**Joshua Commentary**

**Joshua Chapter 1**

Jos 1:1

**“the servant of Yahweh.”** This is emphasized in Joshua chapter 1, and Moses is referred to as Yahweh’s “servant” five times in this one chapter (v. 1, 2, 7, 13, 15). The phrase is not that common, and Hebrews 3:5 may have had this in mind when it says that Moses was a faithful “servant.” However, other people are also referred to as “the servant of Yahweh” (cf. Joshua (Josh. 24:29; Judg. 2:8), although mostly by the phrase “my servant” (cf. Abraham (Gen. 26:24); Caleb (Num. 14:24); David (2 Sam. 3:18); Job (Job 1:8); Isaiah (Isa. 20:3); etc.).

**“Yahweh spoke to Joshua.”** The Bible does not say how God “spoke” to Joshua, but it could well have been in an audible voice.

Jos 1:2

**“this Jordan.”** Israel was camped just east of the Jordan River. The Israelites had already heard about the Jordan River when God described the boundaries of the land.

**“cross over this Jordan, you and all the people, to the land that I am giving to them.”** In a very real sense, the book of Joshua is a fulfillment of the promises of God to give Israel the land (cf. Josh. 1:6; 21:45). The book of Joshua is typological of Jesus and his work in many ways. One of them is that, although God made available the Promised Land, the people had to cross over the Jordan to get it. Similarly, God has made salvation through Christ and the future Promised Land available, but people must act to receive it.

Crossing over the Jordan and inheriting the Promised Land is a major theme in Joshua.

Jos 1:4

**“From the wilderness.”** Or “desert,” the desert that they had just been on to the south of Israel. So this is a description of the land from south to north, and the western border of the Mediterranean Sea. These boundaries are very general. More detailed descriptions are given in other places (cf. Num. 34:3-12).

**“the river Euphrates.”** This is not the full length of the Euphrates that goes all the way to the east and turns southeast through Babylon to the Persian Gulf, but it is the northwestern branches of the Euphrates that are in Syria (biblical Aram) (cf. Num. 34:7-15).[[1]](#footnote-18735)

**“all the land of the Hittites.”** This is not the Hittite lands in central Turkey, but in Israel and in the northwestern part of the Euphrates River in Syria. The Hittites were scattered at this time and had settled in different areas.

**“Great Sea.”** The Mediterranean Sea.

Jos 1:5

**“No man will *be able to* stand before you.”** No one, none of the enemy, will be able to stand against Joshua all the days of his life (cf. Deut. 7:24).

Jos 1:6

**“you will cause.”** God works through people. God supplied much, but the work Joshua did was still important for success. God and His human agents work together to accomplish His purposes. As Paul wrote, “we are God’s fellow workers” (1 Cor. 3:9). There are times when God says He would cause the people to inherit the land (cf. Josh. 1:11), and there are times such as here when God says His human agents do that (Deut. 31:7; Josh. 14:1).

**“to inherit.”** The Hebrew term for “inherit” is from a root word that is the same root word for “valley.” To get an inheritance was to get land.

**“I swore.”** God swore to give the land. He promised. Thus the land is the “Promised Land.” One of the many themes in Joshua is that God keeps His promises, and thus He is giving the “Promised Land” to Israel because He swore to the “fathers” (primarily referring to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) that He would give it to their descendants.

Jos 1:7

**“very courageous.**” The “very” could also be put before “strong” such that the phrase read, “be very strong and courageous.” But since in the Hebrew text the word “very” is before “courageous,” most translations read that way.

**“Law.”** The word “Law” is “Torah.” Here we see that the book of Joshua, the first book in the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible, begins with a reminder to be anchored in the Torah. Studying the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, is essential to learn how to think and reason the way God does.

[For more on the meaning of Torah, see commentary on Prov. 1:8.]

**“have success.”** The verb can mean “have success”[[2]](#footnote-25027) but commonly it has to do with having understanding or prudence; and that gives good decision-making ability, which leads to success.

Jos 1:8

**“This scroll of the Law must never cease *being spoken* out of your mouth.”** In this sentence, the “scroll of the Law” is put by metonymy for the words that are on the scroll of the Law.

[See Word Study: “Metonymy.”]

**“meditate.”** The translation “meditate” here in Joshua 1:8 is okay if it is understood, but it is not a perfect match with the meaning of the Hebrew word. If it is not properly understood in the biblical culture and context, it can lead to misunderstanding. The Hebrew word is *hagah* (#01897 הָגָה), and when used of humans its basic meaning is to utter a sound. Thus, it can mean to mutter, moan, utter, speak. It can mean to read out loud in an undertone. Its extended or applied meanings can include to recite, muse, imagine. In any case, what it does not mean is to think about in silence, like the silent monks. God wants us to read, recite, think about, and dwell on His Word and works, especially out loud. The idea is to memorize it, if not word for word, to certainly get to the point we know what God’s Torah says and means. The HCSB may get the sense of the Hebrew better than “meditate” when it says, “you are to recite it day and night.” The NET paraphrases the meaning when it says, “You must memorize it.” The Torah is not a “meditation” in the yoga sense of the word. We are to repeat it over and over, including out loud, until we know it. If Joshua was going to be truly successful, not only as a warrior but as the one who, after conquering the Promised Land would establish the foundation of a godly society, he had to know the Torah, God’s “instruction book” and guide to godly thinking.

Both Joshua 1:7 and 1:8 make the important point that if we want to be successful and prosper in this life—from God’s point of view, not necessarily the world’s point of view—we must know and act on the Word of God.

Jos 1:9

**“for Yahweh your God is with you.”** This does not mean God would be physically with Joshua, but that He supports him; God’s spirit was upon Joshua (Num. 27:18; Deut. 34:9), and God was working in and through him (cf. Josh. 1:17; 3:7; God was “with” Jesus, Acts 10:38). Note that here God changes to speaking about Himself in the third person. That technique in conversation can sometimes add emphasis, and it likely did for Joshua.

Jos 1:11

**“provisions.”** This would be food, but the Hebrew word includes more than food, it means “provisions,” whatever the people would need.

**“three more days.”** One of the parallels between the life of Joshua and Jesus. Joshua was in the wilderness, and then in three days he would go into the Promised Land; Jesus was figuratively “in the wilderness” of death for three days and nights, and then entered the Promised Land of his resurrected body.

**“cross over.”** “Cross over” is a major theme and key phrase in Joshua. The Hebrew word here translated “crossed over” is *abar* (#05674 עָבַר) and it occurs in Joshua over 70 times, 12 times in Joshua 4. *Abar* comes up many times, sometimes of crossing over the Jordan River, sometimes of other crossings. Also, it does have a number of other meanings, and thus does not always mean “crossed” or “crossed over.” Nevertheless, “crossed over” is important in the typology of Joshua, because Israel’s crossing over the Jordan into the Promised Land is a type and shadow of believers crossing over from this life to Paradise, the Kingdom of Christ on earth (cf. Heb. 4:8-11).

[For more on Christ ruling the earth in the future, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on how the future will unfold from this present age to the Millennial Kingdom to the Everlasting Kingdom, see commentary on Rev. 21:1.]

**“the land that Yahweh your God gives you.”** There are times, such as here in Joshua 1:11, when God says He gives the Promised Land to Israel, and there are other times, such as Joshua 1:6, when God says His human agents give the Promised Land to Israel. God and the believers who work with him work together as a team (see commentary on Josh. 1:6).

**“possess.”** This word occurs two times in the verse, and can have the meaning “inherit” as well as “possess.” God owned the land, and He was giving it to the Israelites.

Jos 1:13

**“Remember the word that Moses.”** “Remember” is an infinitive absolute in Hebrew and is idiomatic for “keep remembering,” or “keep in mind.” It is not a one-time remembering, but a keeping in mind (cf. Exod. 13:3). The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh had livestock, and when Israel conquered the area east of Israel that was east of the Jordan River, those tribes came to Moses and asked not to cross the Jordan River, but to be able to settle where they were, on the east side of the Jordan, because that was good grazing land. Moses allowed them to do that on the condition that the men of those tribes would cross the Jordan with the other Israelites and fight to conquer the Promised Land, and they agreed to that (Num. 32).

**“this land.”** Joshua is referring to “this land,” the land they were all standing on, on the east side of the Jordan River. God said the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh could stay on the land east of the Jordan, called the land “beyond the river.” But the men had to help the rest of the Israelites conquer the Promised Land west of the Jordan River.

Jos 1:14

**“beyond the Jordan.”** That is, beyond the Jordan River. Maps in the Western world have north at the top, and we Westerners orient to the north. That was not true in biblical times: people oriented to the east, where the sun rose. The Old Testament is focused on the Promised Land, Israel, and if you are in the Promised Land and look east, the land God gave to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh is to the east and “beyond the Jordan River.” So the land east of the Jordan was called the land beyond the river, even if you were standing on it, as these men were.

Some scholars see this as evidence of a later author or reviser who wrote from the perspective of being on the west side of the Jordan, but that is unnecessary. The people of Israel knew their inheritance was west of Jordan, so they could already speak of the “other side of the Jordan” as land that was east of the river. Furthermore, the geography is clarified in Joshua 1:15.

**“before your brothers.”** The Hebrew can mean “ahead of,” or it can mean in such a way as your brother Israelites can see them, “in the presence of” the other Israelites. It could well have both meanings here.

Jos 1:15

**“beyond the Jordan toward the sunrise.”** The phrase “beyond the Jordan” in this context means to the east of the Jordan River; on the east side of the Jordan River. Joshua was speaking to the children of Israel as if they were already west of the Jordan River, in the land promised to Abraham. In that context, “beyond the Jordan” meant east of the Jordan River, even though when Joshua spoke these words, he himself was still “beyond the Jordan.” This phrase occurs in Joshua 12:1 (and other places), but at that time Israel was west of the Jordan River, and “beyond the Jordan” meant east of the Jordan River. The Bible uses the phrase “Beyond xxx” quite a few times, and to understand it, one must understand the geography in the context of each use. For example, sometimes, “beyond the Jordan” means east of the Jordan River, as in Joshua 1:15, but sometimes it means west of the Jordan River.

Jos 1:16

**“All that you have commanded us we will do.”** This is similar to Exodus 24:7, but the people did not follow through on what they said. The generation of Joshua did better than the wilderness generation, but even so, did not conquer the whole Promised Land, and some of them still held on to their pagan gods (cf. Josh. 24:23).

Jos 1:17

**“listened.”** The Hebrew word is “listened” (or “heard”), but in this context, it includes the idea of “obey,” which is why some versions have “listened” and some have “obeyed” (cf. HCSB, ESV, NASB).

Jos 1:18

**“he will be put to death.”** Although this seems harsh, it was appropriate. The fighting men of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the eastern half-tribe of Manasseh were going to go into battle in the Promised Land at the head of the army (Josh. 1:14) and therefore were involved in the heaviest fighting. To succeed the people had to be motivated and follow orders. If anyone became negative, obstinate, and rebellious he would not only endanger his own life but the lives of others as well. There is a good reason why, in armies throughout the centuries, deserters were executed. High morale is essential to success in an army.

**Joshua Chapter 2**

Jos 2:1

**“secretly sent two men.”** Joshua sent the spies secretly, without telling the Israelites what he was doing. Some 40 years earlier, when Moses sent spies into the Promised Land, all Israel knew they were going. But when they came back they brought an evil report and discouraged the people (Num. 13). The result of that evil report was that the people of Israel grumbled about Moses and spoke of stoning him, and finally God intervened and said He would not let that generation go into the Promised Land, which is why Israel wandered in the desert for 40 years (Num. 14). Joshua did not want any kind of a repeat of that event, so he sent the spies secretly, not telling the people of Israel he had sent them.

It is possible to translate the Hebrew that Joshua “had sent” the spies out, which might make the timing of the three days easier to understand.

**“out from Shittim.”** The name “Shittim” means “Acacias,” and it is also called Abel-shittim (Num. 25:1, 33:49, Acacias Meadow). The biblical city of Shittim is almost certainly the archaeological site of Tel el-Hamman, the site of a huge Canaanite city (cf. Num. 25:1; 33:49). It is in the plains of Moab across from Jericho.

**“the house.”** The fact that the men from Israel went right into her house indicates that her house also was a local inn, and that fits with Rahab being a prostitute. It was common in the ancient world, and widely practiced in New Testament Greece and Rome, that one of the services provided by inns was the availability of a prostitute. Often he or she was a slave who had little or no choice in the matter.

**“a prostitute whose name was Rahab.”** Although Rahab was a Canaanite, she believed in Yahweh (Josh. 2:9-13) even if she believed in her own gods as well. Rahab is praised in the New Testament in Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25. Because she hid the spies from Israel, she and her family were saved from the destruction of Jericho (Josh. 6:22-25), and she then married Salmon of the line of Judah and became part of the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Ruth 4:20-21; Matt. 1:5). The fact that Rahab went from Canaanite prostitute to an ancestor of Jesus Christ shows how God can redeem and elevate people’s lives if they trust Him.

**“they lay down there.”** The spies rested in Rahab’s house. The Hebrew text uses ambiguous vocabulary that can sometimes mean to have sex with, but that is not its meaning here. The vocabulary pulls you into the story.

Jos 2:2

**“king of Jericho.”** The “kingdom” of the king of Jericho would not have been very large; just the city of Jericho itself and perhaps some small towns in the local area. Nevertheless, the “king” would oversee the city, make judicial decisions, and command a small army of the local men.

**“was told.”** Even though it was after dark (cf. Josh. 2:5), an important event such as men from Israel entering the city was serious enough to interrupt the king. Good leaders know the importance of good and timely intelligence and encourage their people to get that information to them.

**“search.”** The Hebrew word is “dig.” The idiom “dig out the land” referred to uncovering what was there. The Hebrew language uses very concrete language. However, the language that the woman spoke would have almost certainly not been Hebrew. It might have been that these two men were chosen because they knew some of the local language.

Jos 2:3

**“So the king of Jericho sent to Rahab.”** Apparently, the king did not come himself, but sent representatives. This occurred after dark (cf. Joshua 2:5).

**“all the land.”** That the king of Jericho knew the mission of Israel, to conquer the Promised Land, shows that news of Israel, including who they were and what they wanted had been spread around.

Jos 2:4

**“I did not know where they came from.”** Rahab lied to the leaders of Jericho, but to those leaders, what Rahab the prostitute said was a plausible statement. Jericho was on both a major north-south trade route and a major east-west route, so it is likely that lots of men came through, and Rahab would not know a lot about many of them, especially if they were not fluent in the local language.

This verse and others like it (cf. Exod. 1:15-20) reveal an ethical standard for what is a “lie,” or at least that there are times when lying is acceptable. God does not require us to give the accurate facts (“the truth”) to someone who will use them to harm us or God’s people. It is certainly good to give accurate facts when we can. Furthermore, this concept can and does get abused because there are times when people’s intentions are not clear, the circumstances are not easily discerned, or people just lie to protect themselves when they ought to tell the truth and deal honestly with the situation they are in. However, there are clear cases, such as here, where a “lie” is the will of God.

[For more on lying as a means of self-defense and more on civil disobedience see commentary on Exod. 1:19.]

Jos 2:5

**“for you will catch up with them.”** Jericho was a little over five miles from the Jordan River, and the paths were well-traveled and mostly quite level, so once again Rahab’s statement seemed plausible.

Jos 2:6

**“the stalks of flax that she had spread out on the roof.”** Flax was cut, dried, and eventually pounded into fibers which were then woven into clothes, oil lamp wicks, etc. The flax stalks were cut and then laid out in the sun to dry, usually for a few weeks, but less if the air was dry and the sun was hot, and a perfect place to do that was on top of a flat roof where the sun would dry them quickly. The fact that Rahab could hide men under the flax on the roof showed that Rahab had been very diligent in gathering a lot of it and likely made clothing for her and her household from it, and may have sold some as well (cf. Prov. 31:13, 34).

Jos 2:7

**“to the Jordan.”** The fords of the Jordan across from Jericho are about five miles (8 km) from the ancient city.

**“to the fords.”** Many places in the Jordan River were too deep to cross easily, but the Jordan did have natural fords where people and animals could cross more easily. The roads in the region led to those fords. If a country controlled the fords, they controlled the east-west travel. When the Israelites fought the Moabites, they captured the fords of the Jordan and then were able to kill all the Moabite soldiers trying to get back to Moab (Judg. 3:28-29).

Jos 2:8

**“the spies.”** This is the spies from the camp of Israel. The Hebrew simply reads, “them,” the words “the spies” is added to the English for clarity.

Jos 2:9

**“I know that Yahweh has given you the land.”** Because the Devil and his followers have always infiltrated the highest levels of religion, it often happens that “regular people” and even those considered outwardly less godly are people who trust God. Jesus recognized this, and said to the religious leaders of his day, “Truly I say to you, that the tax collectors and the prostitutes will get into the Kingdom of God before you” (Matt. 21:31).

**“melt away.”** That fear had “fallen” on the Canaanites, and they “melted” brings up the way God spoke in prophecy about the Canaanites. Exodus 15:15-16 speak of fear “falling” on the Canaanites, and them “being melted away.” In the last two months of the wilderness wanderings, God said the fear of the Israelites would fall on the people who heard the reports about Israel, and thus about what God did for them (Deut. 2:25).

Jos 2:10

**“we have heard how Yahweh dried up the water of the Red Sea before you.”** Rahab had heard of the Red Sea (the Hebrew reads “Reed Sea”) drying up before the Israelites, an event that had occurred 40 years earlier. Nearly every book of the Old Testament mentions the Exodus in one way or another, giving strong evidence that it was a historical event.

**“devoted to destruction.”** The Hebrew word translated “devoted” is *cherem* and means a thing that is “devoted.” It can be “devoted” to Yahweh in the sense of being set apart to Him and therefore being His and holy, or it can be a thing “devoted” to Him in the sense that it is an abomination to Him and thus it will be destroyed; in that case, “devoted to destruction” is the meaning. Generally, this specific phrase was used when the city and its inhabitants were destroyed, and the booty was taken, especially the metals, to the Tent of Meeting (Tabernacle). There is no record of Israel taking spoil or of dedicating it to Yahweh in the Sihon/Og battles, so they may or may not have. We only know from the text that Israel dispatched the people and possessed the land. It is likely that Rahab knew more than we do. The word has entered English as “harem” a group of women set apart for one man.

[For more on “devoted,” see commentary on Josh. 6:17.]

Jos 2:11

**“rise up any more spirit.”** The Hebrew word translated “spirit” in the REV is *ruach* (#07307 רוּחַ), and *ruach* has a huge semantic range and can refer to a large number of things. In this instance, the word “spirit” is used of a person’s mental state including their attitude and emotion. No more haughty or confident attitude (“spirit”) rose up in any Canaanite when they heard about what Yahweh had done for Israel. They became discouraged and downhearted.

[For more on the uses of “spirit,” see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

**“Yahweh your God, he is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.”** Rahab heard of the great works of God and acknowledged that Yahweh was God in heaven and on earth, and then she acted in a way that showed she respected and would serve that God. In fact, right away she risked her life by hiding the Israelite spies, not because she somehow loved Israel, but because she recognized that their God was the real “God” in heaven and on earth. Rahab is a model for how people should react when they hear about God.

Jos 2:12

**“give me a reliable sign.”** All the men could really give was their word on the matter, which they did (Josh. 2:14), and that did turn out to be enough. Also, they told her to tie the rope out the window so they could tell which house was hers in the attack. The fact that Rahab’s house was in the wall and the rope was left out the window during the attack is good evidence that the entire wall did not fall down.

Jos 2:13

**“lives.”** The Hebrew word “life” is *nephesh* (#05315 נֶפֶשׁ), often translated “soul” (the word is plural here). *Nephesh* has a number of meanings, including “life” (as here in Josh. 2:13), the “individual,” the life force that animates humans, land animals, and many sea creatures.

[For more information, see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Jos 2:14

**“faithfully and reliably with you.”** Rahab had used “faithfully” and “reliably” in her talk with the spies (Josh. 2:12), and now they use the same words back to her, no doubt on purpose to show the seriousness and sincerity of their intention.

Jos 2:15

**“and she lived in the wall.”** Many of the ancient walls were not solid but had spaces in them. One such construction is called a casemate wall, and there is an excellent example of one at Masada.

Jos 2:16

**“Go to the hill country.”** The mountainous area rises up quickly very quickly just about one-half mile from Tel Jericho. The pursuers would have naturally thought that the men from Israel would have headed back east toward the Jordan, about five miles (8 km) away.

**“three days until the pursuers have returned.”** It would not take the pursuers three days to go the five miles to the Jordan, but if the pursuers did not find them on the path, they would likely think that either the spies had made it to the Jordan and crossed over to the camp of Israel, or that they had hidden in the brush by the Jordan. Since it was night, there would have been a good chance that the spies would not have crossed the Jordan in the dark since it was at flood stage and unfamiliar to them, and instead had hidden themselves in the brush waiting for sunrise. So it is logical that the men from Jericho might have searched for them here for a couple of days. While hiding for three days may seem excessive, the spies wanted to be sure they would not encounter the men from Jericho on the path to the Jordan.

Jos 2:17

**“that you have made us swear….”** This is an anacoluthon, an unfinished sentence. The spies do not spell out what has to happen such that they will be guiltless until the next sentence.

[See Word Study: “Anacoluthon.”]

Jos 2:18

**“Tie this cord of scarlet thread.”** The Hebrew is abrupt; the directions were short and clear. There was no room for error in this communication, it meant life or death. The cord was made of scarlet thread, and is called a “scarlet cord” in Joshua 2:21. It is interesting and unexplained as to how Rahab happened to have a scarlet-colored cord in her house. However, we know from the flax she was drying that she may have made clothes, and scarlet was a common color worn by women, so it does make sense that she could have had scarlet cord in her house.

The Hebrew word translated “cord” is *tiqvah* (#08615 תִּקְוָה), which has two meanings, and both are appropriate here. The two meanings are “cord, line” and “hope.” In Rahab’s case, she was to tie a “cord” of scarlet thread, which was also her “hope” of being delivered from death, into the window so the Israelite warriors could see it.

Jos 2:19

**“out of the doors of your house, outside.”** The Hebrew does not use the word for “street” although many versions read that way based on the likely correct assumption that outside the house was the street.

**“if any hand is on him.”** This is idiomatic for “if anyone harms him.”

Jos 2:20

**“we will be guiltless of your oath.”** To anyone who fears God, taking an oath is a very serious business. God expects people to keep their word, and even more so if it is an oath (cf. Ps. 15:4; Eccl. 5:1-6).

Jos 2:21

**“cord.”** The Hebrew is both “cord” and “hope.” See commentary on Joshua 2:18.

Jos 2:23

**“that had happened to them.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic: the spies “told all that found them.” This idiom occurs in a number of places (cf. Judg. 6:13).

Jos 2:24

**“Yahweh has given into our hands all the land.”** These two spies, like Caleb and Joshua almost 40 years earlier, were confident, having a secure trust in the work of Yahweh in bringing them into their land inheritance. Years earlier, Moses had sent out 12 spies (Num. 13:1-20), and 10 of them fearfully reported that they could not conquer the land, saying, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are” (Num. 13:31-32). In contrast to those ten, Joshua and Caleb had confidently reported that Israel could conquer the land (Num. 14:6-9). There is little doubt that when Joshua heard the confident report of the spies that he had sent to Jericho that he remembered what he and Caleb had reported to Moses those many years before. It is quite likely that he thought about what his life would have been like if all the spies Moses sent into Israel had been like he and Caleb and these two brave men. He could have spent his life in the Promised Land rather than marching around the desert and eating the same manna day after day for 40 years. Every life has its “What if…,” but it is not healthy to dwell on that. There is much to do for God here and now, and believers have eternity to look forward to because we will be in a wonderful place with a wonderful new body surrounded by wonderful people. Joshua understood that and wisely focused on the task at hand and prepared for crossing the Jordan and the attack on Jericho.

**“melt away.”** This also occurs in Joshua 5:1.

**Joshua Chapter 3**

Jos 3:1

**“And Joshua rose up early in the morning.”** Chapters 3 and 4 describe the miraculous entrance of Israel into its inheritance, the Promised Land, including the stopping and drying up of the waters of the Jordan River just as had happened with Moses at the Red Sea. Joshua 5:1 then describes the effect of the Jordan crossing on the local inhabitants. Just as the crossing of the Red Sea melted the hearts of Canaanites (Rahab’s testimony), so the stopping of the Jordan did the same to the Amorites in the Hill Country and the Canaanites on the coast; they had no spirit anymore (cf. Josh. 2:11; 5:1).

**“before they crossed over.”** The Hebrew word *abar* (#05674 עָבַר), here translated “crossed over” is a major theme in Joshua because the man Joshua is a type of Christ and the book of Joshua typologically portrays people crossing over from this mortal life into the “Promised Land” of everlasting life (see commentary on Josh. 1:11).

Jos 3:3

**“the priests, the Levites.”** Every priest was from the tribe of Levi, but the priests were descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses, who were from the tribe of Levi.

**“the ark of the covenant of Yahweh.”** The ark represented the very presence of Yahweh Himself, and as such is mentioned ten times in Joshua 3 alone (Josh. 3:3, 6 (2x), Josh. 3:8, 11, 13, 14, 15 (2x), and Josh. 3:17). And the fact that the ark is in the Jordan while Israel crosses over into the Promised Land showed Israel that it was Yahweh Himself who was holding back the water of the Jordan River, and so it was “Yahweh of Armies” that was fighting for Israel even as they enter the Promised Land. The fact that the ark of the covenant went first into the Jordan is a picture of the God of Israel leading His people to victory. The name, “the ark of the covenant of Yahweh” occurs five times in Joshua (some 30 times in the Bible) and is one of several names that describe the ark. For example, it is called “the ark of the testimony” a number of times, including Joshua 4:16, and nine times in Joshua it is simply called the “ark of Yahweh” (Josh. 3:13; 4:5, 11; etc.). The name here in Joshua 3:3, “the ark of the covenant of Yahweh your God” may emphasize the king-vassal covenant in which Yahweh, the people’s God, is leading His people to victory in battle.

