

ISRAEL IN CANAAN

JOSHUA 5:13 – 12:24

The commander of YHWH's army

¹³Once when Joshua was by Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing before him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you one of us, or one of our adversaries?"

¹⁴He replied, "Neither; but as commander of the army of YHWH I have now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and he said to him, "What do you command your servant, my lord?"

¹⁵The commander of the army of YHWH said to Joshua, "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so.

The effect of this epic fragment is to heighten excitement and expectation. Joshua is surprised by a divine messenger, the commander of the heavenly hosts. Joshua and his armed forces have often been promised that they are not alone, that the conquest of Canaan is something willed by God. Here is the proof.

Joshua evinces both courage and complete docility. He is ready to be commanded. He knows that any victory will be YHWH's.

He is commanded to model himself on Moses. The imagery takes us back to the burning bush when the messenger of YHWH instructed Moses:

Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.

– Exodus 3:5

Joshua, too, is in a place (māqôm) that is 'holy'(qōdeš).

As we read on, we are to know that we are reading no ordinary story. It is the story of salvation, and the only hero is YHWH.

At the time of the emergence of Israel in Canaan, Jericho was not the city it once was. Archeology has established that its walls were destroyed some centuries earlier, possibly at the time of the ousting of the Hyksos from Egypt. In any case the importance given here to Jericho is because it is the first of the former Canaanite cities encountered in the movement of the story starting from the Jordan. It is also near the sanctuary of Gilgal.

The text of the story does not tell of a military victory. Rather it describes a liturgical celebration of the victory of YHWH. The rubrics are for the liturgical 're-enactment'. One might compare it to the instructions in a church manual for the conducting of a Palm Sunday procession.

The nucleus of historical truth behind the story is that there were towns in Canaan on sites that were once walled (we will read of another one in chapters seven to eight) that fell in one way or another to the Yahwist movement. The proximity of Jericho with its collapsed walls made it a perfect symbol of this for a Gilgal memorial ceremony.

The number 'seven' is obviously significant as is the presence of the priests carrying the ark (6:6) and trumpets (šōpār) shaped like a ram's horn (yōbēl, 6:4; qeren, 6:5). Everyone in the congregation is involved in the procession.

¹Now Jericho was shut up inside and out because of the Israelites; no one came out and no one went in.

²YHWH said to Joshua, "See, I have handed Jericho over to you, along with its king and soldiers. ³You shall march around the city, all the warriors circling the city once. Thus you shall do for six days, ⁴with seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, the priests blowing the trumpets.

⁵When they make a long blast with the ram's horn, as soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and all the people shall charge straight ahead."

⁶So Joshua son of Nun summoned the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant, and have seven priests carry seven trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark of YHWH." ⁷To the people he said, "Go forward and march around the city; have the armed men pass on before the ark of YHWH."

⁸As Joshua had commanded the people, the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets of rams' horns before YHWH went forward, blowing the trumpets, with the ark of the covenant of YHWH following them. ⁹And the armed men went before the priests who blew the trumpets; the rear guard came after the ark, while the trumpets blew continually.

¹⁰To the people Joshua gave this command: "You shall not shout or let your voice be heard, nor shall you utter a word, until the day I tell you to shout. Then you shall shout."

¹¹So the ark of YHWH went around the city, circling it once; and they came into the camp, and spent the night in the camp.

¹²Then Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of YHWH.

¹³The seven priests carrying the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of YHWH passed on, blowing the trumpets continually. The armed men went before them, and the rear guard came after the ark of YHWH, while the trumpets blew continually. ¹⁴On the second day they marched around the city once and then returned to the camp. They did this for six days.

¹⁵On the seventh day they rose early, at dawn, and marched around the city in the same manner seven times. It was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times. ¹⁶And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, "Shout! For YHWH has given you the city.

¹⁷The city and all that is in it shall be devoted to YHWH for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live because she hid the messengers we sent. ¹⁸As for you, keep away from the things devoted to destruction, so as not to covet and take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel an object for destruction, bringing trouble upon it. ¹⁹But all silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are sacred to YHWH; they shall go into the treasury of YHWH."

In verse seventeen we read:

The city and all that is in it shall be devoted to YHWH for destruction [ḥērem].

Some understanding of this notion is important, if only because it is found twenty-two times in Joshua. It is a key concept of the Deuteronomic School. Perhaps the best place to start is to list the texts in Deuteronomy where we find the notion of ḥērem.

In recalling the victory over Sihon, Moses reminds the people:

We captured all his towns, and in each town we utterly destroyed [ḥāram] men, women, and children. We left not a single survivor.

– Deuteronomy 2:34

It was the same in Bashan (see Deuteronomy 3:6). As part of his instructions as to how they are to treat the inhabitants of Canaan, Moses says:

When YHWH your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy [ḥāram] them. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy.

– Deuteronomy 7:2

Moses warns them not to bring pagan idols into their house

or you will be set apart for destruction [ḥērem] like it. You must utterly detest and abhor it, for it is set apart for destruction [ḥerem].

– Deuteronomy 7:26

The same must happen to any Israelite town that gets involved in worshipping false gods:

You shall put the inhabitants of that town to the sword, utterly destroying [ḥāram] it and everything in it—even putting its livestock to the sword.

– Deuteronomy 13:15 (see 13:17)

Finally:

As for the towns of these peoples that YHWH your God is giving you as an inheritance, you must not let anything that breathes remain alive. You shall annihilate [ḥāram] them ... just as YHWH your God has commanded,

– Deuteronomy 20:16-17

On face value, the positive aspect of the command that ‘the city and all that is in it shall be devoted to YHWH for destruction (ḥērem, Joshua 6:17) is that it is a discouragement from waging war for personal or communal gain (all spoils have to be given up to YHWH). The negative aspect is in the picture it gives of YHWH, and what the ruthless, warrior god wills or allows in order to achieve his purposes.

