Probably the order here represents what 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 offered burnt and peace offerings on Mt. Sinai when God first gave the Law to Israel. Their offering again here recalled the former incident and shows that this ceremony constituted a covenant renewal.

"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."¹⁰⁹

"This made it palpable [*sic*] even to strangers entering the land what God was worshipped in it, and all excuse for error was taken away."¹¹⁰

"The religion of Israel at its best has always been a missionary religion."¹¹¹

The extent of the passages from the Mosaic Law that the people copied on the stone monuments is not clear from this passage. Deuteronomy 27 seems to imply the Ten Commandments. "The blessing and the curse" (v. 34) may be a synonym for "all the words of the law" (i.e., the Ten Commandments) rather than a reference to the specific blessings and curses listed previously and recited here (Deut. 28).¹¹² However, another possibility is that "the blessing and the curse" may refer to Deuteronomy 28.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸Woudstra, p. 144.

¹⁰⁹Hughes, p. 101. Some scholars believe the Israelites inscribed the whole Book of Deuteronomy on stone. This is possible since the Behistun Inscription, also written on a stone monolith in Iran, is three times the length of Deuteronomy.

¹¹⁰John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Joshua*, p. 133.

¹¹¹Madvig, p. 294.

¹¹²See 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.

¹¹³Bush, p. 97; Meredith G. Kline, "Deuteronomy," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 192.

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 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 demonstrate His supernatural power.

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 rather than the renewal of the covenant at Shechem. Israel's success led several Canaanite kings to ally themselves 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.¹¹⁴

"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."¹¹⁵

9:3-5 Gibeon lay seven miles south of Bethel. It was "one of the largest towns in the central part of Canaan,"¹¹⁶ larger than Ai (10:2), and possibly the Hivite capital.¹¹⁷ 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 Chron. 16:39; 21:29; 1 Kings 3:4-5). Hivites inhabited Gibeon at the time of the conquest (v. 7). They were "a brave people."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴Hess, p. 175.

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 176.

¹¹⁶Keil and Delitzsch, p. 95.

¹¹⁷Bush, p. 99.

¹¹⁸Keil and Delitzsch, p. 96.

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

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 (v. 8) as well as with their food and clothing (vv. 12-13). They pretended to fear Yahweh, too, the highest motive for allying with Israel (vv. 9-10). Their objective was to save their own lives.

On the surface 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).¹¹⁹ The Israelites sealed the treaty with a solemn promise to preserve the Gibeonites (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).

"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!"¹²⁰

*". . . no proposed course of conduct can be so clear to a Christian as to excuse him from the duty of seeking direction from above."*¹²¹

9:16-27

The leaders of Gibeon controlled four towns (v. 17). These towns acted together 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

¹¹⁹Livingston, p. 157.

¹²⁰Madvig, p. 297.

¹²¹Bush, p. 105.

congregation was guilty. Here the congregation is justified, while the leaders are at fault."¹²²

The Israelites considered their oath to the Gibeonites as binding, especially since it was a promise given in the name of Yahweh (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)."¹²³

Ancient Near Easterners regarded all treaties as sacred agreements.¹²⁴ If Israel had violated this oath she would have brought great reproach on herself and her God. Israel's leaders were wise not to break their promise.¹²⁵ Later in Israel's history King Saul put some of the Gibeonites to death in his misguided zeal. 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 become incorporated into Israel was that they might lead the Israelites into idolatry. The leaders of Israel therefore punished the Gibeonites for their deception in a way designed to minimize the possibility of their doing this. They made them servants in the tabernacle. 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 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)."¹²⁶

"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

¹²²Butler, p. 104.

¹²³Madvig, p. 299.

¹²⁴Davis and Whitcomb, p. 63.

¹²⁵See F. Charles Fensham, "The Treaty Between Israel and the Gibeonites," *Biblical Archaeologist* 27:3 (1964):98-100.

¹²⁶Woudstra, p. 164.

faith. Israel learns the supreme danger which threatens its life and leadership when decisions are made without consulting Yahweh and when the Mosaic law is not followed."¹²⁷

This 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.

"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."¹²⁸

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 to resist? Most commentators have concluded that they were enemies and that their craftiness (v. 4) extended 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.¹²⁹

Unbelievers usually oppose believers as we seek to carry out God's purpose for us in the world. They sometimes resort to deception to become part of the fellowship of God's people 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.'"¹³⁰

¹²⁷Butler, pp. 104-5.

¹²⁸Schaeffer, p. 151. See pp. 148-151 for his defense of this view. See also Hess, p. 179.

¹²⁹For 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.

¹³⁰Keil and Delitzsch, p. 95.

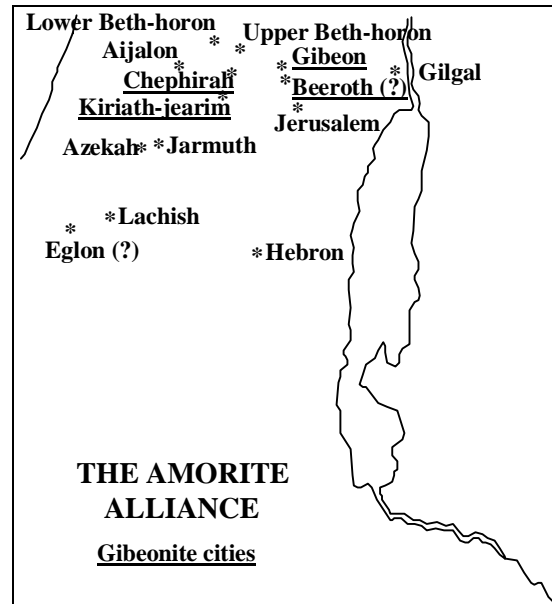
If God's people make covenants with unbelievers we may end up disobeying God as Israel did (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14-18). We need to seek the will of God *before* we make these commitments. We should look for it in prayer (James 4:2) and in Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16-17; cf. Num. 27:21). We should also consult other godly people who understand God's ways and can help us avoid overlooking important scriptural revelations that He has given us (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.