**“and the priests, the Levites, carrying it.”** In the wilderness wanderings, God put a pillar of cloud over the Tabernacle by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exod. 40:38), and when the cloud over the Tabernacle moved, the children of Israel moved and followed it (Exod. 40:34-38). The Bible never mentions when the pillar of cloud and fire disappeared, but it had by this time and the people were now to follow the priests carrying the ark, not the pillar of cloud. In fact, the 2,000 cubit distance between the priests and the rest of the Israelites was so that the Israelites could tell where the priests were going and then follow them (Josh. 3:4).

Jos 3:4

**“2,000 cubits.”** Scholars estimate that a standard cubit was about 18 inches, so 2,000 cubits would be about 3,000 feet (about 1,000 yards; 914 meters; .57 miles, or just over half a mile).

**“before.”** The Hebrew text uses an interesting idiom, and literally reads, “yesterday and three days ago.” It means, “before, formerly, in the past,” and gets translated “before” in many English versions. So in the idiom, the current day would be day one, “yesterday” would be day two, and “three days ago” would be day three, and the idiom would then use that to refer to “before.”

Jos 3:5

**“Make yourselves holy​.”** The people were to do what it took to make themselves holy in the sight of God. This involved ritual purity, for example, doing what it took to restore physical purity in the sight of God, such as by washing or doing a necessary sacrifice, and abstaining from sex (cf. Exod. 19:15; Num. 11:18). However, more importantly, it involved “turning the heart to God, in faith and trust in His promise, and in willing obedience to His commandments, that they [Israel] should lay to heart in a proper way the miracle of grace which the Lord was about to work in the midst of them and on their behalf on the following day.”[[3]](#footnote-30908) Thus, “making yourself holy” involved both outward and inward obedience to the commandments of God, and it is a key to God actively being in the midst of His people and working powerfully.

Jesus Christ said it this way: “Whoever has my commandments, and is keeping them, that is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him, and will reveal myself to him...If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (John 14:21, 23). God and Jesus are gracious and full of mercy, and there are many times when they move powerfully in the lives of people who have not been obedient or faithful. However, experience has proven over and over that, if people want to have a consistent and powerful relationship with God and the Lord, their being purposely obedient, that is, “making themselves holy,” is a vital key to that happening.

Everett Fox translates the phrase, “Make yourselves holy”[[4]](#footnote-18283) (cf. BBE, CEB). The most common English translation, “Sanctify yourselves” is good if you understand what “sanctify” means, but to most readers the phrase is unclear.

The translation, *The Scriptures*, done by the Institute for Scripture Research, South Africa, has “set yourselves apart.” While that translation captures the meaning of the word “holy” as something that is set apart, the idea of being “set apart” in this context was being set apart from the world and the unclean and ungodly things in it by obedience and dedication to God, which may not be clear to readers. Nevertheless, the translation “set yourselves apart” shows that it was something the people could do in obedience to God.

The people were to make themselves holy—purify themselves—to be able to enter into God’s presence. Yahweh is a warrior (Exod. 15:3), and for Israel to fight alongside God in the battles, they must be holy.

**“for tomorrow Yahweh will do wonders among you.”** This is a prophecy and promise that Yahweh would do miracles among the people. That generation had seen many miracles, including manna appearing on the ground six days a week, and the pillar of cloud and fire over the Tent of Meeting (Tabernacle). Now they would see some new miracles.

Jos 3:6

**“cross over.”** “Cross over” is a theme and key phrase in Joshua (cf. Josh. 1:11).

**“before the people.”** The Hebrew can mean “before” in the sense of “ahead of,” or it can mean “before” in the sense of “in the presence of,” that is, in the presence of the people such that the people can see the ark and gain courage from it. Actually, the Hebrew text could well have both meanings here (cf. Josh. 1:14).

Jos 3:7

**“I will begin to make you great.”** God and the Devil both empower people so that they are great in the eyes of others, but being elevated by the Devil brings only short success and then a very heavy price, while being elevated by God brings blessings now and in the future. That the text states that it is God who makes Joshua great is part of Joshua’s being a type of Christ, because Christ did the works of God and was magnified by God (cf. Acts 10:38).

**“so that they will know.”** A part of the reason that God elevated Joshua in the eyes of Israel the way He did was so that Israel would know that God was with Joshua. Similarly, the works that Jesus did testified that he was sent by God (John 5:36; 10:25; 14:10-11). When God is obviously working in someone’s life but scoffers deny and denigrate it, that is sin (John 15:22-24).

Jos 3:9

**“Draw near and hear the words of Yahweh your God.”** Joshua spoke the words of God to the people. In this, we see the continued typology between Joshua and Jesus. Joshua, a type of Christ, spoke the words of God to the people just as Jesus spoke God’s words, not his own words (John 12:49; 14:10).

Jos 3:10

**“the living God.”** The Hebrew is *el hai* (אֵ֥ל חַ֖י), and the *el*, “God” is singular. (cf. Hos. 1:10; Ps. 42:3; 84:3). The Hebrews did not see “God” as a plurality of “Persons.” Also, Yahweh is active and alive; He intervenes in human affairs. In this case, He is going to intervene by driving the Canaanites out from before Israel.

**“drive out, yes, drive out.”** God uses the figure polyptoton for emphasis (see commentary on Gen. 2:16).

**“the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Hivite and the Perizzite and the Girgashite and the Amorite and the Jebusite.”** These are seven nations spoken of in the Mosaic Law (Deut. 7:1). The fact that the people groups were not a unified front helped Israel fight these nations. The geography of Israel is such that it divides people into people groups. The groups are all connected by “and,” the figure polysyndeton, to emphasize each individual group and not lump them together.

[See Word Study: “Syndeton.”]

Jos 3:11

**“is crossing over before you.”** The ark of Yahweh did not completely cross over before the people, but it started its crossing over first.

Jos 3:13

**“coming down.”** The Hebrew words are related to the name of the Jordan itself: the “coming down *one*.” For most of its journey, the Jordan River descends very rapidly.

**“heap.”** The Hebrew word is used in Exodus 15:8 when there were “walls” of water when the Red Sea split (cf. Ps. 78:13).

Jos 3:14

**“moved from their encampment.”** Although the Hebrew might be more literally, “moved from their tents,” that makes it sound like they left their tents behind on the east side of the Jordan, which is not what they did. They moved from where they had been tenting to across the Jordan.

Jos 3:15

**“the Jordan overflows all its banks.”** Israel entering the Promised Land occurred in the spring and the rains had swollen the Jordan River, which has now flooded the area. This does not deter God at all, but shows His power more dramatically. Also, the Canaanite god Baal was a storm and rain god, and the fact that Yahweh entered Baal’s territory by stopping the Jordan River and drying up the river bottom when the Jordan was at flood stage was a demonstration that Baal would be powerless against Yahweh.

Jos 3:16

**“a great way off, at Adam.”** Adam is about 25 miles (40 km) north of the Dead Sea. The Israelites would not have needed such a long stretch of dry ground to cross over, so perhaps God did that for such a long way so many Canaanites could see for themselves the power of God.

**“the Sea of the Arabah, even the Salt Sea.”** This is the Dead Sea.

**“Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho.”** The Israelites must have crossed over Jordan close to where the modern Allenby Bridge is, which leads into Jericho today. “Crossed over” is a major theme in Joshua because the man Joshua is a type of Christ and the book of Joshua typologically portrays people crossing over from this mortal life into the “Promised Land” of everlasting life (see commentary on Josh. 1:11).

Jos 3:17

**“in the midst of the Jordan.”** That is to say that there was water all around where the priests were, but they were not in the “middle” of the Jordan, which would have been the very middle of the riverbed.

**“on dry ground.”** The fact that God not only divided the water but dried up the ground is an important part of the miracle of the crossing of the Jordan (and the crossing of the Red Sea; cf. Exod. 14:21-22). The God who can split the waters can also dry up the land so the riverbed was dry to cross over. This is the same word as when Elijah struck the Jordan and Elijah and Elisha crossed over on dry ground (2 Kings 2:8; cf. also Gen. 7:22).

**“the nation.”** The Hebrew word *goy* is rarely used of Israel. E. Fox says: “Its usage here suggests that the crossing of the Jordan is an act of nation-founding.”[[5]](#footnote-17263) There was also a “mixed multitude” with Israel, and this may indicate that in the Promised Land they would become more integrated with Israel, and indeed, even some Canaanites, such as Rahab, joined the nation of Israel.

During the seven years of famine that came over Egypt and Palestine, Joseph sent for his family and brought them to Egypt. Jacob must have had some concern about leaving the land God promised to Abraham and even to Jacob (Gen. 48:3-4) because God spoke to Jacob as he was starting the journey to Egypt and said, “I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down into Egypt, for there I will make of you a great nation” (Gen. 46:3). So God promised to make Jacob a great nation in Egypt, and that came to pass. Now they enter the Promised Land as a nation.

**Joshua Chapter 4**

Jos 4:1

**“crossed over the Jordan.”** The Hebrew word *abar* (#05674 עָבַר), here translated “crossed over” is a major theme in Joshua because the man Joshua is a type of Christ and the book of Joshua typologically portrays people crossing over from this mortal life into the “Promised Land” of everlasting life. “Crossed over” the Jordan occurs 12 times in Joshua 4 (Josh. 4:1, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11 (2x), Josh. 4:12, 13, 22, and 4:23 (2x)).

[For more on “cross over,” see commentary on Josh. 1:11.]

Jos 4:3

**“and make them cross over with you.”** The stones were taken from the edge of the Jordan River where the feet of the priests stood in the water, so just as Yahweh was making the Israelites cross the Jordan, the Israelites were making the stones cross over the Jordan. It is as if the stones also were obeying God and going into the Promised Land. The fact that the stones themselves came from the other side of the Jordan adds to the effect of them being a witness of the crossing.

Jos 4:4

**“Then Joshua called the twelve men.”** One of the themes in Joshua is Joshua’s obedience to God. We see it here in Joshua 4:3-4. God says, and Joshua obeys. See commentary on Joshua 4:16.

**“one man from each tribe.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic: “one man, one man from a tribe.”

Jos 4:5

**“Cross over.”** Since the Jordan was at flood stage, and the priests were on the east side, standing where their feet had touched the water, that these men might be carrying these stones a mile or even more.

**“in front of.”** The Hebrew word “before” has the meaning of “in front of,” and also “in the presence of.” These men had to pass in front of the ark to get the stones, and were “in the presence of” Yahweh as He held back the Jordan River.

**“the midst of the Jordan.”** That is, into the dry river bed.

**“each of you take up a stone onto your shoulder.”** This gives some indication as to the size of the stones set up as a memorial. They were large enough that they had to be hoisted up onto the shoulder, but small enough that one man could carry one of them.

Jos 4:6

**“in time to come.”** The Hebrew is the word “tomorrow,” being used idiomatically for the future.

Jos 4:7

**“And these stones will be for a lasting reminder for the children of Israel.”** There can be great value to memorials that remind future generations of great things that have happened. The King James version reads, “these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever.” The word “forever” is often used in English versions, but is not literally accurate.

The Hebrew word that many English versions translate “forever” is *olam* (#05769 עוֹלָם), and it is often translated “forever,” but that is quite often misleading in English because *olam* generally refers to only a long period of time or an indefinite period of time. The word *olam* occurs more than 400 times in the Hebrew Old Testament and exactly what it means, or how long a period of time it refers to, must be determined from the context and from the scope of Scripture. For example, *olam* can refer to a long time in the future, as here in Joshua 4:7, or a long time in the past as in Habakkuk 3:6, or a long time (or forever) in both the past and future. *Olam* can mean a long time with no specific end in sight. C. H. Dodd correctly and succinctly states: “The [Hebrew] word עוֹלָם [*olam*; #05769], with αἰών [#165 *aiōn* ] as its [Greek] equivalent, denotes properly a period of time of which the beginning or the end are both out of sight, an indefinitely long, rather than strictly an infinite period.”[[6]](#footnote-18951)

For example, in 2 Chronicles 33:7, most versions say that God would put His name in the Temple in Jerusalem “forever” (*olam*) but we know that in the Eternal City that comes from heaven there will not even be a temple (Rev. 21:22), so “forever” is not correct. We could say in English that “forever” was a hyperbole, an exaggeration, but that misses the point. No native Hebrew speaker would understand *olam* to mean “forever” and be a hyperbole, the definition of *olam* was just a long undetermined amount of time, although in some contexts that undetermined time could indeed be forever. At the time Chronicles was written, saying that the Temple would last “*olam*” was accurate because there was no specific end in sight for the Temple even though at some point the Temple would be no more.

Translating the Hebrew word *olam* and the Greek word *aiōn* can be very difficult because English really does not have words that are equivalent to them. The English word “forever,” is not a good translation, because “forever” has no end, whereas *olam* and *aiōn* can come to an end—the end is just out of sight, a long time away. However, because there really is no good English word for *olam*, the word “forever” gets used most of the time, even though it is misleading. Some more accurate translations might be: “age-abiding,” “age-long,” “for ages,” “for eons,” etc.

*Olam* can also refer to a long period of time that is now over. For example, Isaiah 63:9 refers to God carrying Israel “in the day of old” (*olam*). It would be wrong to translate *olam* as “forever” in that verse because then the verse would not be accurate. (Other verses that have that meaning for *olam* include Gen. 6:4; Deut. 32:7; Isa. 44:7; 63:11; Amos 9:11; Mic. 5:2; 7:14; Mal. 3:4). Some other times *olam* refers to a long period of time include Psalm 143:3 and Lamentations 3:6, referring to people who have been dead a long time.

*Olam* can be used to define a specific period of time that does not have a definite end until that end arrives. For example, a human life. According to the Law, a person who volunteered to be a bond slave would be a slave “forever” (*olam*), meaning the life of the person, however long that ended up being (Deut. 15:17; cf. Exod. 21:6; 1 Sam. 1:22; 27:12; Job 41:4). In Exodus 40:15, *olam* refers to the priesthood of Aaron, which, while lasting a long time, is not “forever.” In Joshua 4:7 it refers to a heap of stones that were to be a memorial but are gone today and therefore were not “forever,” even though when they were built no one knew exactly how long the pile of stones would last. In 1 Samuel 1:22, *olam* refers to the term of Samuel’s service at the Tabernacle.

*Olam* can be used of things that will seem to last indefinitely, and some, like God, will indeed last “forever.” God is forever (Gen. 21:33; Isa. 40:28).

[For more on *olam* and especially as it compares to the Greek *aion*, see Appendix 1: “Life in the Age to Come.” For a more complete definition of *olam* with more examples, see BDB.[[7]](#footnote-27799)]

Jos 4:8

**“And the children of Israel did that.”** One of the themes of the early part of Joshua was the people’s obedience to Joshua, who himself obeyed Yahweh. The act of setting up the stones from the Jordan is ascribed to “the children of Israel” even though only the twelve men actually carried and set up the stones because the men acted on behalf of the whole nation. In Joshua 4:9, “Joshua” is said to have set up the stones because he was causing and overseeing the whole event. There is no record of what happened to these stones, but the pile would likely have been dismantled by the enemies of Israel during the time of the captivities of Israel in the period of the Judges, or perhaps even later during Israel’s subjugation by Assyria, Babylon, Persia, etc. In any case, the pile is not there now.

Jos 4:9

**“And Joshua *also* set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan.”** Not only was there a heap of stones on the bank of the Jordan to mark the crossing spot where Israel crossed the Jordan, but Joshua also had a memorial of stones placed in the Jordan where the priests stood. The REV adds the word “also” to make it clear there was a second set of stones, as do some other versions (cf. CEB, CJB, CSB, GW, JPS, NET, NLT). While the stones for the monument set up where the people lodged were taken from the place where the priest’s feet stood, this second monument was set up where the priest’s feet stood. This could have been a monument that in some way commemorated the role that Yahweh, via his ark and priests, played in drying up the Jordan. Also, since the pile was placed where the priest’s feet stood at the edge of the Jordan, since the Jordan was at flood stage, it almost certainly meant that this second pile of stones was on the east bank of the Jordan most of the year (Josh. 3:12-13, 15.) Predictably, however, since the Jordan flooded every year, it would not have lasted too long before it started to break down, get covered in mud, and/or wash away. Perhaps a few decades.

**“they are there to this day.”** So when the account that is recorded in Joshua 4 was written, the stones in the Jordan were still there. They would have been very large stones, and the top of the pile was almost certainly visible late in the dry season when the Jordan River ran very low. Of course, over time they would have washed away.

Jos 4:10

**“in the midst of the Jordan.”** In this case, the “midst” means “in,” not “in the middle of.” The priests stood near the east edge of the Jordan River. The priests and ark had led the way “into” the water, but then stood somewhere just inside the water (Josh. 3:15, 17).

**“and the people hurried and crossed over.”** When Israel crossed the Red Sea 40 years earlier, the people were being chased by the Egyptians. Although they were not being chased by an enemy now, they hurried to cross over even though there was no danger and no command from Joshua to do so. The reason they hurried was likely due to them being uncomfortable with the Jordan being supernaturally dried up and a basic fear of being in the riverbed of the Jordan during its annual flood stage without really knowing at that time what happened to the water.

Jos 4:11

**“when all the people had completely crossed over.”** There had to be people assigned to make sure that everyone was accounted for. There are almost always stragglers when any group moves from one place to another, and the leaders in the front would not be able to tell if anyone was still on the east bank of the Jordan. In this case, there was a clear picture of God taking care of His people: The ark went first into the water and stopped the water, then it stayed in the riverbed holding back the water while everyone crossed over, then it crossed over last to be sure everyone else was safely over the river. “Yahweh is my shepherd….” (Ps. 23:1).

Jos 4:12

**“And the children of Reuben.”** The fighting men of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh who had wanted land on the east side of the Jordan now made good on their promise to fight along with the rest of the tribes of Israel until the Promised Land was conquered (Num. 32, Josh. 1:12-18).

Jos 4:13

**“ready and armed for war crossed over.”** The people from Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh made good on their promise and crossed over Jordan to help the rest of Israel claim their inheritance (Josh. 1:12-18).

**“in the presence of Yahweh.”** The ark, representing God, was in the Jordan River when the people crossed over.

**“to the plains of Jericho.”** The “plains of Jericho” is the flat land in the Arabah, the Jordan Valley, just north of Jericho. The Hebrew word for “plains” comes from the word “mixed.” The area might well have been known as “mixed” because there are patches of gray, brown, and green, in part due to the agriculture and vegetation there from springs, streams, and the Jordan itself.

Jos 4:14

**“Yahweh made Joshua great.”** Just as Yahweh had promised Joshua (Josh. 3:7). One of the most defining characteristics of God is that He keeps His promises.

**“stood in awe of him.”** The Hebrew can be “feared him,” but in this context, the word “feared” is better translated “stood in awe.” There is an element of fear in awe, but not enough for the translation to read “feared.”

Jos 4:15

**“Then Yahweh spoke to Joshua.”** There are a number of ways God could have spoken to Joshua. It seems most likely that this would have been through the holy spirit that God had put upon Joshua (Num. 27:18; Deut. 34:9). But God spoke in various ways (Heb. 1:1).

Jos 4:16

**“Command the priests.”** One of the themes of the book of Joshua is that Joshua obeyed the word of Yahweh. We see that in Joshua 4:16-17. God tells Joshua to command the priests (v. 16) and Joshua commands the priests (v. 17). This theme occurs elsewhere in Joshua, and helps us see the type of Christ in Joshua (cf. Josh. 4:3-4; 5:2-3; 6:2-6; 7:14-16; 8:18; cf. Josh. 5:15).

Jos 4:17

**“So Joshua commanded the priests.”** God commands (Josh. 4:16) and Joshua obeys (Josh. 4:17). The exact obedience of Joshua is part of the motif of Joshua as a type of Christ, who always did the will of the Father (cf. John 8:29).

Jos 4:18

**“when the priests...had come up out of the midst of the Jordan.”** The exact timing of the priests leaving the Jordan River and the water returning at that same time is more evidence that this is a great miracle of Yahweh and that He is able to control things that happen on earth. The gods of the Canaanites could not do that. Also, this verse gives evidence that “midst” does not always mean “middle,” but just somewhere “in” something, in this case, the ark was close to the edge of the Jordan, not in the middle.

**“separated from the ground.”** When the feet of the priests stepped off the dry riverbed of the Jordan River, Yahweh let the water flow back down the riverbed and over the banks as it had been flowing before. The riverbed had been made “dry” by God, so the verse is not primarily saying that when the feet of the priests stepped “onto” the dry ground, but rather when the priest’s feet “separated from” the dry ground of the riverbed that the water returned. In Joshua 3:17 the feet of the priests stood firm on the dry ground, and here the feet of the priests are separated from that dry ground and the water then returned. The *HALOT*[[8]](#footnote-28865) gets the sense of the separation of the priest’s feet from the riverbed correct because it says, “be raised from the ground,” that is, the feet of the priests were “raised from the ground” of the riverbed, not “set down” on the bank of the Jordan River.

**“the Jordan returned.”** The Hebrew verb “returned” is the same as when Yahweh held back the waters of the Red Sea and then the sea “returned” upon the Egyptian army (Exod. 14:26, 28). It is clear in both the Exodus record and here in Joshua that it is Yahweh who has the power to split the sea and stop the river.

Jos 4:19

**“the tenth *day* of the first month.”** The tenth day of the first month, Nisan, is the day that the Passover lamb is selected (Exod. 12:3). That means it had been almost 40 years to the day that Israel left Egypt, because they left on Nisan 15, 40 years before (Exod. 12:29-40).

**“on the east side of Jericho.”** No evidence for this camp has ever been found.

Jos 4:21

**“in times to come.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic: “tomorrow,” meaning “in the future.”

**“What do these stones mean?”** The literal Hebrew is “What are these stones,” but the idiomatic meaning is, “What do these stones mean?” In the biblical culture, “remember” was not nostalgia that led to good feelings, but rather memory that helped people recall the deeds of Yahweh so people could know who He was and what the relationship was between Him and people. Then the memories led to good theology (“God acts this way.”) and then to right actions. If you have no memory, if you forget, you will eventually not know how to relate to God, which will result in bad theology, bad relationship, and a bad life (Deut. 6:12; 8:11, 18; Judg. 3:7).

Jos 4:22

**“to make known to your children.”** This translation may be a little weak. The Hebrew is causative; make them know. It is a parent’s responsibility to teach their children about God. The assumption of Scripture is that children are curious and will ask questions, such as “What do these stones mean” (Josh. 4:21). At that time parents are to “make them know” the great deeds of Yahweh. Parents today often express that they want their children to “make up their own mind.” That will happen naturally. Eventually, every person makes up their own mind as they grow and mature. But it is the parents’ responsibility before God to raise their young children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. In reality, the children do not belong to the parent, they belong to God; the parents are simply the wards of the children until they mature, and so the parents are responsible for raising the children as the Heavenly Father would have them raised. To not teach children about God early on puts them at a serious disadvantage because they learn to live without thinking about God even though every breath of air they breathe is from God. Eternal life and eternal death are not things to take a chance on. Every parent should give their children the best chance to live forever. “...a child who is left *to itself* puts his mother to shame” (Prov. 29:15).

**“dry ground.”** The Hebrew is also used of the dry seabed of the Red Sea (cf. Exod. 14:22, 29).

**Joshua Chapter 5**

Jos 5:1

**“beyond the Jordan.”** The phrase “beyond the Jordan” can refer to either east (Deut. 3:8; Josh. 24:8) or west (Deut. 3:20; 11:30; Josh. 5:1) of the Jordan River depending on the context or the location of the speaker. In this context, “beyond the Jordan” refers to the west side of the Jordan River.

**“westward.”** Or, “toward the *Mediterranean* Sea.”

**“that their heart melted, nor was there spirit in them anymore.”** Exodus 15:15-16 speaks of fear “falling” on the Canaanites, and them “being melted away.” The word “spirit” here refers to their attitude, courage, etc., and when God dried up the Jordan the Canaanites lost all their courage.

Jos 5:2

**“flint knives.”** Freshly knapped flint knives are sharp as scalpels and sterile. They are perfectly suited for circumcision.

**“knives.”** The Hebrew word in the text of Joshua 5:2 and 5:3 is *chereb* (#02719 חֶרֶב), which is used over 400 times in the Old Testament and almost universally means a “sword” but does not mean a “knife.” The English Bibles almost all read “knives,” because knives were used for circumcision, and also a sword cannot be made out of flint: the flint rock is not suitable for making a long blade and the weapon would be far too brittle to be used in battle. There are Hebrew words for “knife,” but God does not use them here, instead the text uses the word for “sword,” as some commentators point out.[[9]](#footnote-20680) Although some lexicons give “knife” as a definition of the Hebrew word *chereb*, that is questionable because Joshua 5:2 and 5:3 are the only times *chereb* is translated “knife” in the Old Testament.

There is no doubt that the text uses the word “sword” on purpose. In telling Joshua to make “swords” and circumcise the Israelite men who had been born in the wilderness and who had never been circumcised, God was graphically pointing out and symbolically saying that we must make war on certain things that are lacking in our life—the enemy inside—before engaging the enemy outside and around us. God had said that an uncircumcised man was not in God’s covenant (Gen. 17:9-14; Exod. 12:43-49; Lev. 12:3). The Bible never says why Moses did not make sure that the male babies of Israel were circumcised on the eighth day after they were born as the Law said (Lev. 12:3), but Moses did not even circumcise his own boys; his wife Zipporah had to do it (Exod. 4:24-26). In any case, the men who were born during the 40 years of wilderness wanderings were not circumcised, and so God let Joshua know that before he could fight the Canaanite enemy he had to deal with “the enemy in the camp,” which was Israel’s situation of not being in the Abrahamic Covenant. It is common to hear about the “wars of Joshua” and the 31 kings he defeated (Josh. 12:9-24) but it seems that from God’s perspective, the wars of Joshua included the “war” he fought among his own people to bring them into alignment with the Abrahamic Covenant.