It is essential to remember, however, that the Deuteronomist is writing when Canaan is Israelite. The ḥērem, therefore, rather than being a military strategy commanded by YHWH, is a later theological construct stressing the absolute importance of not taking any chances in compromising the purity of Israel’s religious values. This is indicated by the last text from Deuteronomy just quoted. Having commanded the annihilation of ‘everything that breathes’, the text goes on to give the reason:

so that they may not teach you to do all the abhorrent things that they do for their gods,
and you thus sin against YHWH your God.

As some of the texts from Deuteronomy indicate (see Deuteronomy 7:26; 13:15), it is a threat as much against Israel as against Israel’s enemies. We have to remember that the Deuteronomists are writing at a time when the very survival of Israel as a people was at stake. In light of the aggression by Assyria and Babylon at the time of writing, and with the memory of the accommodation that went on under Manasseh, the Deuteronomists are using desperate language to confront a desperate situation. The fact that we are dealing here with a later construct of the Deuteronomists takes away some of the repugnance of the notion of ḥērem, but it hardly makes more acceptable the image it conveys of God.

The central thrust of the message inherent in the notion of ḥērem is of the absolute importance of total allegiance to the true God, YHWH, as well as of the dangers to the community of false religion. Thanks to Jesus we can see beyond the serious defects of this dangerous notion. Not to do so could leave us vulnerable to the repetition of the zealous but sometimes horrendous behaviour that we see in the history of those who take the idea out of context and see it as justifying ‘annihilation’ in God’s name. The idea is not as dead as we might have hoped.

In verse seventeen the commitment given to Rahab is recalled (2:14). We are meant to observe the faithfulness of YHWH even in the terrible circumstances of war. The Israelites suffering under the Assyrians and Babylonians needed to be reassured on this point.

In verses fifteen to twenty-seven we see the fulfilment of YHWH’s promise. The city falls and is totally destroyed except for Rahab and her family

¹⁵On the seventh day they rose early, at dawn, and marched around the city in the same manner seven times. It was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times. ¹⁶And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, "Shout! For YHWH has given you the city. ¹⁷The city and all that is in it shall be devoted to YHWH for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live because she hid the messengers we sent. ¹⁸As for you, keep away from the things devoted to destruction, so as not to covet and take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel an object for destruction, bringing trouble upon it. ¹⁹But all silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are sacred to YHWH; they shall go into the treasury of YHWH."

²⁰So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpets, they raised a great shout, and the wall fell down flat; so the people charged straight ahead into the city and captured it. ²¹Then they devoted to destruction by the edge of the sword all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys.

²²Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, "Go into the prostitute's house, and bring the woman out of it and all who belong to her, as you swore to her." ²³So the young men who had been spies went in and brought Rahab out, along with her father, her mother, her brothers, and all who belonged to her—they brought all her kindred out—and set them outside the camp of Israel.

²⁴They burned down the city, and everything in it; only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of YHWH. ²⁵But Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, Joshua spared. Her family has lived in Israel ever since. For she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

²⁶Joshua then pronounced this oath, saying,

"Cursed before YHWH be anyone who tries
to build this city—this Jericho!
At the cost of his firstborn he shall lay its foundation,
and at the cost of his youngest he shall set up its gates!"

²⁷So YHWH was with Joshua; and his fame was in all the land.

The 'curse' uttered by Joshua supports the idea that at the time that this liturgical commemoration was part of the ritual at the sanctuary of Gilgal, Jericho was a local ruin – a perfect symbol of the victory of YHWH against the Canaanite 'kings'.

Introduction to 7:1 – 8:29

Archeology has established that in its heyday Ai was a powerful city-state, much larger than Jericho. However, that was in the vicinity of a thousand years prior to the emergence of Israel. There were many tells (artificial mounds formed by the accumulated remains of ancient settlements) in Canaan. This is a story that features one of the largest of them. Like Jericho it is within the tribal area of Benjamin. The word ‘Ai’ means ‘ruin’. This is a story about the victory of Israel over the inhabitants of a town built on the site of a well-known ruin some two kilometres from the important sanctuary of Bethel. Bethel is mentioned in the text (7:2; 8:9, 12, 17), and this story may have come from the Bethel sanctuary, though as it stands it is linked with the Gilgal sanctuary by the reference to the Valley of Achor (7:24, 26), a plain some four kilometres wide and eight kilometres long just west of Qumran, and a day’s journey south from Gilgal.

This story is composed in a very different style from the previous one concerning Jericho. That was a liturgical text. This one captures the kind of military strategy that would have been repeated in many places when, in the name of YHWH, the locals rose up against the foreigners who had been controlling them from the towns.

The story begins with a set-back, of which no doubt there were plenty in the early years of the emergence of Israel. Since YHWH is leading the conquest, a reason had to be discovered, and it is found in Achan’s failure to follow YHWH’s instructions concerning the *hērem* (see pages 236-237). There is more than one strand to the story, for when the sin is actually located it seems to relate more to stealing from the booty than to a failure to carry out the *hērem*. In any case, once the sin is admitted and punished, in chapter eight YHWH gives the instructions and they are followed obediently, with complete victory.

1. Set-back at Ai (7:1-5; see map page 244)

¹But the Israelites broke faith in regard to the devoted things: Achan son of Carmi son of Zabdi son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things; and the anger of the LORD burned against the Israelites.

²Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and said to them, “Go up and spy out the land.” And the men went up and spied out Ai. ³Then they returned to Joshua and said to him, “Not all the people need go up; about two or three thousand men should go up and attack Ai. Since they are so few, do not make the whole people toil up there.”

⁴So about three *contingents* of the people went up there; and they fled before the men of Ai. ⁵The men of Ai killed about thirty-six of them, chasing them from outside the gate as far as Shebarim and killing them on the slope. The hearts of the people melted and turned to water.

As noted above, this is the first set-back. The reason for it is stated up front (7:1), and the confession and punishment will follow. ‘elep in verse four is translated ‘contingent’, not ‘thousand’(see 4:13). The loss of thirty-six men out of three thousand is nowhere near as dramatic as the loss of thirty-six out of a contingent that could have been as small as fifty.

2. Disobedience is punished (7:6-26)

⁶Then Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the ground on his face before the ark of YHWH until the evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads. ⁷Joshua said, "Ah, Lord YHWH! Why have you brought this people across the Jordan at all, to hand us over to the Amorites so as to destroy us? Would that we had been content to settle beyond the Jordan! ⁸O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has turned their backs to their enemies! ⁹The Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will you do for your great name?"

The 'name' is important. YHWH has chosen Israel to reveal the nature of the true God to the world. If Israel is annihilated the world will fail to know and call upon YHWH.

¹⁰YHWH said to Joshua, "Stand up! Why have you fallen upon your face? ¹¹Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I imposed on them. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have acted deceitfully, and they have put them among their own belongings. ¹²Therefore the Israelites are unable to stand before their enemies; they turn their backs to their enemies, because they have become a thing devoted for destruction themselves. I will be with you no more, unless you destroy the devoted things from among you. ¹³Proceed to sanctify the people, and say, 'Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow; for thus says YHWH, the God of Israel, "There are devoted things among you, O Israel; you will be unable to stand before your enemies until you take away the devoted things from among you."

On the idea of devoting things to destruction see pages 236 to 237.

¹⁴In the morning therefore you shall come forward tribe by tribe. The tribe that YHWH takes shall come near by clans, the clan that YHWH takes shall come near by households, and the household that YHWH takes shall come near one by one. ¹⁵And the one who is taken as having the devoted things shall be burned with fire, together with all that he has, for having transgressed the covenant of YHWH, and for having done an outrageous thing in Israel."

¹⁶So Joshua rose early in the morning, and brought Israel near tribe by tribe, and the tribe of Judah was taken. ¹⁷He brought near the clans of Judah, and the clan of the Zerahites was taken; and he brought near the clan of the Zerahites, family by family, and Zabdi was taken. ¹⁸And he brought near his household one by one, and Achan son of Carmi son of Zabdi son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.

We are perhaps meant to understand that the selection is made by use of the Urim and Thummin (see Numbers 27:21; and 1Samuel 14:41). They trusted that God would intervene and reveal guilt by, as it were, the throwing of a dice (Exodus 22:9 seems to be referring to such a practice).

¹⁹Then Joshua said to Achan, "My son, give glory to YHWH God of Israel and make confession to him. Tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me." ²⁰And Achan answered Joshua, "It is true; I am the one who sinned against YHWH God of Israel. This is what I did: ²¹when I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels, then I coveted them and took them. They now lie hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath."

As noted in introducing this chapter, the crime here seems to be that of stealing from the booty rather than disobedience to the law of ḥērem. Not unusually different strands representing different versions of a story are stitched together by the editors at various stages of the handing down of the text.

²²So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and there it was, hidden in his tent with the silver underneath. ²³They took them out of the tent and brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites; and they spread them out before YHWH. ²⁴Then Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan son of Zerah, with the silver, the mantle, and the bar of gold, with his sons and daughters, with his oxen, donkeys, and sheep, and his tent and all that he had; and they brought them up to the Valley of Achor.

Not unusually, the whole family suffers for the deeds of the head of the household.

²⁵Joshua said, "Why did you bring trouble on us? YHWH is bringing trouble on you today." And all Israel stoned him to death; they burned them with fire, cast stones on them, ²⁶and raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then YHWH turned from his burning anger. Therefore that place to this day is called the Valley of Achor.

An ambush is set up

3. YHWH commands Joshua to organise an ambush (8:1-2)

¹Then YHWH said to Joshua, “Do not fear or be dismayed; take all the fighting men with you, and go up now to Ai. See, I have handed over to you the king of Ai with his people, his city, and his land.

This echoes YHWH’s earlier words to Joshua:

Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for YHWH your God is with you wherever you go.

– Deuteronomy 1:9

Also YHWH’s words concerning Jericho:

YHWH said to Joshua, “See, I have handed Jericho over to you, along with its king and soldiers.

– Joshua 6:2

²You shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king; only its spoil and its livestock you may take as booty for yourselves. Set an ambush against the city, behind it.”

4a. Joshua organises an ambush (8:3-11)

This seems to be a second version inserted by the editors to fill out the story.

³So Joshua and all the fighting men set out to go up against Ai. Joshua chose thirty *contingents* of warriors and sent them out by night ⁴with the command, “You shall lie in ambush against the city, behind it; do not go very far from the city, but all of you stay alert. ⁵I and all the people who are with me will approach the city. When they come out against us, as before, we shall flee from them. ⁶They will come out after us until we have drawn them away from the city; for they will say, ‘They are fleeing from us, as before.’ While we flee from them, ⁷you shall rise up from the ambush and seize the city; for YHWH your God will give it into your hand. ⁸And when you have taken the city, you shall set the city on fire, doing as YHWH has ordered; see, I have commanded you.” ⁹So Joshua sent them out; and they went to the place of ambush, and lay between Bethel and Ai, to the west of Ai; but Joshua spent that night in the camp. ¹⁰In the morning Joshua rose early and mustered the people, and went up, with the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai. ¹¹All the fighting men who were with him went up, and drew near before the city, and camped on the north side of Ai, with a ravine between them and Ai.