10:1-5 The Jebusites lived in and around Jebus, ancient Salem (Gen. 14:18). The writer called this town Jerusalem 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."¹³¹

10:6-11 Here the writer used the name "Amorites" (v. 6) generally of the Canaanites who were living in the nearby hills including the Jebusites.

"The Amorites who dwelt in the mountains were the strongest of all the Canaanites."¹³²

¹³¹Davis and Whitcomb, p. 63.

¹³²Keil and Delitzsch, p. 104.

This was the first time Israel had gone into battle against an alliance of city-states. God reassured Joshua that he would be victorious (v. 8).

God's strategy included an early morning surprise attack that caught the Amorites off guard (cf. Exod. 23:27). Israel was able to gain the advantage and pursued the fleeing Amorites for several miles. God also sent a hailstorm (cf. Exod. 9:24) as the Amorites descended from Upper Beth-horon to Lower Beth-horon along the ridge route that connects these towns (the "descent," v. 11). This storm killed many of the enemy but none of God's people. By this the Amorites and the Israelites realized that this victory came as a result of the supernatural help of Yahweh and not simply by Israel's own power. Yahweh as well as 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."¹³³

Note in verses 9-15 how the writer alternated 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).

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

There are two basic explanations of 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.¹³⁴ The main problem with this view is its improbability. Would God (He could, of course) 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.

¹³³J. L. Kelso, *Archaeology and Our Old Testament Contemporaries*, p. 53.

¹³⁴Schaeffer, p. 142; Campbell, *No Time . . .*, pp. 81-83; idem, "Joshua," p. 351; et al.

2. This may have been a local miracle whereby God provided additional light 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. Others feel God provided a light for Israel that may even have looked like the sun but was a different source of light such as the shekinah.¹³⁵ 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 cite 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 that seems to favor this view (Gen. 8:22; cf. Jer. 33:20-21).

Robert Dick Wilson, a competent and conservative Hebrew scholar, believed that both the sun and the moon experienced an eclipse by other heavenly bodies.¹³⁶ He argued that the Hebrew words translated "stand still" and "stood still" can be translated "be eclipsed" and "was eclipsed." This is a possible explanation.

Various writers have suggested many other views and variations of these views.¹³⁷

The Canaanites regarded the sun and moon as deities. Their control by Yahweh must have deeply impressed Israel's enemies.¹³⁸

The Book of "Jashar" ("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 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.

"God fights for Israel. He also fights with and through Israel. She cannot expect the victory, however, if she does not do her part."¹³⁹

¹³⁵Bush, p. 119; Davis and Whitcomb, pp. 69-70; Keil and Delitzsch, pp. 109-112; et al.

¹³⁶Robert Dick Wilson, "Understanding 'The Sun Stood Still,'" in *Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation*, pp. 61-65.

¹³⁷See Davis and Whitcomb, pp. 66-70, for several. John S. Holladay Jr., "The Day(s) the Moon Stood Still," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 87 (1968):167-78, believed Joshua was voicing belief in astrology and was calling for a favorable alignment of the heavenly bodies.

¹³⁸See Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "The Polemic against Baalism in Israel's Early History and Literature," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:603 (July-September 1994):276-77.

¹³⁹Butler, p. 117.

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).

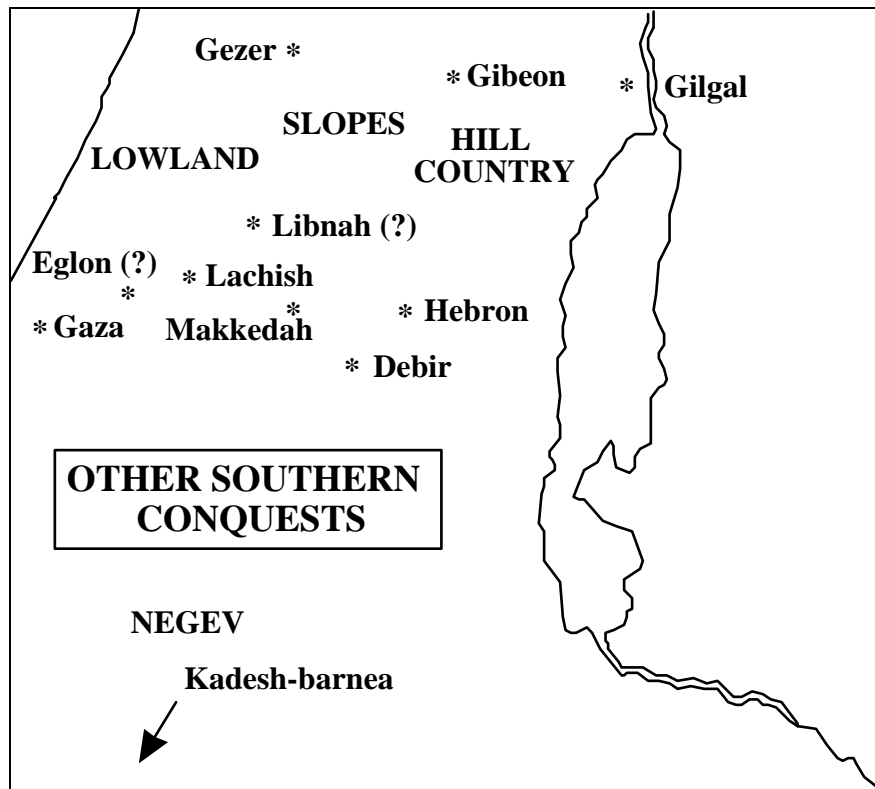
Putting one's foot on the necks of one's enemies was a symbolic act that represented complete subjugation in the ancient Near East (v. 24; cf. 1 Kings 5:3; Ps. 8:6; 110:1). The act also gave the Israelites greater confidence. Joshua strengthened the impact of this act with an encouraging exhortation (v. 25).