God’s command to circumcise the men also took an act of trust on the part of Joshua and Israel. It takes some time to heal from circumcision, and it is very difficult to fight right after being circumcised. Jacob’s sons took advantage of that fact when they killed the men of Shechem (Gen. 34:13-25). From a military standpoint, it would have made a lot more sense to circumcise the men of Israel before they crossed the Jordan River than to cross the Jordan and then circumcise the men, because west of the Jordan they would be much more vulnerable to an attack from the Canaanites. By getting Israel to cross the Jordan and then circumcise the men, God was keeping up His demonstration that He was Israel’s key to victory, not their army or weapons.

**“Yahweh said to Joshua.”** Joshua 5:2-3 is another verse couplet that shows Joshua’s obedience to Yahweh (cf. Josh. 4:16-17).

Jos 5:3

**“So Joshua made.”** The Hebrew text has the redundant pronoun, “Joshua made himself,” but that idiomatic Hebrew, if translated literally, makes the English unclear. The text is worded as if Joshua did all the work himself, but it is simply a way of expressing that Joshua was the leader and was overseeing the work. Here again in Joshua 5:2-3 we see the theme in Joshua of Joshua quickly and exactly obeying Yahweh (see commentary on Josh. 4:16).

Jos 5:4

**“the people...the males.”** God clarifies “the people” as being the men, and “the people” continues in the next verse.

Jos 5:5

**“in the wilderness on the way as they came out of Egypt.”** This phrase shows that from God’s perspective, the whole forty-year wandering was part of coming out of Egypt. It was never God’s intention that the Israelites would wander in the desert for 40 years, so their wandering was part of their coming up out of Egypt.

Jos 5:6

**“perished.”** This is the same word that is used in Joshua 5:8 for the people being “finished” circumcising, but that is almost impossible to bring out in English. Perhaps one could say that the men of war “were finished [dead] in the wilderness,” and then in 5:8 that the people were “finished” circumcising, but that may make Joshua 5:6 too unclear in English.

**“perished, because they did not listen to the voice of Yahweh.”** God tells people what to do to live a prosperous life and live forever, and people who do not listen to the voice of Yahweh bring about their own death. God says over and over to listen to His voice (cf. Jer. 11:7-8). In a context like this, the word “listen” can also be used idiomatically and have the meaning “obey.” Some scholars refer to this as the “pregnant sense” of the word. In this verse it has the meaning “listen to and obey.” Many Hebrew words are used with an idiomatic or pregnant sense (see commentary on Luke 23:42).

**“honey.”** It has recently been discovered that the ancients cultivated beekeeping.

Jos 5:7

**“their children whom he raised up.”** God said He would bring the children into the Promised Land (Num. 14:31).

**“in their place.”** The word “place” is the same Hebrew word in Joshua 5:7 and 5:8. This is likely a double entendre, the figure of speech amphibologia (a word or phrase that has two meanings, both of which are true). In English, if someone is “in the place” of another person, they are there instead of them. However, in this case, while that is true, it is also true that the physical “place” that God had wanted Israel to occupy in the land was not being occupied by the men who came out of Egypt because they had died, but the “place” God prepared for them was now being occupied by the children of those men, which is clear in Joshua 5:8.

Jos 5:8

**“until they were living *again*.”** The Hebrew is literally “until their living” [“their living *again*”]. Although it does refer to the men being healed, and most English versions have “healed” or a similar word, the Hebrew text is communicating more than that, because there are other words that specifically mean “healed” that God could have used here but did not. Although there is a sense in which a sick or hurt person was not really “living” in the full sense of the word, there is a greater truth here, because now, being circumcised, the men of Israel were back in the covenant of God and back being obedient to the Law, and were not “cut off” from life and the nation. Genesis 17:14 says, “The uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that soul will be cut off from his people. He has broken my covenant.” Trent Butler correctly observes, “The new generation receives new life.”[[10]](#footnote-31322)

Jos 5:9

**“reproach.”** The Hebrew refers to reproach, scorn, mocking, taunt. Jacob and his descendants were the people of Yahweh, the creator of the heavens and the earth, but they were slaves to the Egyptians, and this certainly was a cause of reproach, scorn, and mocking.

**“Gilgal.”** “Gilgal” means “rolled away.”

Jos 5:10

**“encamped at Gilgal.”** The exact site of Gilgal has not been located, but given the size of the Israelite camp, “Gilgal” might have been properly the place where the Tent of Meeting and ark of God camped, with Israel camped around it as they did in the wilderness. Gilgal had not been a city, it was the place where Israel camped.

**“on the fourteenth day of the month at evening.”** The Hebrew day started at sunset, making this 40 years to the day of when the children of Israel ate the Passover and then left Egypt after midnight. (Exod. 12:29-37).

Jos 5:11

**“produce.”** This is a rare word, used only here and in Joshua 5:12 of the “produce” of the land. The word is related to the word “cross over,” which is one of the major themes of Joshua 1-5. Now the Israelites are eating food that they did not plant because they crossed over the Jordan River.

**“on the day after the Passover.”** The day after the Passover is the 15th day of Nisan (also called “Abib”), and that day, the 15th of Nisan, started the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Joshua 5:11 says that the Israelites ate the produce of Canaan on the 15th of Nisan, and then Joshua 5:12 says that the manna stopped on the next day, which would be the 16th of Nisan. So, the 14th of Nisan was the Passover, the 15th of Nisan was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and when the Israelites ate the produce of Canaan, and the 16th day of Nisan there was no more manna.

Jos 5:12

**“And the manna ceased on the day after they ate of the produce of the land.”** The day that there was no more manna was the 16th of Nisan (see commentary on Joshua 5:11).

Jos 5:13

**“when Joshua was by Jericho.”** The chronology is general; God does not tell us exactly when this happened.

**“And Joshua went to him.”** God had told Joshua not to fear, and Joshua shows no fear in this situation. Also, it must have been clear to Joshua that this “man” was not a Canaanite, but Joshua apparently did not recognize the dress or appearance.

Jos 5:14

**“Neither.”** While confusing at first glance, the angel’s answer makes perfect sense. Joshua asked whether he was “for us” or “for” the enemy. The correct answer is “Neither.” God is not “for us,” as if He were following our lead and our agenda. We must be “for Him.”

**“the commander of the army of Yahweh.”** Here, the angel is the commander of the army of Yahweh, and in 2 Kings 5:1, Naaman is the commander of the army of the king of Syria. The wording about being the commander is the same.

**“worshiped.”** In the biblical culture, showing respect or “worship” was done by an action, usually prostration or bowing low, and that action was itself considered worship. Here in Joshua 5:14, Joshua prostrates himself before the angel as an act of worship. Because prostrating oneself was the action that was considered worship, some English versions say “worship” (cf. KJV, ESV, CSB) and some say “bow,” “bow down,” or “bow low” (cf. NASB, NET). Commonly, the act of “bowing down” was to fall on one’s knees and then bow the upper body and face to the ground as the Muslims do in the mosques today, although in some cases a person would lie completely flat on the ground.

The problem with bringing the Hebrew into English is that the bowing down was itself representative of worship. But if the English version reads “worship” the reader misses the fact that the worship was in fact the act of bowing to the ground, but if the version reads, “bow down,” the reader misses the fact that the bowing was worship. This angel was a messenger and agent of God, but was not God. Also, the use of “lord,” here, *adoni*, (the specifically inflected Hebrew word, not the root word) shows that Joshua did not consider the one he was talking with to be God. See Word Study: “Lord” for the meaning of *adoni*.

[For more on *shachah* (“worship”) and that it is referring to prostration, bowing, or “worship,” see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Jos 5:15

**“Take your sandals off of your feet.”** This is hearkening back to Exodus 3:5 when the angel said the same thing to Moses. Joshua is now standing in Moses’ place as the leader of Israel.

**“And Joshua did so.”** This short statement continues the theme of Joshua as the obedient servant of Yahweh. He obeyed what Yahweh said, and he obeyed what Yahweh’s messengers said (see commentary on Josh. 4:16).

**Joshua Chapter 6**

Jos 6:2

**“Behold, I have given Jericho into your hand.”** The fall of Jericho was a miracle of God. Attempts to make what happened to Jericho some kind of purely natural phenomenon have never rung true. Even if God caused the walls to fall by an earthquake, it was a strange earthquake indeed, both in its timing and in the very particular destruction it caused. For example, it was strong enough to knock down the strong mud-brick walls of Jericho but did not knock over a single marching Israelite. This was no “natural earthquake.” Jericho stands as an example to believers that God’s help is essential to success. Wise people obey God and follow God, and see good success in their lives, and a promise of everlasting life in the future.

Jericho was a key to the confidence that Israel had in God and in Joshua. God had said the Israelites were to conquer the Promised Land, but how would they know they could do it? Jericho was certainly one of the strongest, if not the strongest, fortified city in Israel. Yet that did not deter Yahweh in the least, and through the fall of Jericho, He showed that with His help the Israelites could take the Promised Land just as He had said. The fall of Jericho gave the Israelites great confidence in moving ahead with the conquest of Israel.

When Jericho was excavated by Garstang in the 1920s, he discovered that the physical remains at Jericho fit the biblical account in Joshua completely. Jericho was excavated again in the 1950s by Kathleen Kenyon, who stated that the walls of Jericho were destroyed before Joshua got there. Although she confirmed that everything that she found at Jericho fit the biblical account, she based her dating on what she did not find at Jericho, especially Cypriot-ware pottery. But Kenyon’s dating and logic are faulty, and the pottery that is found there could easily date from the time of Joshua. The only ancient record of the fall of Jericho is the Bible, there are no Egyptian records of it, or records from any other ancient civilization. Furthermore, the accuracy of the Bible when it comes to recording other historical accounts is a strong argument against the commonly accepted explanation for the biblical account of the fall of Jericho, which is that the Israelites made up the story to give themselves a glorious history. The godly men and women of Israel were believers who would not have had any more reason to invent a lie than the apostles would have lied about seeing the resurrected Christ. The men and women who are truly God’s people have always valued truth. Also, there is no explanation of who could have destroyed Jericho if the Israelites did not, because not only did the walls fall down, but there was a very deep destruction layer, sometimes a few feet deep, on top of the fallen rubble. Furthermore, Jericho was in a very valuable location. Many cities that were destroyed in the various wars in Israel were rebuilt right where they were, for example, there are over 20 such layers at Megiddo. Why would Jericho have been destroyed but then abandoned for centuries? The logical explanation is that the Israelites controlled the area and the city was under a curse (Josh. 6:26).

Jos 6:3

**“you are to march.”** The verb is plural. In the phrase, “Do this six days,” the verb is singular; God is addressing Joshua as the leader because he was the one to make sure everyone obeyed.

Jos 6:4

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet.

Jos 6:5

**“shofar.”** The ram’s horn trumpet, not the metal trumpet.

**“the wall of the city will fall down underneath itself.”** This is a very literal rendering of the Hebrew text and a very real picture of what happened at Jericho. The excavations of Jericho both by Garstang in the 1920s and Kenyon in the 1950s show that the walls of Jericho were stone walls with a strong mud-brick wall on top of the stone wall. What happened in the destruction of Jericho was that the mud-brick wall collapsed and fell mainly on the outside of the stone wall and to the foot of it (thus “beneath” it), spreading out and up the stone wall and actually forming a kind of ramp up the stone wall. Thus, the text of Joshua is very accurate when it says that the people “will go up” and straight into the city. The Israelite warriors had to run “up” the newly formed mud-brick ramp, over the stone wall, and into the city, which they then conquered and burned.

**“every man straight before him.”** This is not “straight and level” but “straight ahead,” up and over the collapsed wall.

Jos 6:6

**“So Joshua.”** Here again we see the theme of God commanding something and Joshua obeying (see commentary on Josh. 4:16).

Jos 6:7

**“Go forward...go forward.”** This is the same Hebrew word (used twice in Joshua 6:7) that is translated “cross over” in the phrase, “cross over the Jordan.” From God’s perspective, no territory in the Promised Land had been conquered yet, so the process of crossing over into the Promised Land was still going on. The army was to “cross over and march around” Jericho, and the front troops were to “cross over” ahead of the ark. The army was to “cross over” and begin the actual conquest of the land.

**“the people.”** In this context, the Hebrew text, “the people,” means the army that is marching around Jericho (cf. Josh. 6:3, 10).

Jos 6:8

**“just as Joshua had spoken.”** The emphasis here is that the priests and people did “just as” Joshua had spoken (cf. ESV, RSV, NJB). A major theme in Joshua is Joshua obeying Yahweh, and then the people obeying Joshua (see commentary on Josh. 4:16).

**“went forward.”** Literally, “crossed over” (see commentary on Josh. 6:7).

Jos 6:9

**“and *the priests* continued to blow.”** The emphasis in the text is the continual blowing of the shofars, not the priests who were blowing them. The victory belongs to Yahweh.

Jos 6:15

**“in the same way.”** Although “in this manner” is possible, the phrase could also be more literally, “according to this judgment (or decision),” that is, that the people were obeying God in the way in which He told them to conquer Jericho.

Jos 6:17

**“devoted.”** The Hebrew word translated “devoted” is *cherem* (#02764 חֵרֶם or #02763 חֶרֶם ), and means a thing that is “devoted.” It can be “devoted” to Yahweh in the sense of being set apart to Him and therefore being His and holy (cf. Lev. 27:21, 28, 29; Num. 18:14), or it can be a thing “devoted” to Him in the sense that it is an abomination to Him and thus it will be destroyed; in that case, “devoted to destruction” is the meaning. Thus when something is “devoted” it can be “devoted to Yahweh” for sacred use, or “devoted to destruction,” and the context determines what “devoted” means in any given occurrence. However, even if a city, such as Jericho in this context, was “devoted” to destruction, the metal articles in it were to be brought into the Tabernacle treasury (Josh. 6:19). It is worth noting that the Arabic word “harem” comes from the root word for “devoted” and refers to a part of a palace or house that is “devoted” (set apart for special use) and used for the women.

The majority of the time that *cherem* is used in the Bible, it is used of the enemies of God and animals that are “devoted” to destruction and are killed (cf. Josh. 2:10; 6:20-21). If a person took something that was devoted, that person became devoted (Josh. 6:18) and would be put to death. That is why the Mosaic Law said that if a person becomes “devoted,” then they were to be put to death (Lev. 27:29). That is what happened to Achan and his family (Josh. 7).

Jos 6:19

**“all the silver and gold and articles of bronze.”** No doubt Israel obeyed this command, and it is significant that no objects of metal were found among the ruins at Jericho. Plenty of pottery, but no metal objects.

Jos 6:20

**“So the people shouted, and the priests blew the shofars.”** This first sentence is a summary; then the verse continues with more particulars on the situation.

**“the wall fell underneath itself so that the people went up into the city.”** See commentary on Joshua 6:5.

**“every man *straight* in front of him.”** Every soldier climbed the collapsed wall ramp and ran straight into the city (see commentary on Josh. 6:5).

Jos 6:21

**“the mouth of the sword.”** This is the first occurrence of the phrase “mouth of the sword” in Joshua. E. W. Bullinger lists “the mouth of the sword” under the figure of speech pleonasm[[11]](#footnote-13047) (the use of more words than necessary), because the Bible could have just said, “the sword” instead of “the mouth of the sword,” but the amplification is not just decoration: it indicates that the sword “devoured” its victims. There is a sense in which the figure could also be the figure of speech personification, as if the sword was alive, human, and hungry and was eating up its victims. The phrase occurs a number of times in the Bible, and occurs when there is a great slaughter, and seems to be used more when, in an attack, only people are killed without the city they live in being destroyed, although there are exceptions to that, Jericho being one of them.

Jos 6:23

**“the young men.”** Perhaps specified as “young men” as representative of the new, young generation that obeyed God.

**“Rahab and...and...and...and.”** The text uses the figure of speech polysyndeton, “many ands” to emphasize that God honored everything that had been promised to Rahab. Her whole family was spared.

[See Word Study: “Syndeton.”]

**“all her relatives.”** Rahab was obviously a very caring woman, and made sure that all her relatives were safe as well as her immediate family.

Jos 6:24

**“they burned the city with fire.”** There is a huge burn layer at Jericho, sometimes up to a meter or so thick. Also, there is good evidence that some of the grain jars were burned with the grain in them, which would certainly not be a normal practice—the conquerers would eat the grain in the city. But in this case, God commanded that everything in the city was His, it would be devoted to destruction, and so even valuable grain would be burned. Joshua burned only three cities in the conquest of Canaan; Ai, Jericho, and Hazor (Josh. 6:24; 8:28; 11:11).

**“the silver and the gold...and...and.”** The figure polysyndeton, which places an “and” before every article, emphasizes the fact that God got all the spoils of war. This was the firstfruits of the Promised Land, and God got all the spoils of this war.

[See Word Study: “Syndeton.”]

**“the treasury.”** The Bible is not clear where this “treasury” was: inside the Tabernacle (it does not seem there would have been enough room) or some kind of special tent in the courtyard.

**“the house of Yahweh.”** At this time in history, the “house” of Yahweh was the Tent of Meeting (the Tabernacle).

Jos 6:25

**“She has lived in the midst of Israel to this day.”** Rahab eventually married Salmon and gave birth to Boaz, who fathered Obed, who fathered Jesse, who fathered David, who was the famous ancestor of Jesus Christ. Rahab is in the genealogy of the Christ (Matt. 1:5). The phrase “to this day,” indicates this text was written not long after the events took place.

Jos 6:26

**“Cursed before Yahweh.”** That is, cursed in Yahweh’s presence. The NLT gets the sense of the verse: “May the curse of the LORD fall on anyone who tries to rebuild the town of Jericho.”

**“rebuilds.”** The Hebrew word for “rebuild” here can be “build” or “rebuild” depending on the context. Here it is more properly “rebuilds.”

**“this city, Jericho.”** The Hebrew text places an emphasis on both “this city” and “Jericho.”

**“will he lay its foundation…will he set up its gates.”** After a miraculous victory and destroying the city of Jericho, Joshua spoke a curse over the destroyed city: “Cursed is the man before Yahweh, who rises up and builds this city, Jericho. With his firstborn *son* will he lay its foundation, and with his youngest *son* will he set up its gates.” That curse, which was also a prophecy, was fulfilled over 500 years later when Hiel the Bethelite rebuilt Jericho and offered his oldest and youngest sons as foundation sacrifices.

[For more information, see commentary on 1 Kings 16:34.]

Jos 6:27

**“And Yahweh was with Joshua.”** This was literally true, but also supports the type-antitype in the Bible between Joshua and Jesus. Joshua 6:27 says Yahweh was with Joshua, and in Acts 10:38 God was with Jesus.

**“fame.”** The text reads “his name,” representative of his fame. Similarly, the fame of Jesus spread as well (cf. Matt. 4:24; Mark 1:28).

**Joshua Chapter 7**

Jos 7:1

**“But...”** The main theme of this chapter is the covetous sin of Achan, which affected all Israel. Israel was to be individually and corporately set apart, holy, to Yahweh. The one person’s sin affected the whole camp. The severity of the judgment upon Achan and his family may seem shocking to modern ears, but it must be remembered that the sin of Achan and his family (because they all knew about it) caused the death of 36 people! Most modern legal systems do not, in practice, acknowledge that the only thing as valuable as a life is another life, and that is the logic of God’s law. Achan’s sin involved a disobedience and covetousness which claimed a right to ownership of the spoils, and therefore the land, apart from God. But the land and what is on it belongs to Yahweh, and He gives it to His people, who are separate from the world. If Israel was to become like the Canaanites, they would, like the Canaanites, be destroyed.

**“the children of Israel were unfaithful.”** The family of Achan was unfaithful, but from God’s perspective, the nation as a whole was unfaithful. There is a community aspect to life, and in the Middle East people were not so much thought of as an individual as they were as part of a community. Often we see the king of Israel represent the whole nation.

**“unfaithful, yes, unfaithful.”** The figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis (see commentary on Gen. 2:16).

[See Word Study: “Polyptoton.”]

**“the son of Zerah.”** Judah and Tamar had more than one son. The Christ-line came from Perez, but this is a line of Judah that did not lead to Christ (cf. Gen. 46:12; 1 Chron. 2:4).

**“the anger of Yahweh burned.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic: “the nose of Yahweh burned.” When we are angry our nose gets red and hot.

Jos 7:2

**“Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai.”** Joshua and the Israelites were camped at Gilgal, near Jericho (Josh. 5:10). They would not have camped in the ruined city of Jericho because it was cursed (Josh. 6:26) and because having just been burned with fire it would not have been habitable. But the large and strongly fortified city of Jericho controlled the whole area, so it is called “Jericho” here, especially since Gilgal was not a city, it was simply the place where Israel was camped.

**“east of Bethel.”** Bethel was an eventual target, and no doubt highly desired because of its association with Abraham and Jacob (e.g. Gen. 12:8).

**“Go up.”** This is literal. In making the simple statement that “Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai,” we must understand that Jericho was about 900 feet (c. 275 meters) below sea level while Ai was about 2,500 feet (c. 750 meters) above it, so the men made an uphill march of some 3,500 feet (c. 1,000 meters).

**“and spy out the land.”** Compare this to Numbers 13:17, when Moses told men to go and spy out the land. In that case, the men came back and said that the people of the land were too many and too strong to conquer. This time the spies come back and say that not all the men of Israel are required to conquer Ai, and they would not have been except for Achan’s sin.

**“the land.”** In this context, the city and the area around it.

Jos 7:3

**“Do not make all the people toil up there.”** The hike from Gilgal to Ai was over 3,000 feet uphill.

Jos 7:5

**“Shebarim.”** Shebarim means “broken.” It may be a place in the valley where the rocks or banks are broken, but it fits here because Israel was symbolically “broken.”

**“the hearts of the people melted.”** This was supposed to happen to the Canaanites, but here it happens to Israel (cf. Josh. 2:11; 5:1).

Jos 7:6

**“fell to the earth on his face before the ark of Yahweh.”** After the miraculous conquest of Jericho, the fact that the Israelite army was defeated by the men of Ai showed that God’s favor was no longer on Israel, but why? That is what Joshua needed to find out.

Jos 7:7

**“across, yes, across.”** This is the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis (see commentary on Gen. 2:16).

**“this people.”** This seems to be poor English grammar (we would say “these people”) but the Hebrew is singular, “this,” here again pointing out that God considered Israel to be a single people, not a collection of independent persons.

**“into the hand of the Amorites.”** Joshua knew that the people in the hill country of Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim were Amorites. He had acute political awareness.

**“to destroy us?”** Here Joshua is very honest and frank in his prayer, as we should be.

Jos 7:8

**“turned their backs.”** The Hebrew word translated “back” is the back of the neck, and it is the word used when Israel is called “stiff-necked” people.

Jos 7:9

**“all the inhabitants of the land...will surround us.”** Joshua understood that the inhabitants of the land would form a coalition to defend themselves, which they did. Joshua was no doubt hoping to come against the people city-kingdom to city-kingdom, but that made no difference to God.

**“And what will you do for your great name?”** Here, Joshua is interceding like Moses (cf. Exod. 32:11-14, 32-35; Num. 14:13-19). Joshua understood the fact that when Yahweh chose Israel and made a covenant with them that He was binding Himself to Israel, and Joshua used that connection as leverage when he prayed. Joshua has a genuine concern for both Israel and Yahweh.

Jos 7:10

**“Get up.”** Joshua had been very frank and honest with God in his prayer; now God is frank and honest with Joshua in His response.

**“Why have you fallen on your face?”** In the next verses, God tells Joshua the reason for Israel’s defeat. Nevertheless, He asked Joshua the question because He had a reasonable expectation that Joshua was spiritually aware and mature enough to realize that since God had promised Israel success if they obeyed Him, if Israel was defeated then there must have been some failure on the part of Israel. At that point, it was Joshua’s job as the leader of Israel to do the hard work of finding out where the failure was. As it turned out, God gave Joshua an idea of the problem, but Joshua still had to ferret out the whole truth and deal with it.

Too often people blame God for a bad situation when the problem is entirely a human failure.

Jos 7:11

**“and also they have...and also they have...and also they have.”** This is the figure of speech anaphora (the same beginnings), and the force of the figure is to emphasize each individual point. Every part of Achan’s transgression was important to God.

[See Word Study: “Anaphora.”]

Jos 7:12

**“devoted *for destruction*.”** For more on things “devoted” to Yahweh and devoted to destruction, see commentary on Joshua 6:17.

Jos 7:13

**“Make yourselves holy.”** The people were to do what it took to make themselves holy in the sight of God (cf. Lev. 11:44).

[For more on “make yourselves holy,” see commentary on Josh. 3:5.]

Jos 7:14

**“you must draw near.”** This is the terminology for drawing close to the Tent of Meeting, where the ark (and thus God) was.

**“tribes...family...household...man.”** Israel was in Egypt for four generations (Josh. 7:1, 18; Gen. 15:16), and descending from Jacob there were first tribes, then families, then households, then individuals.

**“Yahweh captures *by lot*.”** The High Priest would use the Urim and Thummim in his breastplate to “take” or “reject” the thing in question (cf. Exod. 28:30; Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21; Deut. 33:8). The word “capture” (cf. Fox[[12]](#footnote-23690)) is a strong word in Hebrew. Israel was to “capture” Ai after “capturing” Jericho (Josh. 8:19; 10:1; 11:12-16), but they could not because Achan stole the devoted thing and made the camp of Israel devoted to destruction. So now the Israelites must “capture,” by use of the Urim and Thummim in the High Priest’s breastplate, the one who was causing the problem, and they “captured” Achan and his family.

[For more on the “lot” and the Urim and Thummim, see commentary on Exod. 28:30.]

Jos 7:16

**“So Joshua rose up early.”** Here again we see the theme in Joshua of Joshua obeying the words of Yahweh (cf. Josh. 7:14. See commentary on Josh. 4:16).