4b. The ambush is set and is successful (8:12-19)

¹²Taking about five *contingents* of men, he set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, to the west of the city. ¹³So they stationed the forces, the main encampment that was north of the city and its rear guard west of the city. But Joshua spent that night in the valley. ¹⁴When the king of Ai saw this, he and all his people, the inhabitants of the city, hurried out early in the morning to the meeting place facing the Arabah to meet Israel in battle; but he did not know that there was an ambush against him behind the city.

¹⁵And Joshua and all Israel made a pretense of being beaten before them, and fled in the direction of the wilderness. ¹⁶So all the people who were in the city were called together to pursue them, and as they pursued Joshua they were drawn away from the city. ¹⁷There was not a man left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel; they left the city open, and pursued Israel. ¹⁸Then YHWH said to Joshua, "Stretch out the sword that is in your hand toward Ai; for I will give it into your hand." And Joshua stretched out the sword that was in his hand toward the city. ¹⁹As soon as he stretched out his hand, the troops in ambush rose quickly out of their place and rushed forward. They entered the city, took it, and at once set the city on fire.

The curved sword (*kîdôn*) is a weapon from ancient epics, not the usual straight sword (*ḥereb*) or spear (*ḥanîṭ*) used in warfare at the time. It is named here for its epic power. It is not used as a signal to those in ambush, but a sign of divinely ordained victory.

5a. Total victory (8:20-25)

Like 8:3-11, this seems to be inserted from another version

²⁰So when the men of Ai looked back, the smoke of the city was rising to the sky. They had no power to flee this way or that, for the people who fled to the wilderness turned back against the pursuers. ²¹When Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city and that the smoke of the city was rising, then they turned back and struck down the men of Ai. ²²And the others came out from the city against them; so they were surrounded by Israelites, some on one side, and some on the other; and Israel struck them down until no one was left who survived or escaped. ²³But the king of Ai was taken alive and brought to Joshua. ²⁴When Israel had finished slaughtering all the inhabitants of Ai in the open wilderness where they pursued them, and when all of them to the very last had fallen by the edge of the sword, all Israel returned to Ai, and attacked it with the edge of the sword. ²⁵The total of those who fell that day, both men and women, was twelve *contingents* – all the people of Ai.

5b. Total victory (8:26-29)

²⁶For Joshua did not draw back his hand, with which he stretched out the sword, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai.

We are surely meant to remember Moses holding up his hand in the battle led by Joshua against the Amalekites (Exodus 17:11).

²⁷Only the livestock and the spoil of that city Israel took as their booty, according to the word of YHWH that he had issued to Joshua. ²⁸So Joshua burned Ai, and made it forever a heap of ruins, as it is to this day. ²⁹And he hanged the king of Ai on a tree until evening; and at sunset Joshua commanded, and they took his body down from the tree, threw it down at the entrance of the gate of the city, and raised over it a great heap of stones, which stands there to this day.

³⁰Then Joshua built on Mount Ebal an altar to YHWH, the God of Israel, ³¹just as Moses the servant of YHWH had commanded the Israelites, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, “an altar of unhewn stones, on which no iron tool has been used”; and they offered on it burnt offerings to YHWH, and offered *communion sacrifices*.

³²And there, in the presence of the Israelites, Joshua wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written.

³³All Israel, alien as well as citizen, with their elders and officers and their judges, stood on opposite sides of the ark in front of the levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of YHWH, half of them in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of YHWH had commanded at the first, that they should bless the people of Israel.

³⁴And afterward he read all the words of the law, blessings and curses, according to all that is written in the book of the law. ³⁵There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the aliens who resided among them.

This scene fits awkwardly here. The texts before and after relate to Benjamin territory. It is inserted in order to show, early in the book, that Joshua carried out the instructions given by Moses in Deuteronomy 27 (8:31 quotes Deuteronomy 27:5). Shechem was destroyed by Abimelech c.1150BC, but remained as an important pilgrimage site (see map page 246).

Mount Ebal overlooks the important east-west pass through the central hill country. To the south is Mount Gerizim. It is interesting that it is Mount Gerizim that is mentioned in the Samaritan Version of this story. It is likely that the ceremony was associated more with Mount Gerizim, which was an ancient sacred site. Did the authors of Joshua replace it as part of their anti-Samaritan polemic?

This does seem to record a very early event in the story of the emergence of Israel in Canaan. The Israelites are assembled to record and proclaim the covenant and to publicly renew their commitment to it. Present also are ‘alien as well as citizen’ (8:33). This seems to describe locals who are interested in the Israelite movement but have not yet been officially incorporated by circumcision.

Deuteronomy 27 speaks of the twelve tribes standing on the slopes of the two mountains (see Deuteronomy 27:11-13). The scene here in Joshua refers to a time before there was anything like a tribal confederation.

The ‘blessings and curses’ (8:34; see Deuteronomy 27-28) speak of the way Israel is and is not to behave in accordance with the covenant. This is the first mention of ‘the assembly’ (qāhāl, 8:35), the deliberative and decision-making assembly of tribal Israel. It is referred to only on rare occasions in the so-called ‘Deuteronomic History’, as it was by-passed once the monarchy became central to Israel’s communal life.