Israel's leaders placed large stones over the grave 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 our spiritual warfare, we normally experience increasing opposition from our spiritual enemies, as Israel did. Still the Lord fights with His people (2 Cor. 12:9). We have responsibilities to secure victory (e.g., trust, obedience, using our resources, etc.; cf. Eph. 6:14-18). The Lord also provides assistance naturally and supernaturally. He enables us to use the strength, wisdom, and endurance He has given us. He also does things we cannot possibly do for ourselves. 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 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 give His people a base of operation in the middle part of the land first. 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.



10:28-39 Seven other victories followed the battle at Gibeon. In the record of these encounters the writer highlighted two important facts. Israel was obedient to God's command to exterminate the Canaanites in these cities. Second, it was 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."¹⁴⁰

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.

"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."¹⁴¹

"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,

¹⁴⁰Ibid., p. 119.

¹⁴¹Davis and Whitcomb, p. 70.

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."¹⁴²

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 he cannot continue or resume war. Second, he must conquer the land of the enemy so a new military force cannot arise from it. Third, he must subdue the will of the enemy.¹⁴³ Joshua accomplished all three of these basic objectives.¹⁴⁴

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 of the land, all the kings of the cities that Joshua destroyed, and all who lived in those cities (cf. 13:1).

Goshen (v. 41) was a town on the southern frontier of Israel (15:51). The reference is not to the section of Egypt that bore this name.

The writer emphasized God's fighting for Israel again (v. 42).

God's people do not have to engage every enemy that exists immediately any more than the Israelites had to kill every individual Canaanite or attack every city immediately. 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 the tide of lawlessness?" 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 immediately (cf. Matt. 6:25-34).

8. Conquests in northern Canaan 11:1-15

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

¹⁴²Kitchen, p. 89.

¹⁴³Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 101, cited by Craigie, *The Problem of War . . .*, p. 46.

¹⁴⁴See David Ussishkin, "Lachish—Key to the Israelite Conquest of Canaan?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 13:1 (January-February 1987):18-39.

- 11:1-3 Hazor was the leading city in northern Canaan with an area of 175 acres and a population of 30,000 to 40,000 people.¹⁴⁵ Archaeologists calculate the population of walled cities in Canaan as about 200 people per acre. Hazor was at one time the head of an alliance of all the northern cities (v. 10).¹⁴⁶ Jabin (v. 1) may have been a title rather than a proper name (cf. Judg. 4:2).¹⁴⁷
- 11:4-9 According to Josephus the combined armies of the Canaanite tribes totaled 300,000 armed footmen, 10,000 horsemen, and 20,000 chariots.¹⁴⁸

"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."¹⁴⁹

The waters of Merom (v. 5) were evidently close to the village of Merom that was 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.¹⁵⁰ 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.

¹⁴⁵Davis and Whitcomb, p. 74. See also *The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Hazor," by T. C. Mitchell, pp. 507-8.

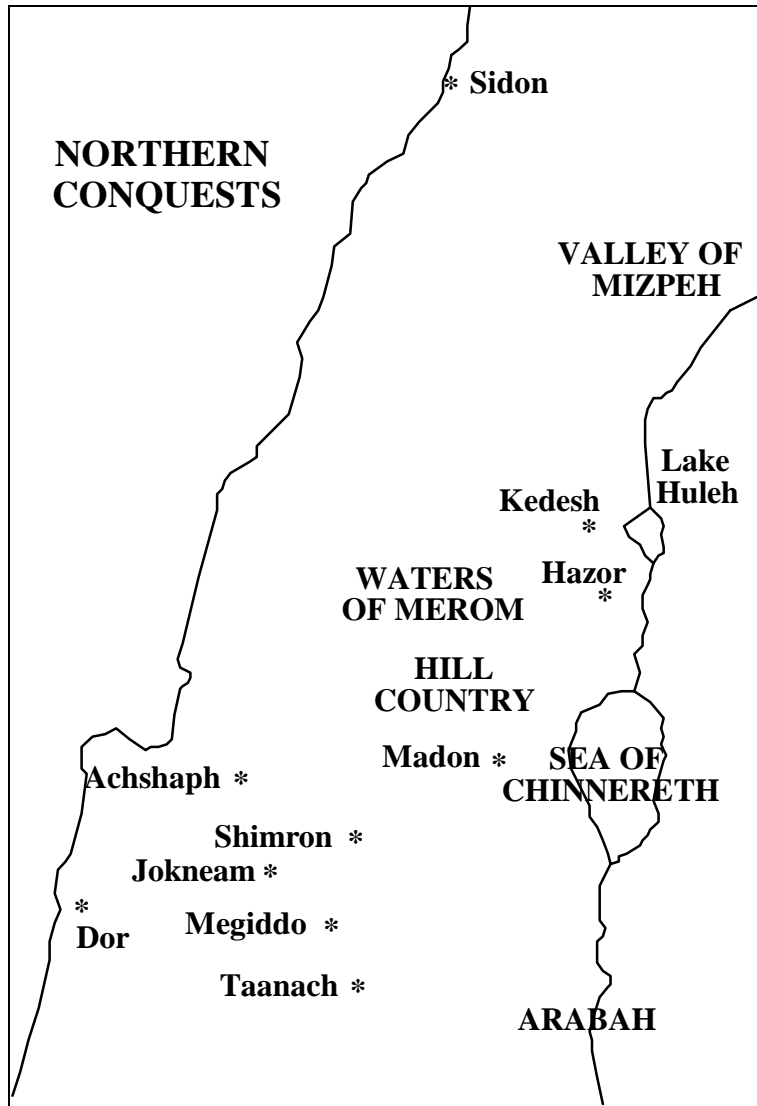
¹⁴⁶See Mary Rattigan, "Hazor and Its Significance," *The Bible Today* 23:1 (January 1985):44-50; Waltke, "Palestinian Artifacts . . .," pp. 42-46; and Merrill, *Kingdom of . . .*, p. 120.