**“was captured by lot.”** For more on the “lot” and the Urim and Thummim, see commentary on Josh. 7:14 and Exodus 28:30.

Jos 7:19

**“give glory to Yahweh.”** In this context, giving glory to Yahweh was acknowledging that Yahweh directed the process in finding Achan, and then confessing his sin and telling what he had done without hiding anything. It was an idiomatic way of expressing an oath to tell the truth (cf. John 9:24).

**“Do not hide it from me!”** In many ways, this parallels the record of Peter with Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11. Both Achan and Ananias and Sapphira were trying to hide the fact that they lied and kept things for themselves, in both cases the facts were not hidden from God (cf. Heb. 4:13), and in both cases, it was early in the formation of the community. Here in Joshua 7, Israel had just crossed the Jordan and was forming a nation, and in Acts 5 the early Church was still forming as a believer community.

Jos 7:21

**“shekels.”** 200 shekels is roughly five pounds (2.26 kg) and 50 shekels is roughly 1.25 pounds (567 grams). A shekel was roughly .4 ounces (11 or 11.5 grams). See commentary on Genesis 24:22, “shekel.”

**“bar of gold.”** The Hebrew is literally, “tongue of gold.” When the gold was poured out, it usually came out in an oblong or “tongue” shape.

Jos 7:22

**“they ran to the tent.”** There is an urgency to this event.

Jos 7:23

**“brought them to Joshua and...poured them out before Yahweh.”** The articles were brought to Joshua, who took them before the ark of God so Yahweh could see them.

**“poured them out.”** This is the standard vocabulary for the pouring out of the drink offering. Here, the stolen articles were poured out on the ground as if they were a drink offering to Yahweh. The English is somewhat awkward, but the Hebrew text is trying to make a point that should not be lost in the English translation. Jericho had been an offering to Yahweh, it had been devoted, and this was part of the spoils of Jericho.

Jos 7:24

**“the Valley of Achor.”** The word Achor means “disaster” or “trouble,” and the valley was named “the Valley of Disaster” after the incident with Achan and because of it (cf. Josh. 7:25-26).

Jos 7:25

**“brought disaster.”** Not only had 36 men died, but the hearts of the Canaanites, realizing the weakness in Israel, could well have been strengthened, and they could have attacked Israel en masse.

**“Yahweh will bring disaster upon you...And all Israel stoned him.”** This is one of the verses where Yahweh is said to act, but He does so through the actions of His people.

**“All Israel stoned him with stones.”** This may seem harsh, but about 36 men were dead because Achan and his family could not control their lust, and we must make no mistake, Achan’s whole family was in on the deception. Justice demanded the death penalty. The only thing as valuable as a human life is another human life, which is why God commanded the death penalty for murderers (Exod. 21:12-16). To demand less than the death penalty, though that is done regularly today, is to send the message that one life is more valuable than another; the murderer’s life is more valuable than the life of the one he or she murders.

Achan knew that if he stole something devoted to destruction, he would also be devoted to destruction because that is what the Law said (Deut. 7:26). Achan was a fool. He and his family took a chance that they could enrich themselves with things from Jericho, and it cost 36 innocent people, and then they themselves, their lives.

The standard method of killing a criminal was to stone them with stones (cf. Lev. 20:2; 24:23; Num. 15:35; Deut. 13:10; 21:21). Some people have asserted that the Jews just dropped one huge stone on the person, but there is no evidence for that in the Bible. Also, stoning with stones was how Achan and his family were killed (Josh. 7:25), and how the Jews killed Stephen (Acts 7:58-60).

[For more on things that are “devoted” to God, see commentary on Josh. 6:17. For more on stoning people to death, see commentary on Lev. 20:2.]

**Joshua Chapter 8**

Jos 8:1

**“Yahweh said.”** Joshua 8 gives the longest description of any conquest battle. Yet, the chapter is really about how Israel is restored to the right relation with Yahweh after the covenant was breached by Achan. Yahweh gives instructions on how to deal with Ai, and Joshua and Israel follow those instructions. The instructions also relate to faithfully following the Torah of Moses, especially Deuteronomy. The last verses of the chapter, Joshua 8:30-35, may seem like an interruption in the conquest account but they fit the theme of the reestablishment and confirmation of the covenant relationship between Israel and Yahweh. The God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses is the God of the people of Israel, and God will fulfill His promises. The wise believer listens to God and believes and obeys Him.

**“Do not be afraid or be dismayed.”** This must have been huge comfort to Joshua and it can be huge comfort to believers today. Joshua had just lost 36 men in his battle with Ai, and had reason to be concerned about another battle. But God is a God of forgiveness and restoration, and when Israel repented and took measures to restore their covenant relation with Yahweh, He assured them that He would be with them.

**“the king of Ai and...and...and.”** This is the figure of speech polysyndeton. The repetition of “and” emphasized each part. God made it clear that Joshua would conquer the king and his kingdom.

[See Word Study: “Syndeton.”]

Jos 8:2

**“take as plunder.”** Although the English phrase is translated as a verb and noun for clarity, the Hebrew is just a plural verb that means to take as plunder. Unlike at Jericho when the livestock and supplies were destroyed, in the case of Ai and most other cities the Israelites could take them for themselves.

**“Set for yourself.”** The verb and noun are singular. Thus, Yahweh is either speaking directly to Joshua (which is likely from the context) or Yahweh is speaking of Israel as a singular body (which is not as likely in the context but often was the way God considered Israel as a singular body of people).

Jos 8:3

**“Joshua and all the people of war rose up.”** The verb “rose up” is singular. This is one of the examples of a singular verb being used with a plural subject (see commentary on Gen. 48:16).

Jos 8:7

**“take possession of the city.”** The Hebrew word has the idea of “inherit” in it. The city of Ai, like the rest of the Promised Land, was Israel’s inheritance from God.

Jos 8:8

**“set the city on fire.”** Ai was one of the only three cities that God commanded that Israel burn after conquering it: Ai, Jericho, and Hazor (Josh. 6:24; 8:28; 11:11).

**“You are to do according to the word of Yahweh.”** Simple and straightforward. Humans are to obey God. This is one of the themes of Joshua: obeying God.

Jos 8:9

**“on the west side of Ai.”** Archaeologists believe that Bethel is slightly more than two miles to the west (actually somewhat northwest) of Ai. Joshua’s army camped just west of Ai between Bethel and Ai, which is basically right where Abraham had pitched his tent and built an altar hundreds of years earlier (cf. Gen. 12:8). In the almost 500 years since Abraham had built his altar there, the local Canaanites had multiplied and solidified their control of the area. One wonders if there was anything left of Abraham’s altar. There well could have been, even if people could not recognize it for what it was.

The 30,000 men had come up from Jericho to the east, so they would have had to have gone around Ai from east to west at some distance from the city to keep from being seen or heard, and then drawn close to Ai from the west side. The way the valleys are around Ai, the ambush force would have probably gone around Ai to the south, but there is no way to know for sure their exact route.

**“but Joshua stayed among the people that night.”** Joshua did not go with the ambush force, but stayed with the main group of fighting men. The ambush force was sent out at night to get ready for the battle.

Jos 8:10

**“before the people to Ai.”** Joshua and the elders were in the lead, and the rest of the people could see them and be encouraged by their example.

Jos 8:11

**“in front of the city.”** The point of Joshua and his troops was to be seen, so they marched in front of the city. Then they camped to the north of the city, which may or may not have been in front of the city. There are a couple of geographical locations that are possible ruins of the city of Ai. The main one is *Et-tell*, but the other possibility is Kirbet Maqatir.

**“there was a ravine between him and Ai.”** That is, between Joshua and Ai. If the archaeologists and historians are correct that the biblical city of Ai is et-Tell today, then this ravine is today called the Wadi Jaya.

Jos 8:12

**“on the west side of the city.”** So the attack is the main army on the north of Ai, with the ambush force on the west of it.

Jos 8:13

**“And Joshua went that night.”** This is Joshua and his army. Many times only the leader is mentioned when it means the leader and those with him. The king of Ai is watching, and sees Joshua move his camp, supposedly getting ready to attack Ai in the morning.

**“of the plain.”** This is the plain, a flat place, not a “ravine” between Joshua and Ai (cf. NJB, “plain”). Just to the east of Ai there is a very flat area on which an army can assemble but also be clearly seen from Ai. It is not really a “valley,” although in the Hebrew geographical terms a “valley” can be a bottom, usually between ridges or mountains, and can be quite flat and very wide, so wide in fact, that the Hebrew word can even mean “plain.” It seems that Joshua moved from behind the protection of the ravine on the north to the flat plain on the east of Ai, making it obvious to the people of Ai that he was going to attack from there. When Joshua faked his retreat, he faced and fled east (Josh. 8:14-15).

Jos 8:14

**“the appointed place.”** Some English versions read, “appointed time” instead of “appointed place,” but it was the place of the battle that was appointed, as Joshua had planned.

**“the Arabah.”** The rift valley through which the Jordan River flows. The main body of the battle flowed to the east, which makes sense because Joshua’s men would have pretended like they were running back to their camp at Gilgal in the Jordan Valley, and the ambush came in from the west.

Jos 8:15

**“by the road to the wilderness.”** More literally, “the road of the wilderness.” There was a road leading down a little valley then down a ridge from close to Ai down into the Arabah, and that valley is today called the Nahal Zeboim, and there is a very good chance that Israel made as if they were fleeing down that road and heading back east to their camp at Gilgal.

Jos 8:16

**“All the people.”** This is a good example of culturally how “all the people” does not refer to the women and children (cf. Josh. 8:17).

Jos 8:17

**“They left the city open.”** This was overconfidence. The king should have made sure there was some protection in the city. The men did not close the city gate when they left. This certainly made it easier for Joshua’s ambush to take the city. It is possible that this advantage was unexpected.

Jos 8:18

**“Stretch out...so Joshua stretched out.”** Here again in Joshua 8:18 we see the emphasis on Joshua’s quick and exact obedience to God, which has been a theme in Joshua (see commentary on Josh. 4:16).

**“javelin.”** The exact weapon the Hebrew word refers to is debated. It is traditionally a spear, but it could also be a short, curved sword. That seems to be the use in the Qumran material and short curved swords have been found by archaeologists from Joshua’s time, but there is also a long time between the time of Joshua and the Qumran writing, so the word is debated.

Jos 8:19

**“and they captured it.”** “Captured” is the same Hebrew word used when Achan was “captured” by lot and discovered as the one whose sin caused the defeat of Israel and the death of 36 men (Josh. 7:16-18). Israel could not capture Ai because of the sin of Achan. Then Achan was “captured” by lot and dealt with, and then Ai could be captured. Although we all sin, to see the fullness of God’s blessing, especially those who are mature believers need to be serious about dealing with their sin.

**“set the city on fire.”** It is not clear as to why God commanded to burn Ai. God had said Israel would get to live in cities they had not built (Deut. 6:10), and Israel only burned Jericho, Ai, and Hazor. It is possible that because word might have spread among the local nations that Israel had been defeated at Ai that God knew that indigenous people could see the smoke from Ai burning many miles away and would again fear Israel. It certainly discouraged the men of Ai, as we see in the following verses.

Jos 8:20

**“they had no ability to flee.”** The Hebrew text is idiomatic and very concrete: “they had no hands to flee,” because a person’s power was expressed through their hands. It means they had no power or ability to flee.

**“the people who had been fleeing.”** That is, the troops of Israel who had been pretending to run away.

Jos 8:24

**“the mouth of the sword.”** Used to show great destruction, as if the sword was eating its victims (see commentary on Josh. 6:21).

**“and struck it with the mouth of the sword.”** The Israelites returned to Ai and killed all those who had not joined the army of Ai in the battle.

Jos 8:26

**“Joshua did not draw back his hand.”** The text indicates that Joshua held his hand out so people could see the command he was giving them, and did not pull it down until the battle was over. Keil and Delitzsch note that “the general did not lower the war-signal till the conflict was to cease.”[[13]](#footnote-25624) The Bible does not explain how Joshua could hold up his hand for so long; perhaps he had help, like Moses before him had (Exod. 17:10-12).

Jos 8:27

**“only the livestock and the spoil.”** God said that Israel could plunder Ai and take the livestock and other plunder (Josh. 8:2), but they could not, and did not, take captives, they only took the other spoil.

**“according to the word of Yahweh that he commanded Joshua.”** The obedience of Joshua to the word of Yahweh is a theme of the book of Joshua.

Jos 8:28

**“so Joshua burned Ai.”** Joshua burned only three cities in the conquest of Canaan; Ai, Jericho, and Hazor (Josh. 6:24; 8:28; 11:11).

**“a mound of ruins.”** The Hebrew is a “tel,” which is a mound of ruins, not just a “heap.” When cities were destroyed, the ruins were a pile that was higher than the surrounding landscape. Over time, the ruins sometimes piled up and became quite high. Any city of the Israelites that turned to idolatry was to be made a “mound of ruins” too (cf. Deut. 13:16), but that never happened even though cities in Israel did turn to idolatry, e.g. Dan.

Jos 8:29

**“And he hanged the king of Ai on a tree.”** From Deuteronomy 21:22-23. In the Old Testament, the person was killed then the dead body was put on a tree (or a stake; the Hebrew can mean either) for display.

**“raised over it a great heap of stones.”** This would serve as a warning, and bring to mind what happened to people who defied Yahweh. Israel had done the same thing to Achan, who sinned against Yahweh and caused the death of 36 men (Josh. 7:26).

Jos 8:30

**“built an altar to Yahweh...on Mount Ebal.”** Both the topic and location shift quickly. Moses had commanded building the altar on Mount Ebal (Deut. 27:1-8). It was about a 20-mile trip from Ai to Mount Ebal. A puzzle is why nothing is mentioned of Shechem and what happened to the Canaanites there. Shechem is not one of the city-kingdoms conquered by Joshua (Josh. 12). Some scholars have suggested that this account comes after the account of Gibeon (Josh. 9) and that the people of Shechem were among the people around Gibeon who made peace with Israel. The account may have been moved to where it is in the text to emphasize Joshua’s obedience to what Moses commanded to do.

Jos 8:31

**“the book of the Law of Moses.”** The revelation that God gave to Moses had already been collected and was being used for guidance as to how to obey God and live life (cf. Exod. 24:4; Deut. 31:9). Many people assert that the laws and records of ancient Israel were passed down from generation to generation as part of an oral tradition before they were written down, but that is just an assumption, there is no proof that occurred. The Bible records that things were written down pretty much as they occurred, and then, like here in Joshua, people checked the writings and obeyed them.

**“an altar of uncut stones.”** This was commanded in Deuteronomy 27:4-6. The phrase “uncut stones” is “complete stones,” whole stones, in the Hebrew text, that is stones that have not been cut down and formed. The altar was not to be a thing of beauty, but a place of atonement for sin, and sin and death are not pretty or to be admired. The word “altar” in Hebrew means “slaughter site” or “sacrificing place.” It was a place of death, but death that pointed to atonement.

Jos 8:32

**“he wrote upon the stones a copy.”** Commanded in Deuteronomy 27:46. A very public and permanent copy of the Law. This is almost certainly not the entire Torah from Genesis through Deuteronomy, but a representative of the most important laws. This could include the Ten Commandments and the blessings and curses from Deuteronomy 27-28.

**“the Law of Moses.”** The Hebrew is “the *torah* of Moses,” where “*torah*” is much more than “law.” The *torah* involves instruction in many different ways (see commentary on Prov. 1:8).

**“which he had written in the presence.”** That is, which Moses had written in the presence of the children of Israel. The prepositional phrase, “in the presence of the children of Israel” can also be placed after the words “he wrote” at the beginning of the sentence which would change the meaning of the verse, but in the Hebrew text the prepositional phrase comes at the end of the verse and it makes sense there.

Jos 8:33

**“stood on opposite sides of the ark.”** The Israelites were about to divide into two groups, one to stand in front of Mount Ebal and one to stand in front of Mount Gerizim, and here the ark divides the two groups.

**“the foreigner and citizen alike.”** It is interesting that this was a mixed group. The “citizens” were the Israelites, although the Hebrew word does not exactly mean “citizen.” That is why the English translations differ: “citizen,” “home-born,” “native,” “native-born.”

**“in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal.”** They were not way up the slopes of the mountains, but in front of them, fairly close together, which allowed the people to hear each other well.

**“to bless.”** The subject of the verb shifts from the people to whoever is doing the blessing, who is left out of the sentence. It might be Yahweh, the priests, or even Joshua (cf. Josh. 8:34).

Jos 8:34

**“he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse.”** The blessing and curse read at Mount Ebal and Gerizim were Deuteronomy 27:9-28:68. The “blessing” and “curse” are singular because they were considered one blessing and curse, not many. If a person obeyed they would be blessed in many ways, and if they disobeyed they would be cursed in many ways. The “law” is the *torah*, which is more than just “law” (see commentary on Prov. 1:6).

Jos 8:35

**“before all the assembly of Israel, and the women.”** This is a good example of the cultural exclusion of women in the culture. The women were often included but not spoken of as if they are included. In this case, “all the assembly of Israel” did not include the women.

**“and the foreigners who walked in their midst.”** The foreigners were included. The phrase “in their midst” has the word “near” in it, and the Bible makes a difference between foreigners who were “near” and those who were “far away.”

[For more on “near” and “far” see commentary on Lev. 1:2 and Eph. 2:13.]

**Joshua Chapter 9**

Jos 9:1

**“beyond the Jordan.”** In this case, west of the Jordan River.

**“the Shephelah.”** The Shephelah, also sometimes referred to as the Judean Foothills, is one of the geographic regions mentioned in the Bible. The geography of Israel, for much of its length, is divided into four geographical zones: the coastal plain by the Mediterranean Sea; the Shephelah, which is the area of rolling hills east of the coastal plain and between the coastal plain and the hill country; the hill country, which is the inner country that is quite mountainous; and the Jordan Valley, much of which is very arid and referred to as the Arabah. The Shephelah is a transition zone between Israel’s western coastal plain on the Mediterranean Sea and the high Judean hill country.

The Shephelah is a small geographical area, about 35 miles (56 km) long and 8 miles (9 km) wide. It is a fertile area of gently rolling hills, and as such has been an excellent location for cities, some agriculture, and herding. 1 Kings 10:27 and 1 Chronicles 27:28 mention the abundance of trees that grew in the Shephelah, and 2 Chronicles 26:10 mentions the livestock kept there. It has well-known cities and sites such as the Valley of Elah where David fought Goliath, Azekah (where the Philistines camped when David fought Goliath; 1 Sam. 17:1), Lachish (mentioned over 20 times in the Old Testament), and Beth Shemesh (mentioned 20 times in the Old Testament; it was the town the Ark of the Covenant first went after the Philistines captured it; 1 Samuel 6). The hill country to the east of the Shephelah has important cities such as Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Hebron.

The entire Shephelah is divided by a series of valleys that have streams that run during the rainy season. For example, from north to south, the valleys include the Valley of Aijalon (Josh. 10:12), the Valley of Sorek (Judges 16:4), the Valley of Elah (1 Sam. 17:2, 19), the Guyrin Valley, and the Lachish Valley (the names of these valleys can be seen in Map 1-10 and 11 in the *Satellite Bible Atlas* by William Schlegel,[[14]](#footnote-29349) and also in the third edition of the Oxford Bible Atlas[[15]](#footnote-23973)

**“shore of the Great Sea.”** This referred to the coastal plain, the shore of the Mediterranean Sea (the Mediterranean Sea was sometimes called “the Great Sea” in the Old Testament).

**“the Hittite, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite.”** All of these tribes are actually “Canaanites.” Genesis tells us that “Canaan became the father of Sidon (his firstborn)[thus the Phoenicians], Heth [thus the Hittites], the Jebusite, the Amorite, the Girgashite, the Hivite, the Arkite, the Sinite, the Arvadite, the Zemarite, and the Hamathite” (Gen. 10:15-18). The only name in the list in Joshua that cannot be traced to Canaan the son of Ham is the Perizzites.

**“Perizzite.”** The Bible mentions the Perizzites in the land of Israel as early as the time of Abraham (Gen. 13:7), and as late as after the Babylonian Captivity, although the reference to Perizzites in Ezra may have been a historical reference since it is in a list of the native people in the Promised Land before Joshua’s conquest (Ezra 9:1-2; cf. Exod. 34:11; Deut. 7:1). According to the book of Joshua, the Perizzites were in the hill country of Judah and Ephraim (Joshua 11:3, 17:15), and they were still in the land at the time of Solomon, who put them to forced labor (1 Kings 9:10-21). Nothing is known of their origin. It has been suggested that the name “Perizzites” means something like “country people,” “rural people,” so they may be offshoots from other people groups who started out by living in rural areas, or they could be an amalgam of different people groups and who started to associate and build a clan soon after the flood, certainly as early as Abraham. It is also possible that they have no stated human origin because they were, at least in part, part of the Nephilim, the fallen race created by demons (see commentary on Gen. 6:4). That may be the reason that the hill country of Ephraim was known as “the land of the Perizzites and of the Rephaim” (Josh. 17:15).

Jos 9:2

**“they gathered themselves together to fight with Joshua.”** These tribes were not always friendly among themselves, and there is evidence of occasional wars between them. This is a good example of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.”

**“*under* one command.”** The Hebrew is literally, “one mouth.” The enemy was composed of different armies, but they fought as one (cf. 2 Chron. 18:12).

Jos 9:3

**“But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard.”** The contradictory responses of the peoples of the land are highlighted in Joshua 9. Some hear and take offense and attack, while others hear and figure out how to join Israel.

Jos 9:4

**“cunning.”** The Hebrew word can have a negative or positive meaning: crafty or prudent. Here there is an element of both. They did act deceptively, but it was to save their lives.

**“wineskins.”** A “bottle” or container made from animal skin. The Hebrew reads, “torn and tied up.” It is likely that the skins had torn on an extremity and then that tear was tied up.

[For more on skin-bottles, which were usually made from the skins of goats, see commentary on 1 Sam. 10:3.]

Jos 9:6

**“camp at Gilgal.”** Joshua maintained his camp at Gilgal, and returned there. Thus the Gibeonites went down into the Jordan Valley to meet with Joshua (a downhill journey of about 3,400 feet or so).

**“a far country.”** They had come less than 20 miles from Gibeon to Gilgal. Deuteronomy 20:10-11 gives Israel direction about how to treat people who were “near” versus people who lived far away. Israel could offer peace to a far city. Also, the people of Gibeon offered to be servants, which is also in Deuteronomy. Also, the Gibeonites specifically asked for a covenant, which Israel was not to cut with any of the people of the Promised Land (Deut. 7:1-2). This opens the question, did the Gibeonites somehow know something about what the *Torah* of Moses said, or did they just assume that since God was making a way for Israel to come into the land that if they said they did not live in the land they would be treated differently.

Jos 9:7

**“living here among us.”** That is, living in the land promised to Israel, even though it has not been conquered yet. The “us” in the Hebrew is literally “me,” singular, and thus the phrase is more literally, “Perhaps you are living within me.” In this case, Israel is a collective group and considered as one. Also, the Hebrew has the word “near” in the phrase “among us,” it is more literally, “near us,” but it has a much deeper meaning than just “near” in proximity.

**“we cut.”** The verb is singular, “I cut.” Israel is one nation and acting as one.

Jos 9:8

**“They said to Joshua, ‘We are your servants.’”** The Hebrew word for “servant” can also mean “slave,” so it is hard to tell exactly how humble the Gibeonites were being here except that they wanted to make a covenant to serve Israel.

Jos 9:9

**“have come from a very far country.”** Joshua asked, “Who are you and where do you come from,” and the Gibeonites did not answer Joshua’s question. They lied—they had come less than 20 miles—but even their lie was an “unclear answer.” Joshua and the elders unwisely did not press the point. The fairly large amount of trading that went on in the ancient Middle East meant that lots of “distant” countries would have been familiar to Joshua and the leaders of Israel; there were trading caravans mentioned in Genesis and Job (Gen. 37:25; Job 6:18-19). We can learn a good lesson from this record. A direct and clear question should get a direct and clear answer. If the answer is not direct or clear, the wise believer should be cautious because something dishonest or disadvantageous is likely going on. Politicians are usually masters at not giving clear simple answers to direct questions, and there is usually something dishonest and/or disadvantageous going on.

**“we have heard of his fame, all that he did​.”** People are affected when they hear what God does. This emphasizes the importance of believers talking about the good things that God does in their life. Romans says, “And how are they to believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without someone to declare it?” If believers will tell the good things that God does it will draw people to God. It is also noteworthy that the Gibeonites gave credit to Yahweh for all that “he did.” Even the Gentiles can recognize the work of God if they will open their hearts and minds to the possibility.

Jos 9:10

**“beyond the Jordan.”** Here meaning on the east side of the Jordan.

**“and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan.”** If these people were from a far country, as they said, then they would not have heard of Israel’s conquest of Jericho and Ai, and so they did not mention those conquests or it would have given them away.

Jos 9:11

**“Now then, cut a covenant with us.”** These Gibeonites seemed to know that if Israel would cut a covenant with them, then they would keep it, which turned out to be correct.

Jos 9:14

**“took of their provisions.”** This may or may not have been part of a communal meal, where the Israelites and Gibeonites shared food together. The text does not communicate any suspicion here, although the Israelites could have had some. It seems, however, especially given the context, that Israel was simply accepting the provisions and story of the Gibeonites.

**“did not ask *counsel* from the mouth of Yahweh.”** Literally, “did not ask the mouth of Yahweh.” The literal “ask the mouth” is a metonymy, with “mouth” being put for asking for what comes from the mouth, that is, advice.

[See Word Study: “Metonymy.”]

Jos 9:15

**“and cut a covenant with them to let them live.”** The covenant that Israel made with the Gibeonites shows that sometimes one thing in the Law is greater than other points. The Law said to kill the people of the land, but Joshua made a covenant with them, and that direct covenant was more binding than commandments such as Deuteronomy 7 in the Law. This kind of thing is how case law is established. “To let them live;” Joshua did not cut a covenant with that purpose, since he thought they came from far away he was not commanded to kill them, but it was the result of the covenant that Joshua made.