Introduction to chapter nine

So far our story has focused on Israel's victory over two small villages, Jericho and Ai. The emergence of Israel in Canaan involved more than that, as is made clear in the opening two verses of the chapter which prepare us for opposition from the larger city-states. Faced with this kind of opposition it is to be expected that nascent Israel would have had to enter into treaties, and the rest of the chapter records a treaty entered into with Gibeon and a cluster of Hivite-controlled villages to the northwest of Jerusalem. The problem with such a treaty, however, is that it cuts across the command of YHWH to annihilate all the inhabitants. We have already seen that this 'command' (the *hērem*) is introduced into the text by the Deuteronomists (see pages 236-237). For consistency they are forced to try to excuse the treaty, and they do so by distancing YHWH from it, and by doing their best to involve Joshua as little as possible. After the short insertion of 8:30-35 we are back in the territory of Benjamin. The record of the treaty was presumably kept and retold in the Gilgal sanctuary. This is probably why Gilgal is mentioned in verse six.

More ominous opposition gathers (9:1-2)

¹Now when all the kings who were beyond the Jordan in the hill country and in the lowland all along the coast of the Great Sea toward Lebanon—the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, [the Girgashites] and the Jebusites—heard of this, ²they gathered together with one accord to fight Joshua and Israel.

The Septuagint includes 'the Girgashites' (see also 3:10). It is absent from the Hebrew text by mistake and is restored here from the Greek Version.

A treaty with Gibeon and its allied towns (9:3-15; see map page 244)

³But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, ⁴they on their part acted with cunning: they *packed their provisions and posed as emissaries*, and took worn-out sacks for their donkeys, and wineskins, worn-out and torn and mended, ⁵with worn-out, patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes; and all their provisions were dry and mouldy.

⁶They went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal, and said to him and to the Israelites, "We have come from a far country; so now make a treaty with us." ⁷But the Israelites said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you live among us; then how can we make a treaty with you?" ⁸They said to Joshua, "We are your servants." And Joshua said to them, "Who are you? And where do you come from?" ⁹They said to him, "Your servants have come from a very far country, because of the name of YHWH your God; for we have heard a report of him, of all that he did in Egypt, ¹⁰and of all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, King Sihon of Heshbon, and King Og of Bashan who lived in Ashtaroth.

YHWH's 'name' (9:9) is spreading. Like Rahab in Jericho (see Joshua 2:10), the inhabitants of Gideon have heard what happened in Transjordan.

Treaty with Gibeon

¹¹So our elders and all the inhabitants of our country said to us, "Take provisions in your hand for the journey; go to meet them, and say to them, "We are your servants; come now, make a treaty with us." ' ¹²Here is our bread; it was still warm when we took it from our houses as our food for the journey, on the day we set out to come to you, but now, see, it is dry and mouldy; ¹³these wineskins were new when we filled them, and see, they are burst; and these garments and sandals of ours are worn out from the very long journey."

¹⁴So the *men* partook of their provisions, and did not ask direction from YHWH. ¹⁵And Joshua made peace with them, guaranteeing their lives by a treaty; and the leaders of the congregation swore an oath to them.

'The men' is purposely vague. A treaty meal was shared, but we are told that those responsible 'did not ask direction from YHWH'(9:14). As noted on the previous page this is necessary in light of YHWH's supposed command to 'devote everything for destruction (ḥērem. 6:17). Joshua is left with little choice but to make peace (šālôm, 9:15) with them. 'Peace' is the goal of a covenant. The 'leaders'(nāšî') confirm the treaty with a solemn oath. The 'congregation' ('ēdâ) refers to the same body as the qāhāl of 8:35, with an added reference to the covenant.

Insertion of an independent (older?) account (9:16-27)

¹⁶But when three days had passed after they had made a treaty with them, they heard that they were their neighbours and were living among them.

¹⁷So the Israelites set out and reached their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon, Chepirah, Beeroth, and Kiriath-jearim.



¹⁸But the Israelites did not attack them, because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by YHWH, the God of Israel. Then all the congregation murmured against the leaders. ¹⁹But all the leaders said to all the congregation, "We have sworn to them by YHWH, the God of Israel, and now we must not touch them. ²⁰This is what we will do to them: We will let them live, so that wrath may not come upon us, because of the oath that we swore to them." ²¹The leaders said to them, "Let them live." So they became hewers of wood and drawers of water for all the congregation, as the leaders had decided concerning them. ²²Joshua summoned them, and said to them, "Why did you deceive us, saying, 'We are very far from you,' while in fact you are living among us? ²³Now therefore you are cursed, and some of you shall always be slaves, hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God."

Yahwism is essentially egalitarian. This seems to be another attempt to rationalise the actual situation of social stratification.

²⁴They answered Joshua, "Because it was told to your servants for a certainty that YHWH your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land before you; so we were in great fear for our lives because of you, and did this thing. ²⁵And now we are in your hand: do as it seems good and right in your sight to do to us."

²⁶This is what he did for them: he [Joshua] saved them from the Israelites; and they did not kill them. ²⁷But on that day Joshua made them hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of YHWH, to continue to this day, in the place that he should choose.

This is the only time in Joshua that we find the expression 'the place that he should choose' (9:27). It occurs twenty-two times in Deuteronomy (see 12:5, page 116).

Introduction to chapter ten

The story goes up a notch. 9:1-2 prepared us for another aspect of the emergence of Israel in Canaan – the opposition of the city-states. In summary form the story is told here.

¹When King Adoni-zedek of Jerusalem heard how Joshua had taken Ai, and had utterly destroyed it, doing to Ai and its king as he had done to Jericho and its king, and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel and were among them, ²he became greatly frightened, because Gibeon was a large city, like one of the royal cities, and was larger than Ai, and all its men were warriors.