¹⁴⁷Hess, p. 208, who did considerable study of non-Israelite personal names in Joshua, called it a personal name.

¹⁴⁸Josephus, 5:1:18.

¹⁴⁹Madvig, p. 309.

¹⁵⁰Hess, p. 209.



11:10-15 The meaning of the phrase "cities that stood on their mounds" (v. 13) is unclear.

"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."¹⁵¹

Perhaps these were the older more influential towns that previous generations had rebuilt on their former ruins.¹⁵² If this is the meaning, probably Joshua did not burn them because he wanted to preserve these towns with time-honored sites for Israelite occupation.

¹⁵¹Bush, p. 134.

¹⁵²Keil and Delitzsch, p. 122.

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.

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

The conquest of the land 11:16-23

The writer referred to Canaan as "the land of the sons of Israel" first here in Scripture (v. 22). The Anakim were the mighty warriors that the 10 spies had feared (Num. 13:28). Israel destroyed most of these.

"The hardening of their 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."¹⁵³

"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."¹⁵⁴

Joshua subdued the whole land (v. 23) in the sense that there were no more pitched battles by the combined Israelite tribal forces following Joshua's conquests. God expected individual tribes to subdue the remaining towns and pockets of resistance from then on (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 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 the commandments of

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

¹⁵⁴Butler, p. 130.

their God and persevere in the gradual extermination of the scattered remnants."¹⁵⁵

"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)."¹⁵⁶

The words of God to Moses to which the writer alluded (v. 23) are probably those in Exodus 23:27-33 (cf. Deut. 7:22). There God told Moses He would not drive all the Canaanites out of the land in one year but little by little. This is 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 ended (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.

"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."¹⁵⁷

The slaughter of the eastern kings 12:1-6

Sihon and Og were the first Canaanite kings the Israelites defeated.

The slaughter of the western kings 12:7-24

The writer identified 31 kings in the order in which Joshua defeated them.

"Many of the same names appear in the Amarna letters, thus confirming the historicity of our text."¹⁵⁸

"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

¹⁵⁵Keil and Delitzsch, p. 125.

¹⁵⁶Kitchen, pp. 90-91.

¹⁵⁷Henry T. Sell, *Bible Study by Periods*, p. 83.

¹⁵⁸Davis and Whitcomb, p. 75.

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."¹⁵⁹

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).

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

Chapters 13—24 describe how Joshua divided the land and the results of that division. Many if not all 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.

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).¹⁶⁰ Consequently dividing all the land among the tribes required faith that God would give His people all the land. Joshua had removed the significant military threats to Israel's existence. From now on each tribe was responsible to conquer and colonize its designated territory.

"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."¹⁶¹

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

- 13:1 Joshua was probably in his 80s at this time.
- 13:2 The Philistines were not native Canaanite peoples. 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 Saul's

¹⁵⁹Butler, p. 139.

¹⁶⁰For maps showing the areas as yet unpossessed, see Wood, *A Survey . . .*, map 8, p. 209; or Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, maps 68 and 69, pp. 50 and 51.

¹⁶¹Hess, pp. 53-54.

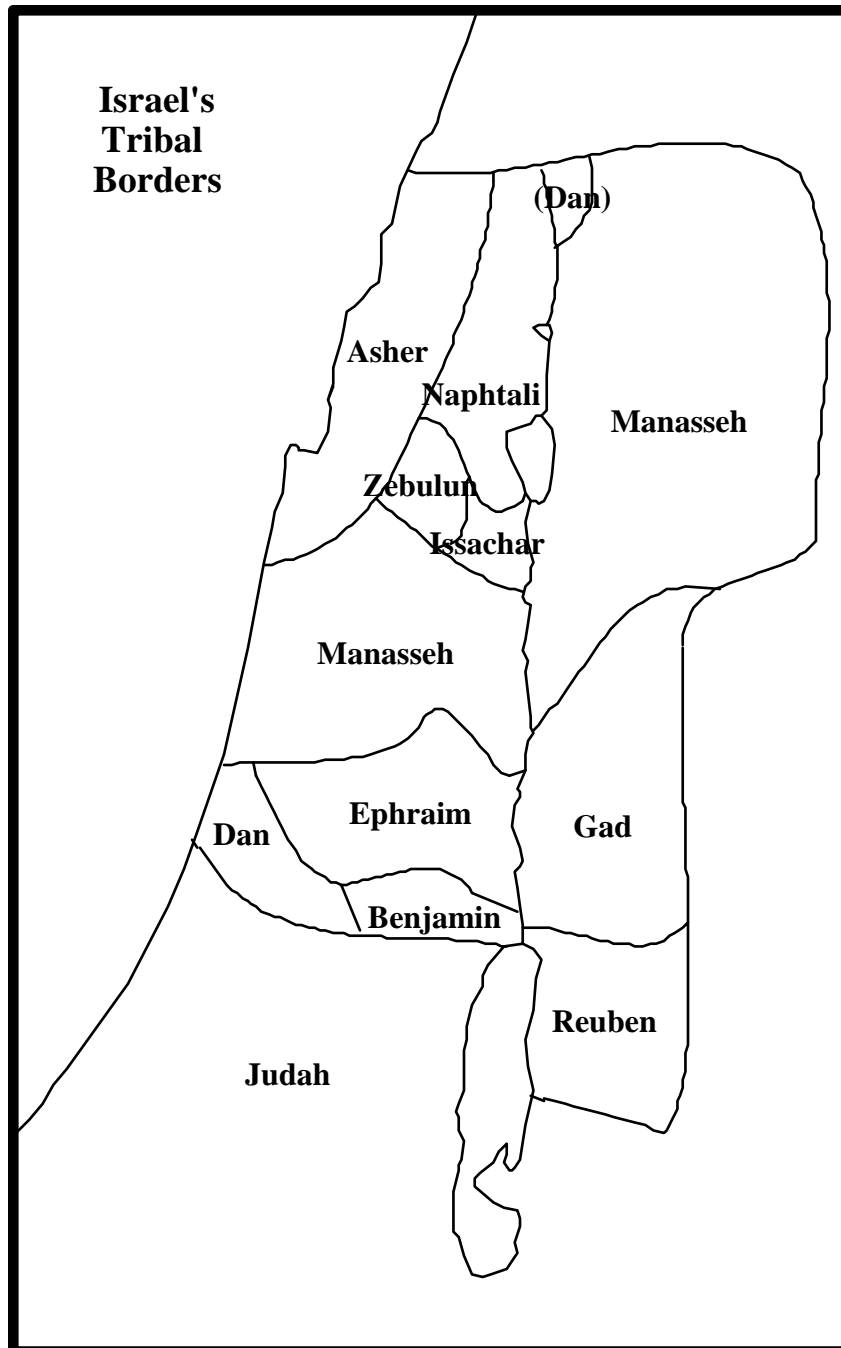
reign. At this time, however, they were a smaller, secondary target of the Israelites.