**“swore *an oath*.”** The verb means to swear an oath.

Jos 9:16

**“three days.”** There is a sort of theme of three days in Joshua (cf. Josh. 1:11; 2:16, 22; 3:2; 9:16).

**“their neighbors and that they lived among them​.”** The words “neighbors” and “among” are both from the root word “near.” A translation that might pick that up somewhat might be “they were from nearby and lived near him [Israel].” The double use of the “near” words adds to the shock of Israel when they realized they had been lied to and deceived, and the Gibeonites were not from a far country as they had said, but not even from 20 miles away, in the heartland of Israel.

Jos 9:17

**“Beeroth.”** The word means “cisterns,” and it is the only one of the towns that has not been positively identified today.

**“on the third day.”** Again we see here the theme of three days (see commentary on Josh. 9:16). Israel could reach Gibeon in one day, because the army of Israel went from Gilgal to Gibeon in one night (cf. Josh. 10:9). However, this trip in Joshua 9:17 was much less rushed. Furthermore, Israel was going into the heart of enemy country and did not want to be ambushed, so they took time to prepare to leave and took time in the journey, and likely kept sending scouts ahead of the people to report on the situation.

**“Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kiriath-jearim.”** All of these cities except Beeroth have been positively identified (and Beeroth is likely known). They are not quite 10 miles northwest of Jerusalem in the tribal area of Benjamin, and lie in a line that runs basically from Gibeon southwest to Kiriath-jearim.

Jos 9:18

**“strike them.”** The word “strike” is an idiom for “kill.”

Jos 9:19

**“We ourselves have sworn to them by Yahweh.”** The leaders did not want to take the name of Yahweh in vain and make a false oath (cf. Exod. 20:7; Lev. 19:12; Deut. 6:13; 10:20).

**“touch.”** Idiomatic for “harm.” The Israelites were supposed to kill the Canaanites (cf. Josh. 9:26), but they cannot harm the Gibeonites. “Touch” is used for harm (including rape) in Ruth 2:9. The leaders took the oath they had made very seriously, so seriously that it superseded the command of Yahweh in the Torah about what to do with the people who lived in the land. This is a good example of one law in the Torah being greater than another, and there are no clear directions from God as to what to do when that occurs (generally because the situation occurs, as it did here, with human error). The leaders must have considered that Scriptures such as Leviticus 19:12, and Deuteronomy 6:13 and 10:20 superseded God’s command to destroy the Canaanites. It would be interesting to know if Rahab’s family being among them had any influence on that decision—but there is no way to know that.

Jos 9:20

**“so that wrath will not be on us.”** The leaders knew that disobeying God could bring His wrath on Israel, as it did when Achan and his family sinned (Josh. 7).

Jos 9:21

**“woodcutters and drawers of water.”** This would be the punishment that people who lived far from Israel but surrendered to them would be subject to (cf. Deut. 20:10-11). The REV follows the reading of Robert Alter. The last phrase, “as the rulers had said concerning them,” points to the discussion that the rulers would have had among themselves when they found out that the Gibeonites lived in the Promised Land. The rulers were in a vice between keeping their covenant with the Gibeonites and obeying Torah concerning the peoples in the land. By making the Gibeonites woodcutters and water carriers the elders were at least keeping the part of the Torah about non-Israelites that they could in this situation.

Jos 9:22

**“far...near.”** This is an example of how the concepts of being “far away” or “near” to someone were important in the biblical culture. With no long-range communication, getting to be “near” someone was a privilege and honor. This shows up with God but is often veiled in translation. For example, when it comes to God, people were to mainly “come near” to Him with an offering or sacrifice. For example, Leviticus 1:2 could be translated “If any man of you comes near with an offering” because the word usually translated “brings” means to approach or come near. Because of the work of Christ, people who were “far” from God are brought “near” (Eph. 2:13).

[For more on coming near to God, see commentary on Lev. 1:2.]

Jos 9:23

**“never cease to be.”** The Hebrew “cease” is the same word as “cut” in “cut a covenant.” The people of Gibeon cut a covenant with Israel and now some of them will never be “cut off” from being a slave and serving in the Tabernacle or Temple. However, some would consider it a blessing to be a non-Jew and get to serve like that in the presence of God.

**“to the house of my God.”** The Gibeonites became slaves to Yahweh and also served Israel (Josh. 9:27). They were alive because of the commands of Yahweh.

Jos 9:24

**“told, yes, told.”** The Hebrew text doubles the word “told” for emphasis in the figure of speech polyptoton. The fact that the Gibeonites knew what they did about Israel shows how well information could travel, usually by merchants and traders, but also by herdsmen, hunters, etc. This causes more questions as to why Joshua and the elders did not know where the Gibeonites came from and that they lived only some miles away.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

**“how Yahweh your God commanded.”** The Gibeonites had a knowledge of Israel’s history. They also appeared to acknowledge Yahweh as a god that has very real power and so were afraid for their lives that it was Yahweh who commanded “His servant Moses” to give the land to Israel and kill the inhabitants. It seems that the Gibeonites had a lot of knowledge and humility when it concerned Yahweh and Israel.

Jos 9:25

**“in your hand.”** The phrase “in your hand” is an idiom for “in your power” or “under your authority.”

Jos 9:27

**“to this day.”** This is a theme that is important to the author. He often explains a present situation by events in the past. In this case, by the time the book of Joshua was written, the Gibeonites were servants who cut wood and drew water for the Tabernacle and Joshua 9 explains how that come to be. It can be important to know history. The phrase “to this day” occurs 15 times in Joshua.

**“the place.”** God had not chosen Jerusalem yet. Thus the text still speaks of “the place” that Yahweh would choose.

**“Yahweh would choose.”** The Hebrew reads, “he,” not Yahweh (“he would choose”), but in this English sentence it would seem that the “he” referred to Joshua, which it does not.

**Joshua Chapter 10**

Jos 10:1

**“Adoni-zedek.”** “Adoni-zedek” is a typically Semitic name, and it means “My lord is righteousness.” Interestingly, Adoni-zedek ruled Jerusalem just as Melchi-zedek (“My king is righteousness”), who is better known as “Melchizedek” ruled Jerusalem some 450 years earlier. Adoni-zedek is called, along with the other kings, an Amorite (Josh. 10:5). They probably had tribal connections as well as geographical ones. The Hivites (some of whom lived in Gibeon) were “cousins” to the Amorites. Ham fathered Canaan (Gen. 10:6), and Canaan then fathered his firstborn, Sidon, then Heth (the Hittites come from Heth), the Jebusites (who lived in and around Jerusalem), the Amorites (who generally lived in central Israel, in the hill country; cf. Num. 13:29, Deut. 1:7, 19, 20, 44; Josh. 5:1, 7:7), the Girgashites, the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites (Gen. 10:15-18). Over time, “the clans of the Canaanites were spread abroad” and populated a lot of the Promised Land (Gen. 10:18).

The presence of Adoni-zedek in Jerusalem is likely more than a coincidence, and demonstrates the war going on between good and evil. During the time of Abraham, it became clear that God wanted the land of Israel for His people, so the Devil went after it too. At the time of Abraham, the Canaanites were already living in Israel (Gen. 13:7) but Melchizedek was a godly king. But by the time of Joshua the native Canaanite population had become so wicked and infiltrated by the Nephilim that God commanded to kill everyone that breathed (Deut. 20:16-17; Josh. 10:40; 11:11, 14).

[For more on the Nephilim and why God commanded that all the people in the Promised Land be killed, see commentary on Gen. 6:4, “Nephilim.”]

**“king of Jerusalem.”** This is the first time in the Bible that “Jerusalem” was called by that name. Although the name “Jerusalem” is said to mean “City of Peace,” (the ancient meaning of the name Jerusalem has been lost in history and today its meaning is debated by scholars), through the millennia, Jerusalem has been anything but a city of peace. There have been long successions of ungodly rulers and war after war in which Jerusalem is involved.

Jos 10:2

**“they were greatly afraid.”** The verb is plural, but the sentence starts with the singular person, Adoni-zedek. This is just one of the many examples in the Bible where a leader is representative of all his people.

Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem, was likely “greatly afraid” of Gibeon’s covenant alliance with Israel because Gibeon sits on a hilltop, or plateau, about 5 miles north of Jerusalem, and is a good staging ground for an attack on Jerusalem. Adoni-zedek knew that a foreign, antagonistic group on his north was dangerous. But his fear, although logical, was misplaced. He feared the humans to his north, but he was not afraid of Yahweh, even though it was Yahweh that did the great miracles that had been behind the great successes of Israel and the defeat of Israel’s enemies ever since the plagues on Egypt. Christ warned us not to fear the wrong party; he said not to fear humans who can only kill the body, but fear God who can destroy one’s life in Gehenna (Matt. 10:28). In Joshua 10:8 God confirms that it is He who gives the victory.

**“the royal cities.”** At this time, the larger city-kingdoms.

Jos 10:3

**“Hebron.”** With the exception of Hebron which is in the hill country of Judah, all the rest of the towns in Joshua 10:3 are in the Shephelah, the lower country toward the Mediterranean Sea.

Jos 10:4

**“Come up to me.”** Jerusalem was higher in elevation than the other kings were, so “come up” is geographically accurate.

Jos 10:6

**“Do not withhold your hand from your servants!”** An idiomatic way of saying, “Do not abandon your servants,” but in this case retaining the idiom in the text seems to be preferable because the meaning is clear in English.

**“save us.”** That is, rescue us; deliver us.

**“that live in the hill country.”** This is a hurried communication and not precisely accurate. Lachish, for example, is not usually considered as being in the hill country, but that would be a minor consideration under these circumstances.

Jos 10:7

**“went up from Gilgal.”** This is geographically correct: from Gilgal in the Arabah (c. 900 feet below sea level) to Gibeon in the hill country of Benjamin (c. 2,400 feet above sea level) was quite an uphill hike.

Jos 10:8

**“And Yahweh said.”** Yahweh encouraged Joshua in the battle. Joshua 10:8 is a great example of how people work together with God. 1 Cor. 3:9 says, “For we are God’s fellow workers.” In most cases, victory takes human effort combined with God’s willingness and power.

Jos 10:9

**“marched up.”** More literally, “having gone up,” but in this case “marched” catches the sense in English (cf. HCSB, ESV, NIV, NJB, RSV). The uphill march is between 15 and 20 miles depending on the route they took, and uphill in elevation some 3,400 feet. This is just one example in the Bible where doing the will of God is not easy. Sometimes Christians teach that if something is the will of God then it will be easy or go smoothly, but this is just one example that shows that is not always the case. Not only did Joshua march uphill all night, then he fought all day; then he stopped the sun from going down and fought even more (Josh. 10:12-13). Like the prophecy of the Messiah in Isa. 50:7, sometimes we have to set our faces like a flint in order to do the will of God. The march uphill from Gilgal at the Jordan River to Gibeon in the hill country would likely take an army in good shape seven to eight hours.

Jos 10:10

**“threw them into a panic.”** Or perhaps, “threw them into confusion.” God often fought for Israel by causing the enemy to panic, be confused, and begin to act in a panicked way such as killing each other or madly running away. This often gave Israel an opportunity to kill them, as we see here in Joshua 10. Yahweh defeated Egypt (Exod. 14:24-25) and the Canaanites (Judg. 4:15) the same way.

**“the ascent of Beth-horon...as far as Azekah and as far as Makkedah.”** The “ascent of Beth-horon” is a well-known road on a ridge that runs from the hill country of Benjamin down into the Shephelah. A person can travel that ridge without having to go down into valleys, making that road an important and well-traveled one. The retreating Amorites ran down the ridge to their towns into the Shephelah. The descent down the road to Beth-horon leads to the Shephelah, and there the road splits, with one road going toward Azekah, and one going toward Makkedah. Thus the text is telling us that the fleeing enemy was in panic and people were trying to get away or get home and as they got down out of the hill country into more level ground they went different ways, so the fighters of Israel would have had to divide up too, and chase them down.

Jos 10:11

**“large stones from heaven.”** Joshua 10:11 goes on to clarify that these were hailstones. God occasionally used weather as a force against His enemies. The hailstones in Revelation 16:21 will be about 100 pounds (45 kilograms) each. The Bible does not give us the size of these hailstones in Joshua. The work of God can certainly be seen in this hailstone attack because Israel was not far behind the Amorites so the hail had to fall only on the enemy and not on Israel. God can be a sniper when He wants to. The fact that Joshua 10:11 first says they were “stones” and only later clarifies that they were hailstones speaks to the hardness of the ice balls—they were as if God was indeed throwing “stones” from heaven.

**“There were more who died from the hailstones than who the children of Israel killed.”** It is a consistent theme in Joshua that God will give Israel the victory if they are obedient to Him. That is true for all believers, although sometimes we have to have an eternal perspective to see that fulfilled because it does not always happen in this life.

Jos 10:12

**“Then Joshua spoke to Yahweh.”** Although the Bible does not say “Joshua prayed to Yahweh,” that is what this is; Joshua prayed to Yahweh. Prayer consists mainly of two things: requests and praise. This is a request to God, it is a prayer. Prayer makes a difference, and the Bible says that God’s people should pray much: “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17).

**“Sun, stand still at Gibeon.”** This is clearly a miracle. The God who placed the sun and moon in the heavens is fighting for Israel. As if the sniper-like hailstones were not enough, these additional cosmic signs are evidence that Yahweh fought for Israel (Josh. 10:14). We should also see in this miracle a defeat of the Canaanite religious system, which included the worship of the sun and the moon. For example, “Jericho” means “moon,” while “Beth-shemesh,” originally a Canaanite town, means “House of the Sun.” Thus the objects that the Canaanites worshiped to elicit their help were actually objects that Yahweh created and controls. So as with Egypt during the plagues, Israel’s conquest of Canaan was not only a victory over the Canaanites themselves, but over their false religious systems as well.

Jos 10:13

**“the book of Jashar.”** This is spelled “book of Jasher” in the King James Version. The word “Jashar” means “upright, straight, correct,” and thus perhaps it should be translated rather than transliterated, and read, “The scroll of the Upright” (“books” as we know them did not exist until after the time of Christ). The “book of Jashar” also occurs in 2 Samuel 1:18.

It is a lost work, but the way it is referred to makes it seem that it was likely some kind of epic poem or record of Israel’s history. The most common belief among scholars is that the real book of Jashar was composed over time. The fact that some events of the time of Joshua were in it, then much later material from the time of 1 Samuel was also in it indicates that it was a compilation of material, some of which corroborated the biblical account, as we see here and in 2 Samuel 1:18. Exactly what it was and what it covered is unknown because the book has been lost. Sadly, the uncertain nature of the book, and the fact that it was lost, has led to a number of attempts to fake and forge a “Book of Jashar” and publish it. One of the last “Book of Jashar” made was a Jewish publication in very good Hebrew that covered the time from Adam to the Judges. But it was written long after the time of Christ and is certainly not the book of Jashar mentioned in the Old Testament. The fact is the real book of Jashar is lost and so we really do not know much about it.

**“in the middle of the sky.”** So Joshua stopped the sun in the middle of the day.

Jos 10:14

**“no day like that before it or after it, when Yahweh listened to the voice of a man.”** This verse is not saying that this was the only time Yahweh ever listened to a person, because God and Jesus listen to our prayers, and those prayers affect what they do (see commentary on John 14:13).

Jos 10:15

**“And Joshua returned.”** Joshua does not return at this time in the battle, but this is a summary statement mirroring Joshua 10:43. This summary is following the statement that Yahweh fought for Israel.

Jos 10:16

**“hid themselves in the cave.”** In part because of the hailstones. The Shephelah has many caves and hollowed-out places, both natural and done by man; caves in the limestone and chalk rock.

Jos 10:19

**“Pursue your enemies and attack them from the rear.”** God did not say, “Attack their rear,” as if the slowest of the enemy was what God was concerned with. Israel was to “attack them,” starting with the first ones of the enemy they could reach; the men in the rear of the retreat. But God was clear that Israel was not to let the enemy get back into their walled cities. For some reason, Joshua himself stayed at Makkedah, but the reason is not clear (cf. Josh. 10:21).

Jos 10:21

**“in peace.”** The Israelite warriors went back to Joshua “in peace” because there was no one left in the open to kill.

**“No one moved his tongue against any of the children of Israel.”** The Hebrew translated “moved his tongue” is literally, “sharpened his tongue.” This same idiom is used in Exodus 11:7 in the context of Israel not feeling the least bit of threat as they were leaving Egypt, and the idiom has the same basic meaning here in Joshua 10:21: God and Israel were moving with such power (and obvious supernatural power) that no one moved against them and Israel felt no threat from the Canaanites at this time. In Exodus 11:7, not even a dog sharpened his tongue, while here no human did.

Jos 10:24

**“Come near, put your feet on the necks of these kings.”** This seems harsh, but war is harsh and definite: someone is going to die, and if Israel’s warriors were not determined enough, it would be them. This was not something that Joshua did regularly, so there had to be a reason to encourage the men and give them a clear idea of what God was doing in their midst as they were determined enough to get the job done. Sadly, Israel was not always determined to get the job done, and as we see in Judges 1, the Israelites did not always have the determination to obey God when it came to the hard work of taking possession of the land (Judg. 1:21, 27-35). That disobedience cost them dearly both in not having a completely Israelite country and in later wars that had to be fought, for example in the time of David.

“**They came near and put their feet.”** The theme in Joshua that Joshua obeyed God is picked up here as the commanders obey Joshua.

Jos 10:26

**“put them to death and hanged them on five trees.”** The hanging on the tree was a public declaration that the person had been cursed by God. As practiced by Israel, being hung on a tree was not torture because the person was already dead. Other cultures hung criminals up for public display (Gen. 40:19). The idea of crucifying a living person likely started with the Assyrians. The Assyrians “hung” people on stakes by impaling them when they were still alive, but generally, they would have died very quickly. The Assyrians portray impaling in their bas-relief sculptures. Impaling was then used by the Babylonians and much more widely by the Persians. Alexander the Great (356-323 BC) brought it to the eastern Mediterranean countries, and the Phoenicians introduced it to Rome in the third century BC. The Romans used crucifixion for torture, execution, and to cause public fear for 500 years until it was abolished by Constantine I in the fourth century AD.

**“five trees.”** The Hebrew word *ets* (#06086 עֵץ) has a couple of meanings and this could be “trees” or it could be five poles or upright stakes. It is similar to the Greek word *xulon* in that it could mean a tree or a stake.

**“sunset.”** Literally, “the going of the sun,” which is sunset. In this, Joshua fulfilled the Law (Deut. 21:22-23). Joshua’s action showed that these kings committed a sin worthy of death (cf. Gen. 15:16).

Jos 10:27

**“*that remain* to this very day.”** The stones were still there when the book of Joshua was written, evidence that it was written fairly close to the time Joshua lived.

Jos 10:28

**“And Joshua took Makkedah.”** Joshua had camped outside it earlier (Josh. 10:21).

**“the mouth of the sword.”** Used to show great destruction, as if the sword was eating its victims (see commentary on Josh. 6:21).

**“devoted to destruction.”** To “devote to destruction all the souls who were in it” was simply to kill the people in the city. The “soul” was the person themselves. They were killed. There was no idea that the “soul” was an immaterial thing that lived on after death; that was introduced into Christianity by the Greeks (sometimes by way of the Jews).

[For more on things “devoted” to Yahweh and devoted to destruction, see commentary on Josh. 6:17. For more on dead people being dead and not living on after death, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on the soul, see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

**“as he had done to the king of Jericho.”** What Joshua did to the king of Jericho is not specifically stated, but that Joshua killed him is implied (cf. Josh. 8:2).

Jos 10:29

**“crossed over from Makkedah to Libnah.”** The Hebrew text uses the same verb for “crossed over” that is used when speaking of Joshua and Israel crossing over the Jordan River into the Promised Land, and it uses that verb a number of times in this section. It seems that the verbs are being used purposely to tell people that the process of “crossing over” into full possession of the inheritance, the land, is still in process.

Jos 10:30

**“He struck it.”** The “He” is purposely ambiguous. The third-person masculine singular could be Yahweh, it could be Joshua as the leader of the army, or it could refer to Israel as a collective fighting group. Actually, all were involved.

**“the mouth of the sword.”** Used to show great destruction, as if the sword was eating its victims (see commentary on Josh. 6:21).

Jos 10:31

**“Libnah to Lachish.”** Lachish and Libnah are only a little more than five miles apart and were both captured by the Assyrians (c. 700 BC) and are mentioned in the Assyrian annals as well as the Bible (cf. 2 Kings 18:17; 19:8).

Jos 10:32

**“He captured it on the second day.”** Lachish was a large and well-fortified city. That Joshua and his army could conquer it on the second day is a testimony of how many of the fighting men of Lachish had been killed in the earlier battles. The Assyrians had a very efficient and powerful army, and they had to take the time to build siege ramps to conquer Lachish.

**“the mouth of the sword.”** Used to show great destruction, as if the sword was eating its victims (see commentary on Josh. 6:21).

**“all the souls.”** That is, all the people. In the Hebrew text, the word “soul” is singular, “all the soul.” This could be understood as “all the life that was in it,” but the context and scope of the conquest are about people; the animals were booty, and so the translation “all the life” could be confusing in English. “All the soul” in this case means all the life that is in all the people.

Jos 10:33

**“Then Horam king of Gezer came up to help.”** The people of Gezer were probably Canaanites (1 Kings 9:16), a more distantly related, different tribe from the Amorites of the hill Country. Gezer sits at a strategic sentinel intersection of main routes from the Mediterranean coast up into the hill country. Horam the king of Gezer tried to help the Amorites because he knew that Israel’s successes were a threat to him.

**“but Joshua struck him and his people.”** There is no record that Joshua and his army went to Gezer to fight it, but Joshua 12:12 says that Joshua did kill the king of Gezer as we see here. It is somewhat of a puzzle that while Joshua struck Gezer’s king and his people, the Israelites did not settle in Gezer until Solomon’s time (1 Kings 9:16). Here, Joshua just kills the men of Gezer who came to help Lachish.

Jos 10:35

**“captured it on that day.”** The reason the sieges of walled cities went so fast now was that the fighting men of the Canaanites had been killed in the earlier battle.

**“the mouth of the sword.”** Used to show great destruction, as if the sword was eating its victims (see commentary on Josh. 6:21).

Jos 10:36

**“went up from Eglon to Hebron.”** Going from Eglon, which was toward the Mediterranean Sea, to Hebron, was uphill; Hebron was in the hill country of Judah.

Jos 10:37

**“They captured it.”** The conquest of Hebron is repeated in the book of Judges, but in more detail. Here in Joshua is the overview history of the conquest of the Promised Land, while in Judges the emphasis is more on how the city was later ruled by judges and leaders (cf. Judg. 1:10-20). Hebron was a very important biblical city. Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Leah are buried there, and it was where David was first acknowledged as king of Israel.

**“the mouth of the sword.”** Used to show great destruction, as if the sword was eating its victims (see commentary on Josh. 6:21).

Jos 10:38

**“turned back to Debir.”** Debir is somewhat west and south of Hebron, so Joshua had to turn back toward the shephelah and seacoast to fight Debir after fighting Hebron. The translations that say Joshua “returned” to Debir are incorrect; Joshua had never been to Debir. “Debir” in Joshua 15:49 is called “Kiriath-sannah,” and “Kiriath-sepher” (Josh. 15:15; Judg. 1:11). The war of Joshua against Debir is also recorded in more detail in Joshua 15:16-17; Judges 1:11-13.

Jos 10:39

**“the mouth of the sword.”** Used to show great destruction, as if the sword was eating its victims (see commentary on Josh. 6:21).

Jos 10:40

**“and the slopes.”** Joshua 10:40 is a brief summary of the areas where the majority of the Canaanites lived and where Joshua conquered. The summary is from the hill country west, and omits the Arabah, but the only major city omitted by that is Jericho. “And the slopes” refers to the area between the “hill country,” which is much more mountainous, down into the Shephelah, which is much flatter but not as flat as the coastal plain.

**“the Shephelah.”** The Shephelah is the area of rolling hills east of Israel’s coastal plain and between the coastal plain and the hill country (see commentary on Josh. 9:1).

**“devoted to destruction all that breathed.”** In obedience to Deuteronomy 20:16 (see commentary on Deut. 20:16 and Gen. 6:4).

Jos 10:41

**“from Kadesh-barnea even as far as Gaza​.”** This is the southernmost reaches of Israel’s conquest in Joshua 10. The southern border of Judah was south of Kadesh-barnea, which is in the deep south of the Negev, and is where Moses and Israel were camped when Moses sent the spies to spy out the Promised Land (Num. 13:1-25; 32:8). Gaza is about 60 miles almost due north of Kadesh-barnea, but is on the Mediterranean Coast of Judah. Kadesh-barnea to Gaza defined the southern extent of Joshua’s conquest. However, Joshua is never said to have conquered Gaza; it is not listed in the cities he conquered in Joshua 12:9-34. It is likely that his army chased men as far as Gaza.

**“Goshen.”** This is not the Goshen in Egypt, but most likely the Goshen of Joshua 15:51, a town in the hill country of Judah. It is possible that it is a site in northern Judah/Benjamin from which a line could be drawn similar to the line drawn “from Kadesh-barnea even as far as Gaza.” In that case, Joshua 10:41 would be drawing two lines delineating the southern and northern borders of the conquest described in Joshua 10. Another suggestion that has been made by scholars is that the “land of Goshen” is the southern slopes toward the Negev south of Hebron, near Debir. A ruin called Khirbet Tatrit has been suggested. If so, “Goshen to Gibeon” would delineate “the Hill Country (of Judah)”

**“Goshen even as far as Gibeon.”** Gibeon was where this battle for the southern part of Israel started (Josh. 10:10).

Jos 10:42

**“one time.”** Meaning, in one military campaign, not on the same day or week. This was a huge campaign that started in Joshua 10. Furthermore, some of these cities were recaptured by the Canaanites. From Joshua 10:43 we learn that the army of Israel returned to Gilgal, and that opened the door for the Canaanites to return to their cities. The army of Israel did not disband and thus begin to settle in the cities they had conquered until the whole land was conquered. Note that in Joshua 10:43 the army returns with Joshua to Gilgal after the battle; it does not split up and occupy the cities that it just conquered.