³So King Adoni-zedek of Jerusalem sent a message to King Hoham of Hebron, to King Piram of Jarmuth, to King Japhia of Lachish, and to King Debir of Eglon, saying, ⁴“Come up and help me, and let us attack Gibeon; for it has made peace with Joshua and with the Israelites.” ⁵Then the five kings of the Amorites—the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon—gathered their forces, and went up with all their armies and camped against Gibeon, and made war against it.



Armies of the city-states defeated in the field (10:6-15)

⁶And the Gibeonites sent to Joshua at the camp in Gilgal, saying, “Do not abandon your servants; come up to us quickly, and save us, and help us; for all the kings of the Amorites who live in the hill country are gathered against us.” ⁷So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the fighting force with him, all the mighty warriors. ⁸YHWH said to Joshua, “Do not fear them, for I have handed them over to you; not one of them shall stand before you.”

YHWH has been consulted (perhaps by use of the Urim and Thummin?). On one level the victory belongs to Joshua. The text, however, focuses on the real source of the victory: YHWH.

⁹So Joshua came upon them suddenly, having marched up all night from Gilgal. ¹⁰And YHWH threw them into a panic before Israel, who inflicted a great slaughter on them at Gibeon, chased them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon, and struck them down as far as Azekah and Makkedah.

The ascent of Beth-horon is through the valley of Aijalon (see map page 248).

¹¹As they fled before Israel, while they were going down the slope of Beth-horon, YHWH threw down huge stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died; there were more who died because of the hailstones than the Israelites killed with the sword.

¹²On the day when YHWH gave the Amorites over to the Israelites, Joshua spoke to YHWH; and he said in the sight of Israel,

[The Greek Version encourages the following translation of verse twelve: ‘Then Joshua appealed to YHWH on the day when YHWH gave the Amorites over to the Israelites. When he [YHWH] attacked them at Gibeon, they were smitten before the Israelites. He [YHWH] said in the sight of Israel’]. The text is best understood as focusing on YHWH’s victory, and it is YHWH who, in response to Joshua’s plea, is commanding the sun in the eastern sky and the moon in the west to stand and marvel at YHWH’s victory.

**“Sun, stand still at Gibeon,
and Moon, in the valley of Aijalon.”**

**¹³And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped,
until he defeated his enemies’ force.**

Habakkuk uses a similar poetic image:

The moon stood still in its exalted place, at the light of your arrows speeding by, at the gleam of your flashing spear.

Is this not written in the Book of Jashar? The sun stopped in mid-heaven, and did not hurry to set for about a whole day. ¹⁴There has been no day like it before or since, when YHWH heeded a human voice; for YHWH fought for Israel.

The Book of Yashar (‘the righteous one’) seems to have been an anthology of heroes.

¹⁵Then Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal.

The fate of the five kings (10:16-17)

¹⁶Meanwhile, these five kings fled and hid themselves in the cave at Makkedah. ¹⁷And it was told Joshua, "The five kings have been found, hidden in the cave at Makkedah." ¹⁸Joshua said, "Roll large stones against the mouth of the cave, and set men by it to guard them; ¹⁹but do not stay there yourselves; pursue your enemies, and attack them from the rear. Do not let them enter their towns, for YHWH your God has given them into your hand."

²⁰When Joshua and the Israelites had finished inflicting a very great slaughter on them, until they were wiped out, and when the survivors had entered into the fortified towns, ²¹all the people returned safe to Joshua in the camp at Makkedah; no one dared to speak against any of the Israelites.

²²Then Joshua said, "Open the mouth of the cave, and bring those five kings out to me from the cave." ²³They did so, and brought the five kings out to him from the cave, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon. ²⁴When they brought the kings out to Joshua, Joshua summoned all the Israelites, and said to the chiefs of the warriors who had gone with him, "Come near, put your feet on the necks of these kings." Then they came near and put their feet on their necks. ²⁵And Joshua said to them, "Do not be afraid or dismayed; be strong and courageous; for thus YHWH will do to all the enemies against whom you fight." ²⁶Afterward Joshua struck them down and put them to death, and he hung them on five trees. And they hung on the trees until evening. ²⁷At sunset Joshua commanded, and they took them down from the trees and threw them into the cave where they had hidden themselves; they set large stones against the mouth of the cave, which remain to this very day.

Conquest of the South (10:28-43; see map page 246)

We have witnessed small villages yielding to the Yahwist movement: by force (Jericho, chapter 6; Ai, chapter 8); or by treaty (Gibeon, chapter 9). We have witnessed the forces of city-states being defeated in the field (10:1-27). Now we are told of the capture of the cities in southern Canaan, along with the destruction of everyone in the city (on the role of the *hērem* in Deuteronomistic theology, see pages 236-237). In his commentary on Joshua (Anchor Bible, Doubleday, 1982, page 280), Robert Boling writes:

The kingdoms of Canaan that were dismantled by the Yahwist revolution were mostly of recent and alien origin, as is indicated by the high frequency of non-Semitic personal names.

The account is no more than a summary record, probably kept in the Gilgal sanctuary (see 10:43). Note the central role of Joshua. Also the accent on 'all Israel'. Finally, and most importantly, credit for the victory is given to YHWH.

²⁸Joshua took Makkedah on that day, and struck it and its king with the edge of the sword; he utterly destroyed every person in it; he left no one remaining. And he did to the king of Makkedah as he had done to the king of Jericho.