- 13:3-5 The "Shihor" is probably the brook of Egypt, the modern Wadi el Arish, that marked the southwestern boundary of the Promised Land. "Sidon" may represent the inhabitants of the Phoenician coast and of the Lebanon mountains.¹⁶² The land of the Gebalite (v. 5) refers to the city-state of Byblos.¹⁶³
- 13:6 God's promise to drive out all the remaining Canaanites depended on Israel's obedience to the Mosaic Covenant (1:6-7).¹⁶⁴
- 13:7 The land referred to here included all that God had promised west of the Jordan River.

¹⁶²Butler, p. 152.

¹⁶³Hess, p. 231.

¹⁶⁴See W. B. Riley, "The Challenge to Carry On," reprinted in *Fundamentalist Journal* 2:2 (February 1983):39-41.



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

(cf. 12:5). Gilead (v. 11) included land on both sides of the Jabbok east of the Jordan.

"The Transjordanian tribes receive a disproportionate amount of attention in this book that records the Conquest 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."¹⁶⁵

13:15-23 Reuben's portion was the southern part of this area.

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.

13:29-31 Half of the tribe of Manasseh settled in the northern portion of this area.

13:32-33 The description of this territory ends with a reminder of the Levites' inheritance, who received a special relationship to God rather than a tract of land.

"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."¹⁶⁶

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

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 inheritance (cf. Num. 26:52-56).¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵Madvig, p. 318.

¹⁶⁶Campbell, "Joshua," p. 356.

¹⁶⁷See also Wood, map 6, p. 186.

"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."¹⁶⁸

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 given a specific allotment. The reason for this special blessing was Caleb's faithfulness to God when he served as one of the 12 spies. Joshua 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."¹⁶⁹

Caleb was a member of the clan in Judah called the Kenizzites (vv. 6, 14). He was not a descendant of the Kenizzites who were early inhabitants of Canaan (Gen. 15:19).¹⁷⁰

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 (Num. 14:24). Caleb was 40 years old 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 Caleb requested was within the tribal allotment of Judah, his tribe. He 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 the unbelieving spies had pointed out to discourage the Israelites from entering the land: hill country, Anakim, and large fortified cities (cf. Num. 13:28-29). Joshua 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, the city of 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 strong in faith as well as in body even though he was an old man. He continued 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

¹⁶⁸Butler, p. 172.

¹⁶⁹Hess, p. 239.

¹⁷⁰Another view is that the early Canaanite Kenizzites joined the tribe of Judah before the Exodus. Campbell, "Joshua," p. 357.

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."¹⁷¹

"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."¹⁷²

3. Judah's inheritance ch. 15

The tribe of Judah probably received first consideration in the text because it was the 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 construct 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 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. 49:7). 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 south (vv. 2-4) to east (v. 5) to north (vv. 5-11) to west (v. 12).

15:13-19 The writer probably included the record of Caleb's success in driving out the Canaanites in his area to highlight the effect of faith in the settling of the land. Othniel (v. 17) was one of Israel's prominent judges (Judg. 3:9), probably the first 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 spiritual characteristics of his sibling.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹Jacobsen, p. 100. See John Cawood, "The Godly Features of Caleb," *Confident Living* 44:10 (November 1986):53-55. The features he identified are uncompromising convictions, unreserved commitment, unalterable courage, and unwavering confidence.

¹⁷²Butler, p. 175.

¹⁷³Some translators and commentators 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."¹⁷⁴

15:20 This verse concludes the description of the tribal boundaries of Judah given in verses 1-19.

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 nine (vv. 21-23), the second five (vv. 24-25), the third nine (vv. 26-28), and the fourth 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 toward the desert wilderness (vv. 55-57), six to the north of Hebron (vv. 58-59), and two on Judah's northern border (v. 60).

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.

15:63 Even though the Israelites defeated the king of Jerusalem (10:1-27) they were not able to exterminate the Jebusites who lived there. This city remained an island of Canaanite domination on the northern border of the Judahites.

¹⁷⁴Hess, p. 245.

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 half the tribe of Manasseh had already received its inheritance, and the remaining half would have been small compared with the other tribes. These one and one-half tribes together formed a large group of Israelites. Their lot fell in central Canaan. Their territory consisted of two parts with Ephraim settling in the southern portion and Manasseh in the northern.