**“Yahweh the God of Israel fought for Israel.”** Yahweh’s fighting for Israel and thus giving them the land is one of the themes in Joshua.

Jos 10:43

**“returned...to the camp at Gilgal.”** The army returned to Gilgal next to Jericho in the Jordan Valley. At this point in the conquest, the camp of Israel was at Gilgal, and that was where the Israelites who were not part of the army—the women, children, and elderly—stayed while the fighting men went to conquer the land. As we see here, after the battles the men went back to their families.

**Joshua Chapter 11**

Jos 11:1

**“when Jabin king of Hazor heard.”** The emphasis on the sentence is on “heard.” Many people in the book of Joshua “heard,” and how they respond when they hear reveals their heart (cf. Rahab (Josh. 2:10); kings of the Amorites (Josh. 5:1; 9:1); the Gibeonites (Josh. 9:3); Jabin (Josh. 11:1)). Also, when people hear, what do they do? The Gibeonites “sent” to Joshua a delegation to seek peace, while others, such as Jabin here, “sent” to form an army and fight.

**“Jabin.”** A dynastic name held by more than one king. “Jabin” was not a title, but a name held by more than one person in the dynasty. This is similar to “Herod” in the New Testament (“Herod the Great;” “Herod Antipas;” “Herod Agrippa I,” Acts 12, “Herod Agrippa II, Acts 25; etc.). This Jabin is different from the one in Judges 4 and 5.

**“Hazor.”** The largest Canaanite tel in Israel; over 200 acres. That is much bigger than Jerusalem up until at least the Roman period, certainly bigger than Jerusalem in the Old Testament.

**“Jobab king of Madon.”** Besides Jabin, Jobab is the only other king in the northern coalition who is named. Perhaps this indicates he was better known for some reason.

Jos 11:2

**“Arabah.”** The Jordan River Valley. The Arabah is part of the Great Rift Valley that goes from Africa north into Syria.

**“*the Sea of* Chinneroth.”** The “*Sea of* Chinneroth.” is better known as the Sea of Galilee. However, the name is plural here in Joshua 11:2, and so some scholars believe that Chinneroth refers to a town by that name although most scholars do not agree with that. For more on the name, see commentary on Deuteronomy 3:17.

**“Dor in the west.”** The city of Dor is on the Mediterranean coast, on the coastal plain.

Jos 11:3

**“Canaanite...Amorite...Hittite...Perizzite...Jebusite.”** All these tribes except the Perizzites were descendants of Noah’s son Ham via Ham’s son Canaan. Genesis says, “Canaan became the father of Sidon (his firstborn)[thus the Phoenicians], Heth [thus the Hittites], the Jebusite, the Amorite, the Girgashite, the Hivite, the Arkite, the Sinite, the Arvadite, the Zemarite, and the Hamathite” (Gen. 10:15-18).

**“on the east and on the west.”** This refers to Canaanites who lived in the Promised Land, but some toward the east and some toward the west. The Canaanites are described as being in the plains (cf. Num. 13:29; Josh. 5:1; 17:16), and there are plains to the west, the coastal plains or the Mediterranean Sea, and plains to the east that are in the Jordan Valley area.

The picture being painted here in Joshua 11:1-3 is that this is a large coalition, including armies from north to south, and from east to west. It was a unified front of human forces from the various inhabitants of the Promised Land, coming together to stop the Israelites. But the smaller forces of Israel defeated them because Yahweh was fighting for Israel.

**“Perizzite.”** A tribe of unknown origin in that by the time of Joshua lived in the hill country of Judah and Ephraim. See commentary on Joshua 9:1.

Jos 11:4

**“many people even as the sand that is on the seashore.”** To the five senses, this is a very dangerous force, but to Yahweh they are no threat.

**“with very many horses and chariots.”** The enemy had a well-equipped army, but God had told Israel not to accumulate horses (Deut. 17:16), without God’s help, they were not what won the battle (Ps. 33:17). Pharaoh’s chariot force did not bring him victory over Israel either (Exod. 14:17-28). Yahweh’s help brings victory and safety (Ps. 127:1). God commanded Israel to burn the chariots and make the horses ineffective for battle (Josh. 11:6). This would prevent Israel from trusting too much in physical things.

Jos 11:5

**“at the waters of Merom.”** The Canaanites left their cities and went to the area of Merom (the exact location is unknown; in the upper Galilee or in the Hulah Valley), likely to better use their chariot forces against Israel.

Jos 11:6

**“Do not be afraid because of them.”** Fear would be understandable given the size of the alliance against Israel.

**“I will make them all slain ones before Israel​.”** The Israelites had to do the fighting, but the victory was due to God’s work in the situation (cf. Josh. 11:8). The Hebrew text uses the word “give,” and reads more like “I will give them slain before Israel.” God gives the victory, which is why it is so vital for believers to serve and obey God if they want to be truly successful.

**“You are to hamstring their horses.”** God knew that the human tendency of a person with horses and chariots was to trust them rather than Him, so He commanded the horses be hamstrung and the chariots burned (cf. Ps. 20:7).

Jos 11:7

**“came against them suddenly.”** The journey from Gilgal to the waters of Merom is not described, but by the time Yahweh spoke encouragement to Joshua the Israelite army was already in the north. There is no way Joshua could make it from Gilgal to Merom in one day.

**“fell on them.”** Idiomatic for “attack them.”

Jos 11:8

**“And Yahweh gave them into the hand of Israel.”** Ultimately, Yahweh gives the victory. To really understand this, we must remember that the world is a spiritual place, not just a physical one. Satan and his demons are invested in certain results and work behind the scenes to bring those results to pass. The Bible makes the point that “the race is not to the swift, nor is the battle to the strong” (Eccl. 9:11), sometimes by chance but sometimes because of the invisible spiritual forces are at play. When Israel obeyed God, and He could fight for them, He said, “Five of you will chase 100, and 100 of you will chase 10,000; and your enemies will fall before you by the sword” (Lev. 26:8; cf. Deut. 28:7; 32:30). But when Israel disobeyed God, then He could not intervene and things went terribly for Israel: “Yahweh will cause you to be struck before your enemies; you will go out one way against them and will flee seven ways before them” (Deut. 28:25). The earth is a war zone between good and evil, between God and the Devil, and the way humans behave often determines which spiritual side has the upper hand in any given conflict (see commentary on Luke 4:6). We can see the effects of both obedience and disobedience in the wars of Joshua. When Israel obeyed God, miraculous victories, like the victory at Jericho, happened. When Israel disobeyed God, stunning defeats, like the defeat at Ai in Joshua 7 occurred. Although the Bible has many examples of when things did not go well for individuals who obeyed God—Job and Jeremiah are two good examples—generally things go much better when people obey God.

**“as far as great Sidon.”** Sidon was on the border of the tribe of Asher (Josh. 19:29), but the Israelites were never able to conquer and hold the Phoenician coast.

Jos 11:9

**“did to them as Yahweh had said to him.”** Joshua obeyed God. It is certainly likely that there would have been people in the army that thought Israel should have kept the horses and chariots for future wars, and God’s leaders must learn to be strong and resist giving in to people who advise against following the commands of God. God’s commands do not always seem the best from a fleshly point of view, but they always are the best.

Jos 11:10

**“Joshua turned back at that time.”** Joshua’s battles had taken him north of Hazor, now he turns back south and attacks and captures the city.

Jos 11:11

**“every soul.”** This is the use of “soul” as an individual. The Hebrew text uses a collective singular, “all the soul” for “every soul.”

[For more on “soul” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

**“There was not one left who breathed.”** Joshua was obeying the command of Yahweh in Deuteronomy 20:16-17. This is repeated in Joshua 11:14 for emphasis.

**“And he burned Hazor with fire.”** Joshua burned only three cities in the conquest of Canaan; Ai, Jericho, and Hazor (Josh. 6:24; 8:28; 11:11). In this last phrase, the pronoun and verb change from plural to singular. Joshua was in charge and he gave the order (cf. Josh. 11:13).

Jos 11:13

**“the cities that stood on their mounds.”** This refers to the cities that were built on (“stood on”) the ruins, the mounds, of the previous cities. So by Joshua’s time the Canaanites had fought each other and destroyed and rebuilt their cities, building cities on top of the ruins of the city underneath. The reason for building one city on top of another in the same spot was that to be a successful and prosperous city, it needed defensibility, water, and being near a trade route. If a city had those three things, the location was favorable and cities would be built on top of one another. Many of the tels in Israel were well along by the Middle Bronze Age.

**“Israel burned none of them, except Hazor only.”** Jericho, Ai, and Hazor, were the only three cities that Israel burned in the conquest of the Promised Land, but Joshua 11 is about the northern conquest and Hazor was the only northern city that Israel burned so Hazor is the only city mentioned in this context to have been burned. Israel was to live in cities and houses that they did not build (Deut. 6:10-12), so in general, they did not destroy the buildings of the towns they conquered. This challenges archaeologists to be careful in trying to find evidence for the Israelite conquest of Canaan because the burn or destruction layer that is often found when one culture conquers another is often not present in the Israelite conquest of Canaan.

Jos 11:14

**“the mouth of the sword.”** Used to show great destruction, as if the sword was eating its victims (see commentary on Josh. 6:21).

**“They did not leave any who breathed.”** Joshua followed God’s command (cf. Deut. 20:16-17; see commentary on Deut. 20:17).

Jos 11:16

**“all the land of Goshen.”** This is not the “land of Goshen” in Egypt, but is in the hill country of Judah; the exact area being described is not known. The word “Goshen” has no known meaning.

**“the Arabah.**” The Arabah is the rift valley area through which the Jordan River runs.

Jos 11:17

**“Mount Halak.”** This could be a mountain on the south border of the Promised Land, but that is an educated guess. But this is in the south of the Promised Land. To go from Mount Halak to Seir, you have to go down and then back up.

**“even to Baal-gad in the valley of Lebanon under Mount Hermon.”** This is in the far north of the Promised Land. Baal-gad has not yet been conclusively identified, but it must be up in the Baka Valley (of Lebanon). It is mentioned three times (Josh. 11:17; 12:7; 13:5), each time to mark the northwestern boundary of the land of Canaan.

Jos 11:18

**“war a long time.”** The wars of Joshua lasted seven years (Josh. 14:7-10). Besides that, the full conquest was little by little (Exod. 23:29-30; Deut. 7:22). This in part explains how it was that when Joshua conquered a city but then he and his army left the area, Canaanites moved back into the cities. Evidence from the testimony of Caleb shows that the conquest lasted seven years. Caleb was 40 years old when he spied out the Land, spent 38 years in the wilderness (until age 78), and 85 when he was given his inheritance at Hebron. Seven years of being on the march and in war after war is a very long time.

**“a long time.”** The Hebrew is literally “many days.”

Jos 11:19

**“They took all *the cities* in battle.”** The Hebrew simply has, “They took all in battle,” and leaving the object noun out emphasizes the word “all.”

Jos 11:20

**“to harden their hearts.”** God allows people to harden their own hearts, but because God’s action is the cause of it, by the Semitic idiom of permission God is said to do it. God did not actively harden the hearts of the Canaanites any more than He hardened Pharaoh’s heart. God would have been happy to see every Canaanite follow the example of Rahab the prostitute and accept that the God of heaven had given the land to Israel and anyone who wanted to could live under God’s rule in Israel. But the Canaanites refused to acknowledge Yahweh and rebelled against Him, so God’s people were forced to go to war against them to inherit the Promsed Land, which was God’s to give to whomever He wanted.

[For more on the idiom of permission, (see commentary on Exod. 4:21.]

**“that they would have no mercy.”** The Hebrew text is ambiguous and can mean that the Canaanites would receive no mercy, or that Israel would show them no mercy. However, the pronouns favor the primary meaning being that the Canaanites would receive no mercy.

**“as Yahweh commanded Moses.”** Here we see Moses giving the command of Yahweh. Yahweh speaks and acts through His agents.

Jos 11:21

**“Joshua came at that time, and cut off the Anakim from...Hebron.”** This attack is recorded in Judges 1:10.

**“Anakim.”** The Anakim were descendants of Anak, who was one of the Nephilim, as Numbers 13:33 says.

[For more on the Nephilim, see commentary on Gen. 6:4.]

**“all the hill country of Judah and from all the hill country of Israel.”** The division of Israel and Judah could easily come from the fact that Joshua fought his first battles in or close to Judah, and knew he would have to conquer the land given to the rest of Israel after that. It is possible but less likely that a later editor added the distinction for clarity.

**“devoted them to destruction.”** For more on things “devoted” to Yahweh and devoted to destruction, see commentary on Joshua 6:17.

Jos 11:22

**“the Anakim.”** The Anakim were descendants of Anak, who was one of the Nephilim (Num. 13:33), and thus they were related to the Rephaim, the descendants of Rapha (cf. Deut. 2:11. The fact that Nephilim remained in the Philistine area explains why Goliath of Gath was there during David’s time (cf. Josh. 11:22; 2 Sam. 21:16, 18, 20, 22).

[For more on the Nephilim, see commentary on Gen. 6:4.]

Jos 11:23

**“according to all that Yahweh spoke to Moses.”** One of the purposes of the book of Joshua was to show that God kept His covenant promise to the patriarchs to give the land of Canaan to their descendants. God told Abraham that he and his descendants would get the land (Gen. 12:7; 13:15-17; 15:7, 18; 17:8). He told it to Isaac (Gen. 26:3). He told it to Jacob (Gen. 28:13; 35:12; 48:4). He told others as well (see commentary on Gen. 15:18). Not one of God’s promises to Israel failed (Josh. 21:45).

**“Joshua gave it for an inheritance.”** This is a wonderful example of the principle of author-agent as it was used in the Semitic languages. In many places the Bible says Yahweh gave the land to Israel, but here it says Joshua did it. Joshua was God’s agent. (Lev. 25:6; Deut. 1:8; Josh. 1:6, 11, 13; 5:6). In a similar way, Jesus is said to do some things that God is also said to do. Both Joshua and Jesus were agents of God and did His work (cf. John 5:30).

**“And the land had rest from war.”** From God’s perspective, “the land” had rest from war. The phrase, “and the land had rest from war” is also in Joshua 14:15, when Caleb received Hebron in Judah as his inheritance. War does not just disrupt the lives of people, the land and everything on it is hurt by war (cf. Isa. 14:7). Nevertheless, because the enemies of God do not willingly submit to Him, it sometimes occurs that war is necessary to bring about the peace that God wants. Jesus himself will fight and win the Battle of Armageddon (cf. Isa. 63:1-6; Rev. 19:11-21).

**Joshua Chapter 12**

Jos 12:1

**“Now these are the kings of the land whom the children of Israel struck.”** Joshua 12 contains a summary of the conquests of Israel. The description is divided into two parts, the east of Jordan, then the west of Jordan. The repetition of the word “king” over and over is emphatic and suggests the subjugation and removal of human kings and human rule and government when the inheritance is given to Yahweh’s people. The men that humans call kings are removed. Eventually, all over the earth man’s kings and rulers will be removed and Yahweh will give authority to His Son.

**“beyond the Jordan toward the sunrise.”** The phrase “beyond the Jordan” in this context means to the east of the Jordan River; on the east side of the Jordan River. Israel was now west of the Jordan River, in the land promised to Abraham, so “beyond the Jordan” meant east of the Jordan River. The phrase “beyond the Jordan” gets used both to mean the east side of the Jordan and to mean the west side of the Jordan; the reader must determine the perspective of the writer in any given context. Joshua 12:1-6 describes the territory that Israel inherited east of the Jordan River, while Joshua 12:7-24 describes the territory that Israel inherited west of the Jordan River.

Jos 12:2

**“edge of the Arnon *River* valley.”** The city of Aroer is south of Heshbon and on the north side of the Arnon River valley (which often is more of a canyon than what we normally think of as a valley, which is wider and does not necessarily have steep sides).

**“and half of Gilead (as far as to the Jabbok *River* valley).”** This is to the north. So Joshua 12:2 describes Sihon’s territory to the south first, then to the north. The Jabbok River goes eastward from the Jordan River but then swings southward to Rabbah, the ancient capital of the Ammonites.

**“the border of the children of Ammon.”** The Ammonites were descended from Abraham’s nephew Lot, and God gave the territory of the Ammonites to them and did not allow Israel to attack or try to conquer it (Deut. 2:19).

Jos 12:3

**“Sea of Chinneroth.”** The Old Testament name for the Sea of Galilee. The name is plural here in Joshua 12:3. For more on the name, see commentary on Deuteronomy 3:17.

**“sea of the Arabah, even the Salt Sea.”** The Arabah is the rift valley through which the Jordan River runs. The Sea of the Arabah is the Salt Sea, the Dead Sea, but the “Dead Sea” is never called the Dead Sea in the Bible. Rather, it is referred to by a characteristic that was more identifiable at the time, and called the “Salt Sea” or the “Sea of the Arabah.” The surface of the Dead Sea is the lowest place on the face of the earth, about 1300 feet below sea level.

**“Beth-jeshimoth.”** Beth-jeshimoth is below and west of Mount Nebo close to the north part of the Dead Sea.

**“on the south under the slopes of Pisgah.”** Sihon did not rule as far south right at the Dead Sea as he rules further east, on the plateau, where he rules to the Arnon River valley.

Jos 12:4

**“lived.”** The Hebrew is literally “sat,” and it can refer to living in a place or ruling there, sitting on a throne. Here it likely means both.

**“Og king of Bashan, of the remnant of the Rephaim.”** The king of Bashan, Og, was one of the Rephaim, the descendants of Rapha, who was one of Nephilim, the “fallen ones” of Genesis 6:4. The conquest of Og and his kingdom is in Deuteronomy 3.

[For more on the Nephilim, see commentary on Gen. 6:4.]

Jos 12:5

**“Salecah.”** A city quite a distance east of the Jordan.

Jos 12:6

**“Moses the servant of Yahweh.”** This phrase is repeated twice in close proximity to show that the inheritance was from Yahweh and Moses was being obedient to Him.

Jos 12:7

**“These are the kings of the land.”** The book of Joshua now switches its attention from the territory east of the Jordan River to the territory west of the Jordan River, the land promised to Abraham west of the Jordan River. Joshua 12:1-6 described the territory that Israel inherited east of the Jordan River, and now Joshua 12:7-24 describes the territory that Israel inherited west of the Jordan River.

**“Joshua and the children of Israel struck.”** Like Moses was on the east side of the Jordan, Joshua is now Yahweh’s representative, and ultimately it is Yahweh who gives the land to Israel (cf. Num. 14:8, Joshua 1:2, 11, 8:1, etc.). Some of these places were conquered and lived in. Others were just conquered but Joshua’s army moved on and the Israelites were not able to occupy them at the time, and sometimes in those cases the Canaanites moved back into the cities and they had to be conquered again later.

**“westward.”** The Hebrew can also be understood as “toward the (Mediterranean) Sea.”

**“from Baal-gad in the valley of Lebanon even to Mount Halak that goes up to Seir.”** Baal-gad is in the north part of Israel, while Mount Halak is in the far south of Israel (cf. Josh. 11:17).

**“Joshua gave it.”** The “it” is the land, as is clear from the context.

Jos 12:8

**“the Shephelah.”** The Shephelah is the area of rolling hills east of Israel’s coastal plain and between the coastal plain and the hill country (see commentary on Josh. 9:1).

Jos 12:9

**“the king of.”** The repetition of the phrase “the king of” over and over is the figure of speech anaphora (“the same sentence (or phrase) beginnings”) and it emphasizes each individual phrase as well as in this case emphasizing the human kings that Joshua removed, which is a foreshadowing of the work of Christ who will remove all human kings and reign from Zion over the whole earth as Yahweh’s sole king and agent.

[See Word Study: “Anaphora.”]

Jos 12:10

**“king of Jerusalem.”** Jerusalem was not conquered by Israel until the time of David, so it seems that the king of Jerusalem must have come out of the city but been defeated in a battle in the field.

Jos 12:17

**“Tappuah.”** Along with Tirzah in Joshua 12:24, the only other site listed that is in Samaria Hill Country.

Jos 12:19

**“king of Hazor.**” A number of cities in this list were apparently conquered by Joshua, but because the army of Joshua stayed together and traveled together to conquer city after city they had no occupation force to occupy the cities they conquered, and after a while, the Canaanites moved back in. In this case, Hazor was again a Canaanite stronghold in Judges 4-5, and there is no indication that the Canaanites had to reconquer the city from Israel.

Jos 12:23

**“in Gilgal.”** This is not the Gilgal that was Joshua’s camp, but must be another Gilgal.

Jos 12:24

**“Tirzah.”** Along with Tappuah, Tirzah is the only other city in the hill country of Samaria that is listed (cf. Josh. 12:17).

**Joshua Chapter 13**

Jos 13:1

Joshua 13. The main divisions of this chapter: Joshua 13:1-7 is a general description of the land that remained to be possessed by Israel. Joshua 13:8-14 are the general borders of the territory east of Jordan. Also, at the end of the chapter, this section ends by describing that the Levites received no specific territory for an inheritance, only cities and fields around the cities. Joshua 13:15-33 describes the territory that was inherited by tribes of Israel in the Transjordan (the land east of the Jordan River). Joshua 13:15-23 describes the inheritance of the tribe of Reuben: the plateau. Joshua 13:24-28 describes the inheritance of the tribe of Gad, which was south-Gilead and the Jordan plain to the Sea of Galilee. Joshua 13:29-33 describes the inheritance of the half-tribe of Manasseh, which was north-Gilead and Bashan.

**well advanced in years.”** An idiom. The Hebrew is “come in days.” The same phrase occurs in Joshua 23:1. . Joshua died at 110 years old (Josh. 24:29, Judg. 2:8).

Jos 13:2

**“the land that remains.”** This is the land that remains to be conquered. This needs to be clear because some of the territory they did conquer they did not yet occupy, and in the years it was empty the Canaanites resettled it and it had to be reconquered.

**all the regions of the Philistines and all the Geshurites.** The next verses that speak of the land left to conquer are mainly speaking of the coastal areas of Israel, but in this verse, the area of the Philistines and the area of the Geshurites are not close together. The Philistines are on the southern coast of Israel, while Geshur is quite a bit north of the Sea of Galilee. This is the first mention of the Philistines in the book of Joshua. The Philistines descended from Ham via Mizraim, Canaan’s brother.

Jos 13:3

**“the Shihor.”** This is some kind of body of water. It could be a river, or Fox calls it a lagoon. Because here it seems to be a southern border of Israel, some scholars think that Shihor is another name for the Wadi El-arish, the “river of Egypt” (Gen. 15:18; Num. 34:5; Josh. 15:4, 47), and this might be the case. Some scholars think it could be an eastern branch of the Nile. The Shihor is mentioned four times in the Bible (Josh. 13:3; Isa. 23:3; Jer. 2:18 (translated “Nile”); 1 Chron. 13:5), the precise identification is uncertain.

**“which is counted as Canaanite.”** The Philistines were not Canaanites, but the area they moved into was broadly considered Canaanite.

**“the Gittites.”** The inhabitants of Gath were referred to as “Gittites” (cf. Josh. 13:3; 2 Sam. 15:18). The Philistines had five ruling cities, and here in Joshua 13:3 we quite clearly see four of them, Gaze, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron, but the inhabitants of Gath are referred to as “Gittites,” not Gathites.

**“the Avvim.”** Inhabitants of the southern Philistine coastal plain, but a group that was not Philistines themselves. They were the early inhabitants of the south coastal region who were displaced from some of their holdings by the people of Caphtor (Deut. 2:23), but who continued to live south of the Philistines in the time of the conquest (Josh. 13:3).[[16]](#footnote-17435)

Jos 13:4

**“and Mearah that belongs to the Sidonians.”** Sidon is in the north of Israel; Mearah is unlocated, but would be somewhere between Tyre and Sidon.

**“to Aphek.”** The Hebrew word “aphek” means “source, spring,” so there is more than one site called Aphek (cf. 1 Sam. 29:1). This is likely the Aphek up north, just south of Acco. The Amorites did have a northern presence. North of the Amorites at this time could even be the Hittites.

Jos 13:5

**“the land of the Gebalites.”** This territory is on the coast. From here the verse moves to the east.

Jos 13:6

**“even all the Sidonians. I will drive them out from before the children of Israel.”** Israel never really gained any control of this northern land by Tyre and Sidon, and there is no record that they really ever attempted to conquer it.

**“only allot it to Israel for an inheritance.”** When it comes to the remaining land that Israel had not yet conquered, God told Joshua to divide it up and allot it to Israel and that they would have to possess it later.

Jos 13:7

**“divide this land.”** Joshua divided the land by lot, by the Urim and Thummim in the breastplate of the High Priest.

**“to the nine tribes and the half-tribe of Manasseh.”** These are the tribes that settled in the land of Israel west of the Jordan River. The tribes of Reuben and Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh, settled in the Transjordan, east of the Jordan River and the Promised Land.

Jos 13:8

**“the other half of the tribe of Manasseh.”** The Hebrew text simply reads “him,” and the reader is supposed to understand from the context and the history of Israel that the “him” is the half-tribe of Manasseh that opted to stay on the east side of the Jordan River. The REV explains the “him” for clarity.

**“beyond the Jordan toward the sunrise.”** That is, beyond the Jordan and eastward.

Jos 13:9

**“from Aroer.”** This verse is about the tribes east of the Jordan River.

**“all the plateau.”** This is actually a high plain, a plateau. The Hebrew comes from the word for “flat,” and from the context, it refers to a high flat plain; a plateau.