²⁹Then Joshua passed on from Makkedah, and all Israel with him, to Libnah, and fought against Libnah. ³⁰YHWH gave it also and its king into the hand of Israel; and he struck it with the edge of the sword, and every person in it; he left no one remaining in it; and he did to its king as he had done to the king of Jericho.

³¹Next Joshua passed on from Libnah, and all Israel with him, to Lachish, and laid siege to it, and assaulted it. ³²YHWH gave Lachish into the hand of Israel, and he took it on the second day, and struck it with the edge of the sword, and every person in it, as he had done to Libnah.

³³Then King Horem of Gezer came up to help Lachish; and Joshua struck him and his people, leaving him no survivors.

³⁴From Lachish Joshua passed on with all Israel to Eglon; and they laid siege to it, and assaulted it; ³⁵and they took it that day, and struck it with the edge of the sword; and every person in it he utterly destroyed that day, as he had done to Lachish.

³⁶Then Joshua went up with all Israel from Eglon to Hebron; they assaulted it, ³⁷and took it, and struck it with the edge of the sword, and its king and its towns, and every person in it; he left no one remaining, just as he had done to Eglon, and utterly destroyed it with every person in it.

³⁸Then Joshua, with all Israel, turned back to Debir and assaulted it, ³⁹and he took it with its king and all its towns; they struck them with the edge of the sword, and utterly destroyed every person in it; he left no one remaining; just as he had done to Hebron, and, as he had done to Libnah and its king, so he did to Debir and its king.

⁴⁰So Joshua defeated the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings; he left no one remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as YHWH God of Israel commanded. ⁴¹And Joshua defeated them from Kadesh-barnea to Gaza, and all the country of Goshen, as far as Gibeon. ⁴²Joshua took all these kings and their land at one time, because YHWH God of Israel fought for Israel.

⁴³Then Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal.

Before leaving these stories recorded and told in the Benjamin sanctuary of Gilgal, it is of value to note the following remark from George Mendenhall in an article 'The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine', published in the *Biblical Archeologist* 25 (1962) page 73:

The Hebrew conquest of Palestine took place because a religious movement and motivation created a solidarity among a large group of pre-existing social units.

Old systems based on power and subjection gave way to a community based on a notion of God as one who cares for the enslaved, the poor and the marginalised, and on an ethic of justice in which the leaders did not use religion and the cult to justify their exercise of power, but who were themselves accountable for their obedience to the covenant that gave the community its identity.

Introduction to chapter eleven

It is something of a surprise that there are no stories in the Book of Joshua from Israel's most significant area, the central hill country occupied by the Joseph tribe, which is Joshua's own tribe. In this chapter we go to the extreme north, to the territory of the Naphtali tribe, and a victory over the forces of the city-states in the area, in particular Hazor, that was rightly part of the epic of the emergence of Israel in Galilee. Israel was fighting for survival in the open field against the forces of Hazor. Hazor was not the powerful city-state that it was in its heyday, but it was still the dominant power in the region, and its forces included small, fast, two-men chariots (driver and warrior). The brave Israel fighters caught them by surprise, crippled their horses, and had a surprising victory. Let us enjoy their story.

¹When King Jabin of Hazor heard of this, he sent to King Jobab of Madon, to the king of Shimron, to the king of Achshaph, ²and to the kings who were in the northern hill country, and in the Arabah south of Chinneroth, and in the lowland, and in Naphoth-dor on the west, ³to the Canaanites in the east and the west, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, and the Jebusites in the hill country, and the Hivites under Hermon in the land of Mizpah. ⁴They came out, with all their troops, a great army, in number like the sand on the seashore, with very many horses and chariots. ⁵All these kings joined their forces, and came and camped together at the waters of Merom, to fight with Israel.



A brilliant victory (11:6-9)

⁶And YHWH said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them, for tomorrow at this time I will hand over all of them, slain, to Israel; you shall hamstring their horses, and burn their chariots with fire."

⁷So Joshua came suddenly upon them with all his fighting force, by the waters of Merom, and fell upon them. ⁸And YHWH handed them over to Israel, who attacked them and chased them as far as Great Sidon and Misrephothmaim, and eastward as far as the valley of Mizpeh. They struck them down, until they had left no one remaining. ⁹And Joshua did to them as YHWH commanded him; he hamstrung their horses, and burned their chariots with fire.

Appendix (11:10-15)

With this appendix we move into a different kind of writing. Archeology has demonstrated that Hazor was, indeed, destroyed some time in the thirteenth century BC, as were other towns in Canaan. However, this could well have been because of the invasion of the Sea Peoples at this time, or because of fighting among the cities themselves. Boling writes: 'The destruction of Hazor may have preceded the arrival of Israel'(page 308). He continues (page 309):

The archeological evidence of Hazor must be considered alongside a growing list of famous towns and cities, the destruction of which during the preceding eras left only small forts to be overpowered, and in fact created the conditions for the spread of unwallled villages, while the Yahweh army grew rapidly through conversion and negotiation.

It was enough for those who told these stories that Israel did put its roots down in Galilee, and the once powerful city-states were unable to prevent it. As the story is told, the victory, as always, belongs to YHWH. Linking the story with Joshua (11:10), and through him to Moses (11:15) is a way of holding together the whole picture of Israel's emergence in Canaan. On the 'utter destruction' of the enemy (ḥērem) see pages 236-237.