- 16:1-4 The writer described the whole territory of Joseph first.
- 16:5-10 The writer traced the borders of Ephraim's allotment here. Ephraim lay north of the area later given to Dan and Benjamin, and south of western Manasseh. The Ephraimites failed to drive out the inhabitants of Gezer (v. 10).
- 17:1-13 These verses describe the territory of the half tribe of Manasseh west of the Jordan and north of Ephraim. It extended north to the valley of Jezreel. The Manassehites also failed to exterminate all the Canaanites in their area (vv. 12-13).
- 17:14-18 The extent of the territory given these two tribes was not sufficient for them, in their opinion. Consequently 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).¹⁷⁵ They 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. They discounted the forested areas that needed clearing and the parts dominated by the Perizzites and the Rephaim (v. 15). Joshua assured them that when they subdued their inheritance it would prove adequate for them (v. 18).

"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."¹⁷⁶

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.

¹⁷⁵See John H. Paterson, "The Touchy Tribe," *Toward the Mark* 16:6 (November-December 1987):110-13.

¹⁷⁶Woudstra, p. 267.

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

After the process of assigning land to the three tribes mentioned above, 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).¹⁷⁷ The name of this town was significant because of Jacob's prophecy of Shiloh (Gen. 49:10) and the association of God's name with the Israelites' rest. God's people could find rest where He abode. The tabernacle stood at 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. 7:9-10), Gilgal (1 Sam. 10:8; 13:8-10; 15:10-15), Nob (1 Sam. 17:54; 21:1-9), and finally at Gibeon (1 Chron. 16:39-40; 21:29; 1 Kings 3:4; 2 Chron. 1:3). Solomon's temple in Jerusalem then replaced it.

Perhaps the break in the allotment proceedings plus continuing Canaanite intimidation influenced the leaders of the remaining tribes to delay distributing the rest of the land. Joshua had to scold them for procrastinating (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 the land and divided it into seven parts.¹⁷⁸ 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). 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 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)."¹⁷⁹

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

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

¹⁷⁷See Israel Finkelstein, "Shiloh Yields Some, But Not All, of Its Secrets," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 12:1 (January-February 1986):22-41.

¹⁷⁸Bush, p. 174, wrote that this is the earliest instance of land surveying on record.

¹⁷⁹Hess, p. 264.

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. On the east the Jordan River formed Benjamin's border. On the west, about half way 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 west (vv. 25-28).

The inheritance of Simeon 19:1-9

Simeon's lot fell within the southern portion of the inheritance of Judah because Judah's portion proved too large for that tribe (v. 9). Simeon received certain towns within Judah's territory. In this way God fulfilled Jacob's prediction that Simeon would experience dispersion (Gen. 49:7), at least initially.

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 included four towns, two in the Negev and two in the Shephelah (v. 7). The names of all these towns also occur in Judah's list (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).

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 range of mountains 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) and the Jordan River north of that sea formed Naphtali's eastern border. It extended north 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 that was 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)."¹⁸⁰

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 18.¹⁸¹

The inheritance of Joshua 19:49-50

As 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 the end. Caleb and Joshua are living examples of God's faithfulness in fulfilling his promises made more than forty years earlier."¹⁸²

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

¹⁸⁰Davis and Whitcomb, p. 83.

¹⁸¹See John C. H. Laughlin, "Dan," *Biblical Illustrator* 9:4 (Summer 1983):40-46.

¹⁸²Madvig, p. 324.

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."¹⁸³

Readers of this section of the text (chs. 14—19) notice that the writer gave much more space to the first tribes he described and progressively less attention to the remaining tribes. There seem 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 therefore became more significant in the history of Israel as the nation matured, so the historical value 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 his 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 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—21

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 in Naphtali, Shechem in Manasseh, and Hebron 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.¹⁸⁴

"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."¹⁸⁵

"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."¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³Butler, p. 208.

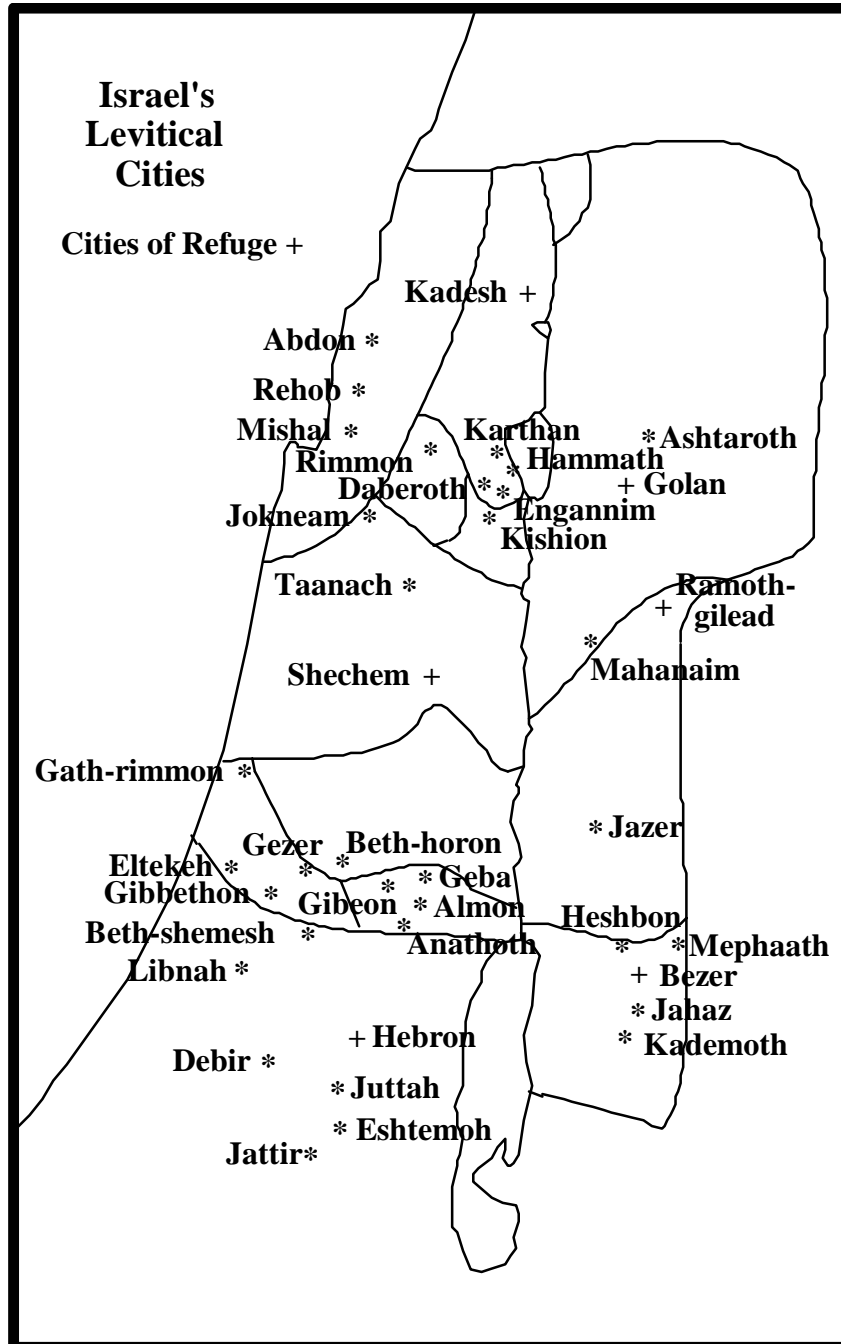
¹⁸⁴See my notes on Numbers 35:9-34 for further explanation of the cities of refuge.