**“Dibon.”** A city just north of the Arnon River gorge. It is where the Mesha Stele was found.

Jos 13:12

**“dispossessed.”** This is the same word as “drive them out” (Josh. 13:6, 13), but here, because Moses struck down the people, it has a slightly different emphasis and thus means he dispossessed them; he took over their land.

Jos 13:13

**“drive out.”** This is more than just “drive out.” God told Israel to kill the Canaanites, not just make them run away, but some of them did run away.

**“Geshur.”** An area in the north of Israel east and southeast of the Sea of Galilee. The land was given to Manasseh, but Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Geshur or Maacath. Centuries later, David married Maacah, a princess of Geshur, and she bore David’s son Absalom (2 Sam. 3:3).

**“Maacath.”** Maacath was to the immediate south of Geshur in the tribal land given to Manasseh. During the reign of David, the king of Maacath sent 1,000 soldiers to help the Ammonites fight against David (2 Sam. 10:6-8; 1 Chron. 19:6-7).

Jos 13:14

**“no inheritance.”** All the other tribes got an inheritance of land, but the Levites got the service of Yahweh and food from His sacrifices and offerings, and they got 48 cities to live in (see commentary on Num. 35:7).

Jos 13:20

**“the slopes of Pisgah.”** The slopes of Pisgah lead westward down to the Dead Sea.

**“Beth-jeshimoth.”** A site down in the Arabah east of the Jordan River.

Jos 13:22

**“the one who practiced divination.”** In Numbers 22-24 Balaam gave some amazing and accurate prophecies. However, he was fixated on personal enrichment and eventually resorted to using divination against Israel, and ended up being killed by the Israelites.

Jos 13:23

**“was the bank of the Jordan.”** The Reubenites got a little piece of the bank of the Jordan River; the rest of their western border was the Dead Sea.

Jos 13:24

**“tribe.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “staff.” The leader of the tribe had a staff, and here that staff is put by metonymy for the tribe itself.

[See Word Study: “Metonymy.”]

Jos 13:25

**“Aroer.”** This is a different Aroer from the one mentioned that is on the southern side of Reuben’s territory (Josh. 12:2; 13:16; Deut. 2:36). Aroer is the name of a plant that grows in the desert, and so a few different arid towns were named “Aroer.”

**“that is before Rabbah.”** From Gad’s perspective, Rabbah is east of Gad’s eastern border. The Israelites were told they could not have the territory of Moab or Ammon. The Ammonites would have normally taken the land west to the Jordan River, but the Amorites kept them to the east.

Jos 13:26

**“Ramath-mizpeh.”** This could be the Mizpeh where Laban and Jacob made their covenant to peace (Gen. 31:49; spelled slightly differently in Genesis but only because of a vowel point that was added later). Ramath-mizpeh means, “the viewing height.” It was a high place on the north bank of the Jabbok River.

Jos 13:27

**“and in the valley.”** This refers to the east side of the Jordan Valley. For some reason, the tribe of Gad had a strip of land that ran from the main portion of their tribal area east of the Jordan River all along the Jordan River Valley all the way north to the Sea of Galilee. In contrast, the half-tribe of Manasseh did not have any land along the Jordan River. There is no explanation given for why the land was divided like this.

**“Beth-haram, Beth-nimrah.”** Beth-haram and Beth-nimrah are some five or a little more miles north of the Dead Sea. This means that the territory Reuben had in the Rift Valley was quite small. Eventually, Gad intermixed and even took over some of the towns originally allotted to Reuben on the Plateau.

**“Sea of Chinneroth.”** This is better known as the Sea of Galilee. The word “Chinnereth” means “harp,” and the Sea of Galilee is shaped like a harp, hence the name. The Sea of Galilee is small, actually, it is a lake, and the entire lake can be seen from the cliffs on both the east and west sides of the lake, so the shape can be easily seen (see commentary on Deut. 3:17).

Jos 13:30

**“from Mahanaim.”** Mahanaim was on the Jabbok River and was the south border of the half-tribe of Manasseh that was on the east side of the Jordan River.

**“all the towns of Jair.”** Jair is the son of Manasseh whose clans inherited the northern towns within the territory of the half-tribe of Manasseh (Num. 32:40-41)

Jos 13:31

**“were for the children of Machir the son of Manasseh.”** The clan of Machir, the son of Manasseh, inherited the towns in the southern part of the inheritance of the half-tribe of Manasseh. Machir was the eldest of Manasseh’s two sons (Gen. 50:23; cf. Num. 32:39-40, Deut. 3:15; Josh. 17:1, 3).

**“even for the half of the children of Machir.”** Some of the descendants of Machir lived on the west side of the Jordan.

Jos 13:32

**“in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan.”** Moses alloted the land east of the Jordan to the Transjordan tribes while he was still alive. The event is not recorded in Scripture, but Moses was in the plains of Moab (Num. 26:3; 31:12; 33:49-50).

**“beyond the Jordan, east of Jericho.”** This tells us that Moses was encamped in the plains of Moab north of the Dead Sea, and east from Jericho.

Jos 13:33

**“to the tribe of Levi Moses gave no inheritance.”** The Levites got towns to live in, but no tribal territory as an inheritance like the other tribes. Furthermore, the towns of the Levites were scattered throughout all the tribal areas of Israel.

**“Yahweh the God of Israel is their inheritance.”** This is a powerful statement, almost as if Yahweh belongs to the Levites instead of the Levites belonging to Yahweh.

**Joshua Chapter 14**

Jos 14:2

**“Their inheritance was by lot.”** The “lot” was the Urim and Thummim that was in the breastplate of the High Priest. So the decision was by Yahweh, and that ended any potential quarrel and subsequent tribal warfare (cf. Prov. 16:3; 18:18).

**“by the hand of Moses.”** An idiom, meaning by the authority of Moses; Moses passed on the decision to divide the land by lot.

Jos 14:3

**“beyond the Jordan.”** That is, on the east side of the Jordan River; the Transjordan.

**“no inheritance.”** All the other tribes got an inheritance of land, but the Levites got the service of Yahweh and food from His sacrifices and offerings, and they got 48 cities to live in (see commentary on Num. 35:7).

Jos 14:5

**“The children of Israel did as Yahweh commanded Moses.”** Finally, the children of Israel did as Moses commanded instead of grumbling and disobeying. This was likely because they were getting something, but at least there is no mention of them fighting over what they received.

Jos 14:6

**“When the children of Judah drew near.”** The chronology of this is unsure; the Israelites were still encamped at Gilgal when this happened.

**“Caleb the son of Jephunneh.”** Caleb was from the tribe of Judah (Num. 13:6; 1 Chron. 4:15).

Jos 14:7

**“sent me from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land.”** Cf. Numbers 13:1-25, especially verse 6.

**“as *it* was in my heart.”** This is idiomatic, and means that the report Caleb gave was his understanding of the situation. The report was fully consistent with the way he felt. It does not mean that it was his heart to report what he saw.

Jos 14:8

**“my brothers.”** Here, “brothers” refers to fellow Israelites, all of whom were descended from Jacob.

**“made the heart of the people melt.”** An idiom for frightened the people.” Some versions say, “made the heart of the people melt with fear,” but the emotions the people felt would not just be fear, but would be a mixture of fear, discouragement, etc. The word “heart” is singular and is a collective noun expressing how the people as a group felt.

**“Yahweh my God.”** Yahweh is Caleb’s God. There is no mention or implication of any God besides the singular and simple Yahweh.

[See Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

Jos 14:9

**“forever.”** The Hebrew can also refer to a long period of time, not necessarily “forever.”

Jos 14:11

**“to go out and to come in.”** The phrase “to go out and to come in” is an idiom and the figure of speech polarmerismos. The figure polarmerismos occurs when two opposite things are juxtaposed such that they refer to a complete whole. For example, the “long and short” of an argument is a way of referring to and summarizing the whole argument, and “to go out and come in” refers to all the daily activities of life. A person gets up in the morning and goes out to do daily work, then comes in at night, so the phrase is an idiomatic way of referring to the totality of living life.

The translation in NICOT catches the sense: “I have the same vigor now as I had then for warfare and for daily duties.”[[17]](#footnote-16670) Solomon used the same basic idiom when he was telling God that he did not know how to live as a king: “I do not know how to go out or come in” (1 Kings 3:7). The figure polarmerismos is used a number of times in the Bible, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament (e.g., Deut. 11:19; 28:6, 19; 31:2; Josh. 14:11; 2 Sam. 3:25; 1 Kings 4:20; 2 Kings 11:8; Lam. 3:63; John 10:9; Acts 9:28).

Jos 14:12

**“So now give me.”** Caleb expected, and asked for, the land that he was due as a reward for his faithful service to God. Caleb sets a wonderful example for believers, who should expect a reward for their faithfulness and good works, and should not be embarrassed about it as if that was somehow greedy or unloving. It is God’s good pleasure to reward those who serve Him (cf. Matt. 5:12; 2 Cor. 5:10; Col. 3:23-24).

**“the Anakim.”** The Anakim were descendants of Anak, who was one of the Nephilim (Num. 13:33), and thus they were related to the Rephaim, the descendants of Rapha (cf. Deut. 2:11. See also 2 Sam. 21:16, 18, 20, 22).

**“It may be that Yahweh will be with me and I will drive them out.”** The book of Joshua says that Hebron had already been conquered. Caleb seems here to be recalling what he and Moses said at the time of the spying out of the land. Caleb and his nephew are described as conquering Hebron in Joshua 15:13-19, but he certainly would have been in the war against Hebron in Joshua 10:36-37. This also explains how it can be that the land had rest (Josh. 11:23 and Josh. 14:15). Most commentators think that Caleb is saying that Hebron has not yet been fully conquered, but that does not seem to be the case, especially in light of Joshua 14:15, which says the land had rest from war. If Caleb still had to conquer Hebron, that verse would not be accurate.

Jos 14:15

**“Kiriath-arba.”** This means, “City of Arba.” Arba was one of the Nephilim. Abraham’s wife Sarah died in Kiriath-arba (Gen. 23:2).

[For more on the Nephilim, see commentary on Gen. 6:4.]

**Joshua Chapter 15**

Jos 15:1

**“lot.”** Although many versions read “allotment,” the Hebrew word is “lot” and the territories were distributed by lot, and the lot was the decision by Yahweh, and the word “lot” makes that clear.

The first allotment to be described in Israel’s inheritance in Canaan, the Promised Land, is of the tribe of Judah. This is the most detailed description of any inheritance given to any of the tribes of Israel, which implies and foreshadows the importance of Judah, from whom the line of David and eventually the Messiah would come. However, the chapter ends on a negative note, that Jebus (Jerusalem) was not possessed by Judah, but this in itself is somewhat strange since Jebus is actually in the tribal territory of Benjamin, not Judah, although admittedly it is on the extreme southern border of Benjamin and thus on the northern border of Judah. Nevertheless, the mention of Jebus and Judah sets up the story of the conquest of Jebus by David.

**“the border of Edom, *which is* the wilderness of Zin.”** So at this time in history, Edom controlled the territory south of the wilderness of Zin in the Sinai Peninsula.

Jos 15:2

**“the Salt Sea.”** This is the Dead Sea.

**“the bay that looks southward.”** This is the south bay of the Dead Sea. The Hebrew is literally, “turns southward,” but that is unclear in English, so English versions do not use it.

Jos 15:3

**“Zin.”** This can be the wilderness of Zin, but more specifically the reference is to the wadi of Zin that runs through the Wilderness of Zin.

**“south of Kadesh-barnea.”** Thus Kadesh-barnea is included in the tribal territory of Judah.

Jos 15:4

**“the brook of Egypt.”** This is the Wadi el-Arish in the Sinai. This wadi drains the middle of the Sinai into the Mediterranean Sea. This same border is described in Numbers 34:1-5.

**“ended at the sea.”** The Mediterranean Sea.

Jos 15:5

**“The east border was the Salt Sea.”** The east border of the tribe of Judah is easy to delineate. Although any ownership of the Dead Sea would have had to have been negotiated with Moab and Edom, there is no indication that was ever a problem since the water was not drinkable or useful for irrigation, nor did it have any fish.

**“The border of the north side.”** Judah’s north border is basically the same as Benjamin’s south border as described in Joshua 18.

Jos 15:6

**“The border went up to Beth-hoglah.”** This border is running west, and the phrase “up to” here refers to the fact that the border is now running west and uphill into the Judean hill country from the Jordan River Valley. Beth-hoglah was a border town, and based on this record may have had Judeans and Benjamites in it, but technically it belonged to Benjamin (Josh. 18:21).

**“Bohan the son of Reuben.”** This only occurs here and in Joshua 18:17. It was apparently well-known at the time of Joshua, but lost in history now.

Jos 15:7

**“the valley of Achor.”** The Valley of Achor (“Achor” means “trouble” or “disaster”) was named because that is where Achan and his family were stoned to death after bringing disaster to Israel in their defeat at Ai (Josh. 7:24-26).

**“the ascent of Adummim.”** This is the ridge that can be walked on the south side of the Wadi Kelt.

**“the south side of the valley.”** This valley is the Wadi Kelt, which runs from the hill country of Judah down toward the Dead Sea.

**“ended at En-rogel.”** This is in the Kidron Valley east of Jerusalem. It is mentioned in 1 Kings 1:9.

Jos 15:8

**“the Valley of the son of Hinnom to the south side of the Jebusite hill (which is Jerusalem).”** The “Valley of the son of Hinnom” is better known as Ge-hinnom, or Gehenna, sometimes poorly translated as “hell.” The Hebrew word “*ge*” means “valley,” and Hinnom was the man’s name who first owned or occupied it. When Hinnom died, his sons inherited the land and the valley became the Valley of the sons of Hinnom.

[For more on the Valley of Hinnom, Gehenna, see commentary on Matt. 5:22.]

**“which is at the north end.”** The Rephaim Valley angles north as it nears Jerusalem. From Jerusalem, it runs south and west toward the Mediterranean Sea, and as it nears the sea it runs westward. This description of the border of Judah fits very accurately with the geography around Jerusalem. The sites are quite close together, giving a very accurate and detailed description of the border of Judah. People doubt the Scriptural record when it comes to history, but no one doubts the Scripture when it comes to geography. But the people who so accurately described the geography would have also accurately described the history. Also, only someone who knew the geography intimately could have written with such accuracy.

Jos 15:9

**“cities of Mount Ephron.”** The biblical Mount Ephron is the modern city of Mevasaret Zion. The word “cities” is accurate, because more than one city is close together on the top of the mountain.

Jos 15:10

**“crossed over.”** There is a deep valley there that needs to be crossed.

**“Chesalon.”** Chesalon is a city on the top of Mount Jearim.

**“went down to Beth-shemesh.”** This is geographically accurate. Beth-shemesh is downhill about 1,000 feet, and to the west, toward the Mediterranean Sea, from Chesalon.

**“and passed along by Timnah.”** These border descriptions really help modern Bible geographers find the ancient sites. The modern Tel Batash has been determined to be the ancient city of Timnah, and this lines up well with this description of it being west of Beth-shemesh.

Jos 15:11

**“shoulder that is north of Ekron.”** The shoulder that is north of Ekron refers to the hills that are on the south side of the Valley of Sorek, which is north of Ekron. These accurate border descriptions help us locate the biblical sites.

Jos 15:12

**“Great Sea.”** The common Old Testament name for the Mediterranean Sea.

Jos 15:13

**“Caleb the son of Jephunneh.”** Caleb was from the tribe of Judah, and he and Joshua were the two spies who remained faithful to God when Moses sent a man from each of the tribes to spy out the Promised Land (Num. 13:1-33; 14:6-9). Yahweh rewarded Caleb with his own city in the Promised Land and did the same for Joshua (Josh. 19:49-50).

**“Kiriath-arba.”** “Kiriath-arba” means “the city of Arba.” Arba was one of the Nephilim, and the father of Anak. The term “Anakites” comes from Anak, the son of Arba. Abraham’s wife Sarah died in Kiriath-arba (Gen. 23:2).

[For more on the Nephilim, see commentary on Gen. 6:4.]

Jos 15:14

**“the three sons of Anak.”** Anak was one of the Nephilim, the “Fallen Ones,” just as Numbers 13:33 says. This event is recounted in Judges 1:10. Also, the three sons of Anak, Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai, are specifically mentioned three times in Scripture (Num. 13:22; Josh. 15:14; Judg. 1:10; see commentary on Judg. 1:10).

[For more on the Nephilim, see commentary on Gen. 6:4.]

Jos 15:15

**“Kiriath-sepher.”** “Kiriath-sepher” means, “city of the book,” and it was likely where many Canaanite records were kept. Joshua 15:15 is almost exactly the same as Judges 1:11.

**“Debir.”** Debir is about 10 miles southeast of Hebron and is just off the road from Hebron to Beer-sheba.

Jos 15:17

**“Othniel the son of Kenaz.”** Othniel was obviously a fierce and competent warrior. Later, Othniel would become the first judge in the book of Judges (cf. Judg. 1:13; 3:9-11).

Jos 15:18

**“It came to pass.”** Joshua 15:18 is worded exactly the same as Judges 1:14.

**“arrived.”** The Hebrew is an idiom: literally, “came to” him. In this context, it might mean, and some scholars think it means, to marry, thus, “came to in marriage,” but this is reading quite a bit into the text (cf. NLT, “when Acsah married Othniel”).

Jos 15:19

**“Negev.”** The Hebrew *negev* can refer to the Negev in Israel, or “south,” or “dry” (arid).

**“pools of water.”** These are not “springs” (the Hebrew word for “spring” is different), but “pools.” They could have come from a very slow seeping spring, or been pools that collected a lot of water during the rainy season.

Jos 15:20

**“This is the inheritance.”** The next verses break down the allotment of Judah into five geographical zones: the Negev, the Shephelah, the coastal plain, the hill country; and the wilderness.

Jos 15:23

**“Hazor.”** Not the town also called Hazor in the north of Israel in the tribal area of Naphtali which has been located and is well-known (cf. Judg. 4:2), but an unlocated town in the tribal area of Judah. “Hazor” means “fortified” or “enclosed,” and because there were a lot of fortified towns there were a lot of potential towns named “Hazor.”

Jos 15:33

**“Shephelah.”** The Shephelah is the geographic area in Israel between the low, flat coastal plain of the Mediterranean Sea and the inner hill country which is hilly and even mountainous. The Shephelah generally has low rolling hills and some flat valleys, and descends westward toward the sea (see commentary on Josh. 9:1).

Jos 15:45

**“daughter-towns.”** The Hebrew text is just “daughters,” referring to small towns that are close to and supported by a “mother” town, which was generally a large and well-fortified town. E. Fox[[18]](#footnote-15525) uses the translation “daughter-towns,” which catches the meaning well and is clear in English. In 2 Samuel 20:19, the city of Abel is referred to as a “mother.” Quite a few verses use the word “daughter” to refer to “daughter-towns” (cf. Josh. 15:47; 17:11, 16; Judg. 11:26; 1 Chron. 2:23; 7:28; 8:12; 2 Chron. 13:19; Ezek. 26:6).

Jos 15:47

**“daughter-towns.”** The text is just “daughters,” referring to small close-by towns that are supported by a “mother” town, a large and normally well-fortified town (see commentary on Josh. 15:45).

**“Great Sea.”** The common Old Testament name for the Mediterranean Sea.

Jos 15:48

**“Socoh.”** This is a different city than Socoh in the Shephelah (Josh. 15:35). The Hebrew word *socoh* means fence or hedge, and many cities might be named that for various reasons.

Jos 15:49

**“Kiriath-sannah (which is Debir).”** Debir was also called Kiriath-sepher (Josh. 15:15).

Jos 15:51

**“Goshen.”** This is not the same Goshen as the Goshen in Egypt. The meaning of the name Goshen is not known, although there is some evidence it might mean “cultivated” or perhaps “inundated.”

Jos 15:56

**“Jezreel.”** This is the “Jezreel” of Judah, not the Jezreel in the Jezreel Valley. This Jezreel is in the hill country, not in the Jezreel Valley. This Jezreel is in south-central Judah, not far from Maon, Ziph, and Carmel (cf. Josh. 15:56; 1 Sam. 25:43; 27:3; 30:5; 2 Sam. 2:2; 3:2).

Jos 15:63

**“the children of Judah could not drive them out.”** The Jebusites lived inside the walled city, while the Judeans lived in the surrounding area. Interestingly, the city of Jerusalem was in the tribal territory of Benjamin, not Judah, but barely so. Jerusalem was on the far southern border of Benjamin. Later in Samuel, David conquered the Jebusite city of Jerusalem for his capital city.

**Joshua Chapter 16**

Jos 16:1

**“The lot came out for the children of Joseph.”** Joshua 16 and 17 describe the inheritance of Joseph, the son of Jacob and Rachel (Gen. 30:22-24) as it is represented by his two sons Ephraim (Josh. 16) and then Manasseh (Josh. 17). Joseph is the firstborn of Jacob through Rachel, his first and beloved wife (although he was tricked out of being with her at first) which may be one reason Joseph received a double portion via Ephraim and Manasseh (cf. Deut. 21:15-17).

When Moses sent spies to search out the Promised Land (Num. 13:1-25), Joshua was the spy from the tribe of Ephraim, and he and Caleb (from Judah) were the two spies who believed that with God’s help Israel could conquer the Promised Land (Num. 14:6-9). As with Judah (Josh. 15:1), there was a “lot” involved in giving the inheritance. So the territory was Yahweh’s decision.

Joshua 1:1-4 describes the southern border of Ephraim. Joshua 1:5-10 describes the other borders, but in general, the descriptions for Ephraim seem more haphazard and are less detailed than the description of the border of Judah. In describing the border of Ephraim, large territories or distances are covered in a short phrase (cf. the northern border of Benjamin; Josh.18:12-14).

**“the waters of Jericho on the east.”** This is almost certainly referring to the spring at Jericho, now called Ein es-Sultan, that was later healed by Elisha (2 Kings 2:19-22).

**“going up from Jericho into the hill country of Bethel.”** This is a fairly nondescript border, covering some 15 miles between points. This border is probably following a wadi, most likely the Wadi Auja.

Jos 16:2

**“from Bethel to Luz.”** This description is somewhat strange because in every other place where Luz is mentioned in the Bible it says that Bethel was formerly called Luz (cf. Bethel is/was Luz; Gen. 28:19; 35:6; 48:3; Judg. 1:23; and even the apocryphal book of Jubilees 27:19, 26). “Luz” means nuts, like walnuts. Another way to understand this might be “Bethel-luz.”

**“the border of the Archites.”** Hushai, David’s trusted counselor was an Archite (2 Sam. 15:32; 16:16; 17:5, 14; 1 Chron. 27:33)

Jos 16:3

**“went down westward.”** This is correct. The border is now described as going down in elevation from the top of the watershed to the Mediterranean Sea.

**“Japhletites.”** This is another smaller tribe or clan on the southern border of Ephraim, which is the northern border of Benjamin.

**“and on to Gezer.”** Again, this description, “from Gezer to the Sea” is fairly vague. Perhaps it more or less followed the Aijalon Valley/Nahal.

That the tribe of Ephraim was given the city of Gezer is geopolitically significant since Gezer controlled the main highway route to Jerusalem and thus access to that important city which would later become the capital of the monarchy under David and Solomon.

**“the sea.”** That is, the Mediterranean Sea.

Jos 16:4

**“inheritance.”** Perhaps more literally, their “hereditary-property” (E. Fox), the property they received by lot as their inheritance.

Jos 16:5

**“the border of their inheritance.”** The author now goes back and very briefly describes the southern border of Ephraim, which borders Benjamin and has already been described in more detail in Joshua 16:1-3 (in the next verse, Josh. 16:6, the northern border is being described; the border with the tribe of Manasseh). Why the author goes back and redescribes the southern border is not known.

Jos 16:6

**“Michmethath.”** Joshua 16:6 can be confusing because the author starts in the middle of the northern border of Ephraim, on the watershed at Michmethath, and goes west then east from Michmethath. He first briefly mentions that the border goes west toward the Mediterranean Sea but does not actually describe that border until Joshua 16:8. He first describes the northern border going east from Michmethath.

Jos 16:7

**“It went down.”** This is the northern border of Ephraim going toward the east, toward the Arabah and Jordan River.

**“to Ataroth.”** This has to be a different Ataroth than on the south of Ephraim (Josh. 16:2, 5; 18:13), which is Ataroth-addar. The word “Ataroth” means “crown,” and there are at least three of them in the Old Testament.

Jos 16:8

**“From Tappuah the border went along westward.”** The author has now gone back up to the north-central border of Ephraim very close to Michmethath and is describing the northern border as it goes to the west. Tappuah (or En-tappuah; the spring of Tappuah) is mentioned as being on the southern border of Manasseh in Joshua 17:7-8. The northern border is easy to follow at some places because it followed the valley of the “brook of Kanah,” which flows toward the Mediterranean Sea.

**“the sea.”** This is the Mediterranean Sea.

Jos 16:9

**“in the midst of the inheritance of the children of Manasseh.”** Some of the border cities seem to be in territories that technically belonged to other tribes (cf. Josh. 17:11 where Manasseh had towns in Issachar and Asher).

Jos 16:10

**“did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer.”** This happened in other cities in Israel as well (cf. Josh. 15:63; Judg. 1:21, 27-36).

**Joshua Chapter 17**

Jos 17:3

**“Noa.”** Although some versions have “Noah,” the Hebrew is very different from the Noah of Noah’s ark fame.

Jos 17:4

**“Yahweh commanded Moses to give us an inheritance.”** This record is in Numbers 26:33; 27:1-7.

**“according to the commandment of Yahweh, he gave them.”** The “he” here in Joshua 17:4 refers to Moses. Moses gave them the inheritance, and Joshua carried out the command of Yahweh by Moses. The Hebrew text reads, “according to the mouth of Yahweh,” where “mouth” is put by the figure of speech metonymy for what comes from the mouth, in this case, the commandment.