¹⁰Joshua turned back at that time, and took Hazor, and struck its king down with the sword. Before that time Hazor was the head of all those kingdoms. ¹¹And they put to the sword all who were in it, utterly destroying them; there was no one left who breathed, and he burned Hazor with fire. ¹²And all the towns of those kings, and all their kings, Joshua took, and struck them with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them, as Moses the servant of YHWH had commanded. ¹³But Israel burned none of the towns that stood on mounds except Hazor, which Joshua did burn. ¹⁴All the spoil of these towns, and the livestock, the Israelites took for their booty; but all the people they struck down with the edge of the sword, until they had destroyed them, and they did not leave any who breathed. ¹⁵As YHWH had commanded his servant Moses, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did; he left nothing undone of all that YHWH had commanded Moses.

Summary of Joshua's Victories (11:16-20)

¹⁶So Joshua took all that land: the hill country and all the Negeb and all the land of Goshen and the lowland and the Arabah and the hill country of Israel and its lowland, ¹⁷from Mount Halak, which rises toward Seir, as far as Baal-gad in the valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon. He took all their kings, struck them down, and put them to death. ¹⁸Joshua made war a long time with all those kings. ¹⁹There was not a town that made peace with the Israelites, except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon; all were taken in battle. ²⁰For it was YHWH'S doing to harden their hearts so that they would come against Israel in battle, in order that they might be utterly destroyed, and might receive no mercy, but be exterminated, just as YHWH had commanded Moses.

On the theme of YHWH hardening people's hearts see the commentary on Deuteronomy 2:30 (page 47). If one begins with the perspective that God controls whatever happens in the world, one must search for a reason for people's resistance to God's will. The Biblical authors knew that we are not mere puppets in God's hands, and that we are responsible and therefore guilty for such resistance. However, in their view, God must somehow have willed the hardening of the hearts of Israel's enemies in order to bring about their annihilation. Clearly we are dealing with theology, not history, and an unsatisfactory theology at that.

The Anakim (11:21-22)

The first mention of the Anakim is in Deuteronomy when those who were sent from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the southern area of Canaan report back to Moses and the people:

The people are stronger and taller than we; the cities are large and fortified up to heaven! We actually saw there the offspring of the Anakim!

– Deuteronomy 1:28

They are mentioned again in relation to a group in Moab, where they are linked to the legendary Rephaim (Deuteronomy 2:10-11). Similarly in relation to the Ammonites (Deuteronomy 2:21). Finally, in speaking of the people they will meet when they cross into Canaan, Moses speaks of

a strong and tall people, the offspring of the Anakim, whom you know. You have heard it said of them, "Who can stand up to the Anakim?"

The reference here to Gaza, Gath and Ashdod, suggest that they were a particularly tall group of people who came into Canaan among the 'Sea Peoples'.

²¹At that time Joshua came and wiped out the Anakim from the hill country, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel; Joshua utterly destroyed them with their towns. ²²None of the Anakim was left in the land of the Israelites; some remained only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod.

²³So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that YHWH had spoken to Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotments. And the land had rest from war.

Summary of Victories in Transjordan (12:1-6; see Deut. 2-3; maps, page 47, 49)

¹Now these are the kings of the land, whom the Israelites defeated, whose land they occupied beyond the Jordan toward the east, from the Wadi Arnon to Mount Hermon, with all the Arabah eastward: ²King Sihon of the Amorites who lived at Heshbon, and ruled from Aroer, which is on the edge of the Wadi Arnon, and from the middle of the valley as far as the river Jabbok, the boundary of the Ammonites, that is, half of Gilead, ³and the Arabah to the Sea of Chinneroth eastward, and in the direction of Beth-jeshimoth, to the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, southward to the foot of the slopes of Pisgah; ⁴and King Og of Bashan, one of the last of the Rephaim, who lived at Ashtaroth and at Edrei⁵and ruled over Mount Hermon and Salecah and all Bashan to the boundary of the Geshurites and the Maacathites, and over half of Gilead to the boundary of King Sihon of Heshbon. ⁶Moses, the servant of YHWH, and the Israelites defeated them; and Moses the servant of YHWH gave their land for a possession to the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

Summary of Joshua's Victories in Canaan (12:7-24)

⁷The following are the kings of the land whom Joshua and the Israelites defeated on the west side of the Jordan, from Baal-gad in the valley of Lebanon to Mount Halak, that rises toward Seir (and Joshua gave their land to the tribes of Israel as a possession according to their allotments, ⁸in the hill country, in the lowland, in the Arabah, in the slopes, in the wilderness, and in the Negeb, the land of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites):

'Kings' defeated in southern Canaan (12:9-16; see Joshua 6-10; map page 246)

⁹the king of Jericho, one; the king of Ai, which is next to Bethel, one;
¹⁰the king of Jerusalem, one; the king of Hebron, one;
¹¹the king of Jarmuth, one; the king of Lachish, one;
¹²the king of Eglon, one; the king of Gezer, one;
¹³the king of Debir, one; the king of Geder, one;
¹⁴the king of Hormah, one; the king of Arad, one;
¹⁵the king of Libnah, one; the king of Adullam, one;
¹⁶the king of Makkedah, one; the king of Bethel, one.

Geder, Hormah, Arad and Adullam are mentioned here for the first time.

Summary

‘Kings’ defeated in central and northern Canaan (12:17-24; see Joshua 11)

¹⁷the king of Tappuah, one;

¹⁸the king of Aphek, one;

¹⁹the king of Madon, one;

²⁰the king of Shimron-meron, one;

²¹the king of Taanach, one;

²²the king of Kedesh, one;

²³the king of Dor in Naphath-dor, one;

²⁴the king of Tirzah, one;

the king of Hopher, one;

the king of Lasharon, one;

the king of Hazor, one;

the king of Achshaph, one;

the king of Megiddo, one;

the king of Jokneam in Carmel, one;

the king of Goim in Galilee, one;

thirty-one kings in all.