¹⁸⁵Butler, p. 218.

¹⁸⁶Campbell, "Joshua," p. 363.

2. The cities of the Levites ch. 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 the leaders identified the towns first and then assigned the various groups of Levites to particular cities by lot (vv. 3-4). The priests (Aaron's descendants) received 13

cities within the 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 lived in 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 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 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 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).

In all, the Levites received 48 cities with their surrounding pasture lands including the six cities of refuge (vv. 41-42). God provided so 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 were to provide a positive spiritual influence on the whole nation.¹⁸⁷

"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 proclamation of the faith (cf. Acts 2:44-47; Rom. 15:26-27; Phil. 4:10-18)."¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷See 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.

¹⁸⁸Hess, p. 281.

"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."¹⁸⁹

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. They form a theological conclusion to the entire book up to this point.¹⁹⁰

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."¹⁹¹

"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 to the supineness and infidelity of Israel. So long as they were obedient, they were uniformly triumphant and prosperous."¹⁹²

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

¹⁸⁹Butler, p. 232.

¹⁹⁰Ibid., p. 234.

¹⁹¹Keil and Delitzsch, p. 216.

¹⁹²Bush, p. 189. See also Campbell, "Joshua," pp. 364-65.

might 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."¹⁹³

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. Israel had experienced all of these to some degree. God had been faithful to the "good promises" He had made to them when they had prepared to cross the Jordan (1:1-9).

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; 22:1; 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.¹⁹⁴

"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."¹⁹⁵

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

"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."¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³Butler, p. 235.

¹⁹⁴For 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.

¹⁹⁵Butler, p. 236.

¹⁹⁶Hess, p. 287.

A. THE RETURN OF THE TWO AND ONE-HALF TRIBES TO THEIR INHERITANCES**CH. 22**

The main part of the second half of the Book of Joshua dealing with the division of the land ends 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 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 affirms.

Joshua's preparations for the conquest of Canaan began with his summoning the two and one-half tribes to join their brethren to help them in the battles ahead (1:12-18). Now Joshua dismissed the two and one-half tribes and allowed them to return to their tribal 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 (vv. 2-3; cf. 1:16-18). He also charged them to remain faithful to the Mosaic Law (v. 5). Obedience included complete devotion to Yahweh.

"This 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."¹⁹⁷

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 land west and east of the Jordan River respectively in this section. 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 (cf. v. 28). If they did, it is easy to understand why the other tribes reacted to its construction so violently. God had prohibited the building of altars in the land apart from the ones He ordained (Deut. 12:1-14).¹⁹⁸ 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 is what God had commanded the Israelites to do if any of their brethren sought to lead others in Israel away from God and His law (Deut. 13:12-18).

¹⁹⁷Madvig, p. 355.

¹⁹⁸Woudstra, p. 320.

22:13-20 To its credit the main body of Israelites did not attack and then ask questions later. Instead these 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 [*sic*!]! 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."¹⁹⁹

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 (v. 17). They also mentioned Achan's transgression (v. 20) 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.

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, 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 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."²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹Bush, p. 194.

²⁰⁰Keil and Delitzsch, p. 220.

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. They 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 a 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 these (e.g., Judg. 17:5).

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 learn that gentle confrontation and candid discussion of problems can often result in the resolution of misunderstandings (cf. Prov. 15:1).²⁰¹ The Israelites dealt wisely with a situation that could have split the people of God. Instead they were able to continue to follow God faithfully 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). Therefore 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 contents.

"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."²⁰²

This address consists of two parts. The structure of the two parts is parallel, and the contents are similar.

²⁰¹Campbell, *No Time* . . . , p. 131.

²⁰²Butler, p. 253.

"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."²⁰³

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

Joshua reminded the Israelites of God's faithfulness in fighting for them and giving them victory over their enemies as He had promised if they kept His covenant with them. Joshua urged the people to remain loyal and promised that God would then 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."²⁰⁴

"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 forms of divine worship."²⁰⁵

"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."²⁰⁶

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, as Moses, called 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 (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."²⁰⁷

²⁰³Ibid., p. 254.

²⁰⁴Madvig, p. 362.

²⁰⁵Keil and Delitzsch, p. 224.

²⁰⁶Butler, p. 255.

²⁰⁷Ibid., p. 256.

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 as He had been in sending blessing because they had been obedient in the past.

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 and 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 for the purpose of getting a binding commitment on the part of the people of Israel to the written Word of God."²⁰⁸

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."²⁰⁹

1. Preamble 24:1

Shechem was a strategic location for this important ceremony. Joshua called on the Israelites to renew formally their commitment to the Mosaic Covenant at the site that 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."²¹⁰

²⁰⁸Davis and Whitcomb, pp. 87-88.

²⁰⁹Butler, p. 278.

²¹⁰Clarence Macartney, *The Greatest Texts of the Bible*, pp. 74-75.

At Shechem God had first appeared to Abraham when he had entered the land and promised to give him the land of Canaan. In response to that promise Abraham built his first altar to Yahweh in the land there (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. 33:19-20; 35:1-4).

"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."²¹¹

At Shechem the same generation of Israelites that Joshua now addressed had pledged itself to the Mosaic Covenant shortly after it had entered the land (8:30-35). They had also built an altar there.

"For the Christian, regular presentation before God in worship is an essential feature of a life of faith (Heb. 10:25)."²¹²

2. Historical prologue 24:2-13

Joshua introduced what follows as the words of Yahweh, Israel's God (v. 2).

Then he reviewed God's great acts on behalf of His people going back to the call of Abraham in Mesopotamia.

The "River" (v. 2) is the Euphrates. Abraham's family members were idolaters in Mesopotamia. We can safely assume that Abraham was too. God's call of Abraham was pure grace. 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 out of Abraham were Israel and Edom (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 then. Israel's deliverance from Egypt and 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). God also frustrated Moab's hostility by turning Balaam's oracles into blessings.

²¹¹Keil and Delitzsch, pp. 226-27.

²¹²Hess, p. 300.

The fourth divine provision was the crossing of the Jordan River and the consequent victory over the Canaanites (vv. 11-13). God routed Israel's enemies for her by using various hornet-like terrors (v. 12; cf. Exod. 23:28; Deut. 7:20).

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.

3. Covenant stipulations 24:14-24

On the basis of God's great acts for them (v. 14) Joshua appealed to the Israelites to commit themselves to Him anew. Though Israel was not guilty of idolatry at this stage in her history as she was later, this sin existed in the nation to some degree (cf. Lev. 17:7).

Joshua's offer to choose the God or gods they would serve (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 in so doing 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."²¹³

The people responded by committing themselves to Yahweh (vv. 16-18). They would 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."²¹⁴

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 (cf. Exod. 19:8). They had 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).

"When does God not spare (forgive)? (1) When transgression and sin is wilfully committed, and when (2) forgiveness would, as He foresees, lead to no amendment."²¹⁵

The people confirmed their earlier decision (v. 21), and Joshua reminded them that they were witnesses against themselves in the renewal of this covenant (v. 22). They would condemn themselves by their own testimony if they forsook the Lord.

²¹³Schaeffer, p. 213.

²¹⁴Jacobsen, p. 114.

²¹⁵J. P. Lange, ed., *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, 2:187.

Joshua then repeated his command to put away all idols, physical and mental, and to turn their hearts to follow Yahweh exclusively (v. 23). Again the Israelites committed themselves to follow the Lord faithfully (v. 24).

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 new one but a renewal of the Mosaic Covenant made for the first time at Mt. Sinai (v. 25). The Israelites 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 (v. 26). The "ordinance" (right) was the record of the blessings Israel would enjoy as the fruits of her obedience.

The "book of the law of God" (v. 26) was the document in which Joshua wrote the record of this renewal of the covenant. He evidently placed it with the record of the covenant itself. The "large stone" (v. 26) he erected became a permanent memorial of the renewal of the covenant undertaken this day (cf. Gen. 28:18; Deut. 27:2). Joshua set the stone up 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 (Gen. 12:7; 35:2-4). "The sanctuary" (v. 26) was this holy place, not the tabernacle that was then at Shiloh.

The stone had not literally heard all that had taken place that day (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) to reinforce the seriousness of the commitment the Israelites had made to Yahweh. He then dismissed the nation (v. 28).

This ceremony was very important to the Israelites because in it the whole nation reaffirmed its commitment to Yahweh as her God and to His covenant as her law. Israel prepared to begin another phase of her national existence without a God-appointed leader such as Moses and Joshua had been. It was important that she remember the faithfulness of her God and rededicate herself to exclusive allegiance to Him. Each tribe was to proceed now to exterminate the Canaanites in its area trusting in Yahweh and obeying His covenant. God would raise up local leaders (judges) as He saw the 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 that God had promised them in the years ahead.

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 contemporaneously with Joshua lived (v. 31).

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.²¹⁶ God greatly used Joshua as He had used Joseph in delivering His people. God recorded no moral blemish on the lives of either 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)."²¹⁷

"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."²¹⁸

Evidently the writer included the record of the burial of Joseph's bones here (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 asked that when that took place his descendants would lay his bones to rest there. The event may have taken place earlier when Joseph's descendants received Shechem as their inheritance. This burial fulfilled the promise Joseph's heirs had made to him before he died that they would bury him in Canaan (Gen. 50:25). God now rewarded his faith.

Eleazar's death and burial were also significant because, as Israel's high priest and co-leader with Joshua during this 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 word to Joshua, Joseph, Eleazar—and to all Israel. And by this we are encouraged to count on the unfailing faithfulness of God."²¹⁹

²¹⁶Merrill, *Kingdom of . . .*, p. 147.

²¹⁷Davis and Whitcomb, p. 25.

²¹⁸Butler, p. 283.

²¹⁹Campbell, *No Time . . .*, p. 142.

Thus the times of Joshua came to a close. This period of Israel's history was its greatest so far. The people had followed the Lord more faithfully than their fathers, though not completely faithfully. Consequently they experienced God's blessing more greatly than the previous generation and 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."²²⁰

²²⁰Butler, 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 all other people. As they anticipated entering into what God had for them, they possessed 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.

The principles of victory revealed and illustrated in Joshua still apply to all who are God's people.

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