[See Word Study: “Metonymy.”]

Jos 17:5

**“Ten.”** If you take the men in Joshua 17:2 (minus Hepher who was the father of Zelophehad), and the five daughters, there are ten children who inherited land.

**“measured-areas.”** The Hebrew refers to a piece of land that could be measured with a rope or cord. E. Fox[[19]](#footnote-20691) uses “measured-areas,” which captures the meaning well.

**“fell.”** The exact way the lot was cast, or pulled from the breastplate of the High Priest, is not known, but the lot was Yahweh’s decision as if it “fell” from Him.

**“beyond the Jordan.”** That is, in this context Joshua is in the Promised Land, so “beyond the Jordan” is east of the Jordan River.

Jos 17:7

**“Michmethath, which is near Shechem.”** Michmethath is about four miles south of Shechem. Michmethath is on the northern border of the tribe of Ephraim (Josh. 16:6).

**“to the south.”** The Hebrew reads, “to the right hand,” but looking east, the “right hand” is to the south.

**“to the inhabitants of En-tappuah.”** The use of this language, “the inhabitants of,” likely indicates that the people there were not from Manasseh, but were from Ephraim (Josh. 17:8).

Jos 17:9

**“brook of Kanah.”** This is a perennial stream, even if at the end of summer the water is only a trickle. The brook of Kanah had very steep sides on both sides and the canyon was hundreds of feet deep in places. The brook runs in a deep canyon and is a clearly definable geographic feature, which is why it makes such a good border, there was no mistaking it. And the canyon runs all the way out to the Mediterranean Sea.

**“belonged to Ephraim among the cities of Manasseh.”** It seems that people from Manasseh leaked over into what was technically Ephraim.

Jos 17:10

**“They reached to Asher on the north.”** “They,” the borders, reached (and touched) the border of the tribe of Asher on the north and the tribe of Issachar on the east.

**“east.”** Actually, Issachar is northeast of Manasseh, but it is “east” from Asher.

Jos 17:11

**“daughter-towns.”** The Hebrew text is just “daughters,” referring to small close-by towns that are supported by a “mother” town, a large and normally well-fortified town (see commentary on Josh. 15:45).

**“the third city is Napheth.”** The town of Dor is also called Napheth-dor (cf. Josh. 11:2; 12:23). Another possibility is that Napheth refers to “three heights,” but that would be very obscure because there does not seem to be heights related to the last three cities in the list.

Jos 17:12

**“Manasseh could not drive out the inhabitants of those cities.”** This is also in Judges 1:27.

Jos 17:13

**“completely dispossess them.”** The Hebrew text uses the figure of speech polyptoton (“many inflections”) for emphasis, using the word “dispossess” twice but in different forms. E. Fox translates the phrase “but dispossess, they could not dispossess them,”[[20]](#footnote-30912) which is quite literal but awkward in English. Often the REV would put the word twice with “yes,” and read, “dispossess, yes, dispossess them” (see commentary on Gen. 2:16), but in this case, the negative “dis” followed by “yes” causes an incongruity and so “completely dispossess them” was the chosen translation.

The fact that the children of Israel did not completely conquer and dispossess the Canaanites shows a failure on their part to trust God and care enough about His agenda and what He wanted for them to carry out His commands completely. Typically human, the Israelites took enough land to comfortably (or mostly comfortably) settle in it and have flocks and farms, and think that was “good enough.” Many believers today act the same way, and ask God to help them until they get comfortable and then that is good enough for them. It does take a lot of effort to fully carry out God’s desires on earth, but for those who will go all the way with God and not stop when they are comfortable, there is great reward.

Jos 17:14

**“Why have you given me just one lot.”** Joseph got only one lot (Josh. 16:1), but it was huge and included territory on both sides of the Jordan River. Furthermore, it was divided into two parts, one for Ephraim (Josh. 16:5-10), and one for Manasseh (Josh. 17:1-13). It was called one lot only to emphasize that “Joseph” was the original child of Jacob, while Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph’s sons, were Jacob’s grandchildren. The huge area given by Yahweh to Ephraim and Manasseh was bigger than many of the other tribal inheritances put together. In fact, if the inheritances of Dan, Benjamin, Asher, Zebulun, Issachar, and Reuben were put together, they would not be quite as big as what “Joseph” got. This puts what the people of Ephraim and Manasseh said to Joshua in perspective. They did not need more land., they needed to trust God and conquer the inheritance God had given them. The complaint of Ephraim and Manasseh is even more grievous when we pay attention to the land areas that they inherited. Almost all of Ephraim was only a day’s travel to Jerusalem, making it easy for the Ephraimites to get to the feasts that were held close to their territory at the time of Joshua and would still be close when David conquered Jerusalem. For its part, Manasseh inherited land both on the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, and the very fertile Jezreel Valley as well. Neither Ephraim nor Manasseh had a reason to complain, and the fact they did highlights the fact that people who are complainers complain, even when there is really nothing to complain about. Negative people are negative, and negative people are not changed by others giving in to them and giving them what they seem to want. They will just continue to complain, but about other things. The believer’s responsibility is to “do all things without grumbling or arguing” (Phil. 2:14) and “be thankful” (Col. 3:15).

It is a valuable lesson to see how Joshua handled the complaining descendants of Joseph. He did not give in to them or acknowledge that they needed more land (another lot). Instead, he told them to clear the mountainous land they had and also to drive the Canaanites out of the good land, the valleys and fertile areas that they lived in. In other words, quit complaining and take what God has given you. Don’t ask for more land when you refuse to obey God and take advantage of what He has given you (Josh. 17:17-18).

Jos 17:15

**“go up to the forest.”** The Promised Land was not a desert, but a well-watered piece of land. However, even by the Roman period, the clearing of the land was quite extensive. It was during the Roman control of Israel that the lions disappeared from Israel because so many of them were used in gladiator games.

**“clear *land*.”** The word “land” is not in the text, the Hebrew is simply “create” or “make,” *bara* (#01254 בָּרָא), so the translation could well be, “make room,” or “make space,” as well as “clear land.” The idea is that the people wanted more room, so Joshua said go and make some in the land you have not taken possession of yet.

**“Perizzite.”** A tribe of unknown origin in that by the time of Joshua lived in the hill country of Judah and Ephraim. See commentary on Joshua 9:1.

**“if the hill country of Ephraim is too narrow.”** The allotment came from God, and Joshua is not going to say it is not good enough, so he uses “if” the hill country.

Jos 17:16

**“the land of the valley.”** In this context, the word “valley” refers to a very flat valley bottom.

**“daughter-towns.”** The Hebrew text is just “daughters,” referring to small close-by towns that are supported by a “mother” town, a large and normally well-fortified town (see commentary on Josh. 15:45).

Jos 17:17

**“You will not have only one lot.”** Joshua is not saying that the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh will have more land, another lot; but rather that if they take the land that they have been given it will be enough for two lots, as indeed the division of the land into the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh showed. Basically what Joshua is saying is, “If you take the land you have and fully possess it, you will not have just one lot.”

Jos 17:18

**“for the hill country can be yours.”** The hill country could give Ephraim and Manasseh more land if they would take it; God had given that land to them as part of their inheritance already. Joshua is not giving the tribe of Ephraim and Manasseh any more land than they had been allotted, but if they clear what they inherited they can possess it to the furthest border. The land, when cleared, “will be yours,” that is, you will be able to live there. The text would have been easier to understand if Joshua 17:17 and 18 had been divided up differently and the last part of 17 was in verse 18.

**“For you can *also* drive out the Canaanites.”** Another way that the tribes could have more land would be to drive out the Canaanites, which they were supposed to do anyway.

**Joshua Chapter 18**

Jos 18:1

**“Shiloh.”** The camp of Israel is now said to be in Shiloh, whereas it was in Gilgal. There is no mention of when or how the move took place.

When Joshua crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land, the Israelites camped temporarily at Gilgal, and the Tabernacle was with them. But later the Tabernacle with the ark of the covenant was set up at Shiloh (Josh. 18:1, 8, 10; 19:51; Judg. 18:31; 21:19; 1 Sam. 1:3, 24; 3:21; 4:4; Jer. 7:12). The Tabernacle stayed at Shiloh for so long that it seems to have been modified somewhat into a more permanent structure and is actually called a “temple” (1 Sam. 1:9; 3:3). The ark of the covenant was taken from the Tabernacle when Israel fought with the Philistines, and it was captured by the Philistines (1 Sam. 4:3-11). That was the last time the Tabernacle and ark were together, because after the ark was returned to the Israelites, David took it to Jerusalem (see commentary on 1 Chron. 16:1). At some point, and for an unstated reason, the Tabernacle (which did not have the ark in it) was taken to Nob (1 Sam. 21:1-9). Two possibilities are that the Israelites may have felt the Tabernacle was not safe at Shiloh due to the Philistines, or it may have been moved after Saul became king, and Nob is much closer to Gibeah of Saul than Shiloh is. However, after King Saul killed the priests at Nob (1 Sam. 22:11-19), the Tabernacle was taken to Gibeon (1 Chron. 16:39). It was there at Gibeon until Solomon finished the Temple in Jerusalem, at which time it was placed in storage in the Temple.

[For more on Shiloh and the Tabernacle, see commentary on Jer. 26:6, “Shiloh.”]

**“the Tent of Meeting.”** The “Tabernacle” (“Dwelling Place”) is also referred to as the “Tent of Meeting” because it was the place where people met with God. The Hebrew phrase is *'ohel mo'ed*, in which *'ohel* (#0168 אֹהֶל) means “tent,” and is followed by *mo'ed* (#04150 מוֹעֵד or מֹעֵד) which means a “meeting” or a “place for a meeting.” Thus the *'ohel mo'ed* is the “Tent of Meeting” (see commentary on Exod. 27:21).

**“since the land was subdued before them.”** There is a subtle parallel here to Genesis 1:28, where God said to be fruitful and multiply and “subdue” the earth. Now Joshua and his army had “subdued” the Promised Land.

Jos 18:5

**“divide it among themselves.”** The verb is reflexive, and it indicates a degree of participation and agreement among the representatives from each tribe.

**“Judah is to remain...Joseph is to remain.”** Judah and Joseph had already received their territories at this time, and they were to remain in them and not expect a change of border.

Jos 18:6

**“here.”** In Shiloh where the Tent of Meeting was at the time.

**“cast lots.”** The Hebrew is “throw a lot,” but the singular verb is likely a collective singular. By using the lot, the decision about which tribe got which land area was up to Yahweh (cf. Prov. 16:33).

Jos 18:11

**“fell.”** The lot “fell” between Judah and Joseph.

Jos 18:13

**“Luz (which is Bethel).”** It is important that the border of Benjamin went on the south side of Bethel because Bethel was in Ephraim, just to the north of Benjamin.

**“Lower Beth-horon.”** Lower Beth-horon lies just to the west of Upper Beth-horon and a mountain lies just to the south and between them. This is very easy to see if one is in the land of Israel.

Jos 18:14

**“forming the west side.”** When the border turns south, it forms the west side border of the tribe of Benjamin.

**“near.”** Literally, “upon the face,” which in this context means “near” (cf. NET Bible).

**“and ended at Kiriath-baal.”** The west border of Benjamin ended on the north side of Kiriath-baal, which means “the city of Baal,” which was probably a center of Baal worship.

Jos 18:15

**“The south side.”** That is, the south side of the tribe of Benjamin.

**“went out to the spring.”** The border is now traveling east (a little southeast).

**“spring of the Waters of Nephtoah.”** This spring is just on the outskirts of the modern city of Jerusalem. This description, that the border of Benjamin goes from the Waters of Nephtoah to Kiriath-jearim is exactly the opposite of the description of the north border of Judah, which runs from Nephtoah to Kiriath-jearim (Josh. 15:9)

Jos 18:17

**“Geliloth.”** This is called “Gilgal” in Joshua 15:7.

**“in front of the ascent of Adummim.”** Geliloth/Gilgal is “in front of” the ascent of Adummim. The meaning of the Hebrew is not clear, and thus “in front of” can here mean to the east of or to the south of Gilgal. The location of this Gilgal is uncertain. This could be a different Gilgal than the one where Israel had its camp near Jericho.

**“Bohan the son of Reuben.”** See Joshua 15:6.

Jos 18:18

**“*Beth-*arabah.”** Mentioned in Joshua 15:61 and Joshua 18:22, and called Beth-arabah in both places. Beth-arabah is in Judah, but so much on the border that the city was listed as part of Benjamin (Josh. 18:22).

Jos 18:19

**“Beth-hoglah.”** This is a city in Benjamin (cf. Josh. 18:19), but the border of Judah was close (Josh. 15:6).

**“north bay.”** This refers to the north basin of the Dead Sea.

Jos 18:21

**“Emek-keziz.”** The location of Emek-keziz is unknown, and the name only occurs here.

**Joshua Chapter 19**

Jos 19:5

**“Beth-marcaboth.”** Meaning, “house of chariots.”

“**Hazar-susah.”** Means, a fenced area for horses.

Jos 19:9

**“in the midst of Judah’s inheritance.”** The Hebrew is “in the midst of their inheritance,” but in English, it then reads like Simeon had an inheritance inside their own inheritance, which is not what the text is saying. Simeon’s inheritance was inside Judah’s inheritance. Over time it seems that Simeon was absorbed into Judah, because at the split of the United Kingdom of Israel into the two smaller countries of Israel and Judah, “Judah” is said to consist only of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, but Simeon would have been in Judah.

Jos 19:10

**“Zebulun.”** Zebulun was the sixth son of Leah (Gen. 30:19-20).

**“Sarid.”** The city of Sarid is in the Valley of Jezreel just below the Nazareth ridge. That makes it the southwest corner of the territory of Zebulun.

Jos 19:11

**“went up westward to Maralah.”** That is, the border went up westward from Zarid (cf. Josh. 19:10).

Jos 19:12

**“Chisloth-tabor.”** This literally means, “the Slopes of Tabor.” This is almost certainly the modern Arabic town of Exaloth, a town just to the south of the Nazareth ridge and west of Mount Tabor.

Jos 19:13

**“Gath-hepher.”** Jonah was from Gath-hepher (2 Kings 14:25). Gath-hepher was just over 4 miles (about 6.5 km) north-northeast from Nazareth, and about 3.5 miles (about 5.5 km) southeast of Sepphoris.

Jos 19:15

**“Bethlehem.”** This is the northern town of Bethlehem, and it is in the tribe of Zebulun.

Jos 19:17

**“Issachar.”** Issachar was the fifth son of Jacob’s wife Leah (Gen. 30:18).

Jos 19:18

**“Jezreel.”** This is the town of Jezreel, in the Valley of Jezreel.

Jos 19:22

**“Tabor.”** That is, Mount Tabor.

**“Beth-shemesh.”** This means, “House of the Sun.” This is not the Beth-shemesh of Judah.

Jos 19:24

**“the children of Asher.”** Asher was the second son of Leah’s slave Zilpah. “Gad” was Zilpah’s first son (Gen. 30:10-13).

Jos 19:25

**“Helkath.”** This city is likely known, close to the Kishon River in the Valley of Jezreel. In this context, Joshua is using Helkath as a city of departure, as he did when speaking of the territories of other tribes. From Helkath, the territory goes west (Josh. 19:26). Also from Helkath it goes eastward (northeastward) (Josh. 19:27).

Jos 19:26

**“On the west.”** This is also the southwest, but it is west of the other cities that had been mentioned.

**“Shihor-libnath.”** This is likely Haifa on the Mediterranean Sea.

Jos 19:27

**“It turned toward the sunrise to Beth-dagon.”** Joshua gets his reference point from Helkat (Josh. 19:25-26. See commentary on Josh. 19:25).

**“the valley of Iphtah-el.”** In Joshua 19:14, “the valley of Iphtah-el” is the north border of Zebulun, and here it is the south border of Asher.

**“on the left.”** Some versions have “north,” and “the left hand” is usually north, but in this case, it seems clear that the border of Asher went north with Cabul on the left.

Jos 19:28

**“great Sidon.”** Also occurred in Joshua 11:8.

Jos 19:30

**“Ummah also, and Aphek and Rehob.”** These are not border cities, but cities included in Asher.

Jos 19:32

**“Naphtali.”** “Naphtali” means “wrestling,” and he was the second son of Bilhah, the slave of Rachel (Gen. 30:7-8).

Jos 19:33

**“the Jordan.”** The Jordan River.

Jos 19:34

**“The border turned westward to Aznoth-tabor.”** It seems clear that Joshua is doing what he has done for other tribal measurements: picking a city as a starting place and going out from there. The city is likely Heleph (Josh. 19:33), and from there he went east to the Jordan, and now he is describing the border in a westerly direction. It seems clear that since the first city is Aznoth-tabor (the “ears of Tabor”), that Heleph is near Mount Tabor, likely slightly east of Mount Tabor because he went west to Aznoth-tabor.

**“as far as Zebulun.”** That is, as far as the tribal territory of Zebulun.

**“and to Judah at the Jordan.”** This is not the tribal area of Judah, but a town called “Judah” on the Upper Jordan (north of the Sea of Galilee). The location is unknown.

Jos 19:35

**“Chinnereth.”** The same name as the Sea of Chinnereth (the Sea of Galilee), but it refers to a city on the northwest side of the sea.[[21]](#footnote-23588) There is archaeological evidence at Chinnereth that dates to the time of Joshua.

Jos 19:37

**“Kedesh.”** This became one of the cities of refuge (Josh. 20:7; Num. 35:9-34; Deut. 19:1-13).

Jos 19:40

**“Dan.”** Dan was the first son of Bilhah, the slave of Jacob’s wife Rachel. Dan was the full brother of Naphtali. (Gen. 30:5-6).

Jos 19:41

**“Ir-shemesh.”** Almost certainly another name of Beth-shemesh.

Jos 19:46

**“Me-jarkon.”** The name means “waters of the Yarkon,” the Yarkon River. This would be a city near the source of the Yarkon River. The Yarkon River flows powerfully from Aphek to the Mediterranean Sea.

Jos 19:47

**“But the territory of the children of Dan was lost to them.”** The real story is given in Judges 1:34. The Danites could not, or would not, defeat the Amorites who lived in the territory assigned to Dan, so the Danites went north and conquered Laish, which they renamed “Dan.” That turned out to be a very poor decision for them because they became the first tribe attacked by every army that came from the north: Syria, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece, and Rome. They were effectively wiped out by the Assyrians around 725 BC, and archaeological surface surveys of the Galilee show very little organized occupation for many years after the Assyrians came through.

The Hebrew text plays with the words to make the action of the children of Dan stand out. The text says that “the territory of the children of Dan ‘went out’ from them,” and also that the “children of Dan ‘went up’ and fought.” The words, “went out” and “went up” have been used to describe the direction of the borders or the tribes, but now Joshua uses them to describe the people of Dan.

**“Leshem.”** Called Laish in Judges 18.

**“the mouth of the sword.”** Used to show great destruction, as if the sword was eating its victims (see commentary on Josh. 6:21).

**“their father.”** Here “father” is used commonly of “ancestor.”

Jos 19:50

**“in the hill country of Ephraim.”** Joshua was from the tribe of Ephraim (Num. 13:8) so the city he received as an inheritance was in the tribal area of Ephraim. Joshua and Caleb were the two faithful spies who searched out the Promised Land when Moses sent out the 12 spies from the wilderness of Paran (Num. 13:3), and each of them got a city as a reward for their faithfulness (cf. Caleb’s city; Josh. 15:13). Joshua is a type of Christ, and the inheritance that he received as the reward for his faithfulness foreshadows the special land-reward that Jesus will get in the Millennial Kingdom for his faithfulness (cf. Ezek. 48:21).

Jos 19:51

**“the Tent of Meeting.”** The “Tabernacle” (“Dwelling Place”) is also referred to as the “Tent of Meeting” because it was the place where people met with God. The Hebrew phrase is *'ohel mo'ed*, in which *'ohel* (#0168 אֹהֶל) means “tent,” and is followed by *mo'ed* (#04150 מוֹעֵד or מֹעֵד) which means a “meeting” or a “place for a meeting.” Thus the *'ohel mo'ed* is the “Tent of Meeting” (see commentary on Exod. 27:21).

**Joshua Chapter 20**

Jos 20:2

**“the cities of refuge.”** “Refuge” has the meaning of “shelter,” and in modern Hebrew, it is used of shelters and bomb shelters. Every one of the cities of refuge is a Levitical city, so the elders of the city (Josh. 20:4) are all Levites.

**“of which I spoke to you by Moses.”** Moses spoke about the cities of refuge (Num. 35:6; 9-34; Deut. 19:1-13). The literal is “by the hand of Moses.” Yahweh spoke to Israel “by (“by way of” or “through”) Moses.”

Jos 20:3

**“strikes down any person.”** More literally “strikes down any soul,” where “soul” is used of the person, and indicates the whole person.

**“unintentionally.”** The translation “unintentionally” means without premeditation. The Hebrew is literally, “without knowledge,” and includes without premeditation, but it would also include doing something that someone died from but you did not even know the person had died. For example, someone walking on a mountaintop might kick a stone that rolls down into a wadi below and hits and kills someone, and the person who loosed the rock might not even know about it.

**“avenger of blood.”** A member of one’s family or clan that would kill anyone who killed someone in the family (see commentary on Num. 35:19). However, there was a procedure. There had to be two witnesses, etc.

The word translated “avenger” is the word for “redeemer.” The “avenger,” the “redeemer,” provides justice.

Jos 20:4

**“gate...elders.”** In the biblical culture of the Old Testament, it was the custom that the elders of a city would sit at the city gate (Gen. 19:1, 9; Deut. 21:19; 22:15; 25:7; Josh. 20:4; Ruth 4:11; 1 Sam. 4:18; Esther 2:19, 21; 3:2; Lam. 5:14; Dan. 2:49).

[For more on the elders at the gate, see commentary on Ruth 4:11; and for Wisdom being at the city gate, see commentary on Prov. 1:21.]

Jos 20:5

**“unintentionally.”** Literally, “without knowledge” (cf. Josh. 20:3).

**“hate him previously.”** A Hebrew idiom: more literally, “yesterday or three,” but the meaning is “previously,” “before,” “in times past.”

Jos 20:7

**“Kiriath-arba.”** This means, “City of Arba.” Arba was one of the Nephilim. Abraham’s wife Sarah died in Kiriath-arba (Gen. 23:2).

[For more on the Nephilim, see commentary on Gen. 6:4.]

Jos 20:8

**“they assigned Bezer.”** The city of Bezer was more or less east of Jericho.

**“Golan.”** “Golan” is the name of a city in the modern Golan Heights, but the ancient name for the area was Bashan.

**Joshua Chapter 21**

Jos 21:2

**“by Moses.”** Literally, “by the hand of Moses.” God commanded by way of telling Moses.

Jos 21:4

**“The lot came out.”** The tribes were assigned areas by “lot,” that is, by the stones—the Urim and Thummim—that were in the breastplate of the High Priest. The High Priest would draw out a stone which would indicate the decision of Yahweh. The exact process, which was well-known at the time and thus was not described in any detail, is not well understood today (cf. Exod. 28:30; Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21; Deut. 33:8; 1 Sam. 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Neh. 7:65). In this case, the “lot,” i.e., the stone, “came out,” that is, came out of the pocket on the front of the breastplate of the High Priest and indicated that the Kohathites were to be the first to be assigned cities in the Promised Land.

[For more on the “lot” and the Urim and Thummim, see commentary on Exod. 28:30.]

Jos 21:8

**“by Moses.”** Literally, “by the hand of Moses.” God commanded Moses that 48 cities were to be given to the Levites (Num. 35:1-8; see commentary on Num. 35:7).

Jos 21:9

**“he called.”** The Hebrew text is a singular active verb, “he called.” It is quite possible, and even likely, here that the “he” is Yahweh, who commanded that cities be given (Josh. 21:8). The parallel in 1 Chronicles 6:65 does read the plural “they,” “they gave,” but here the verb is singular.

Jos 21:10

**“for the descendants of Aaron, of the families of the Kohathites who were of the children of Levi.”** One of Jacob’s 12 sons was Levi, who became the ancestor of the Levites and priests. One of Levi’s sons was Kohath, who fathered Amram, who fathered Aaron (and Moses), and Aaron became the first High Priest and all his descendants were the priests of Israel.

**“theirs was the first lot.”** The priests got the first lot because of their elevated status.

Jos 21:11

**“Kiriath-arba, (*Arba* was the father of Anak), which is Hebron.”** Abraham’s wife Sarah died in Kiriath-arba (Gen. 23:2). “Kiriath-arba” means, “The City of Arba,” and Arba was the father of Anak (cf. Josh. 14:15; 15:13). Arba was one of the Nephilim. “The City of Arba” was renamed “Hebron,” and it and the pasturelands around it were given to some of the priests.

[For more on the Nephilim, see commentary on Gen. 6:4.]

Jos 21:12

**“and its villages.”** The little towns around Hebron. Caleb was given Hebron (Josh. 14:6-13; Judg. 1:10), but when it came up as a Levitical city, Caleb gave it up to the Levites, but still had the smaller towns around Hebron.

Jos 21:18

**“Anathoth.”** The home of Jeremiah, who was a Levite.

Jos 21:25

**“Gath-rimmon.”** The Hebrew of Joshua 21:25 says Gath-rimmon, but Joshua 21:24 also had Gath-rimmon. Some scholars simply say there were two towns named Gath-rimmon, while others take the reading of the Septuagint, “Ibleam,” and say the doubling of Gath-rimmon was a copyist’s error.

Jos 21:27

**“Ashtaroth.”** This town occurs in 1 Chronicles 6:71. This is likely a center of worship of the Ashtaroth. This was also one of the main towns of Og, king of Bashan.

Jos 21:35

**“Dimnah.”** 1 Chronicles 6:77 reads “Rimmon,” which is likely the name here too, but the “D” and “R” in Hebrew got confused.

Jos 21:41

**“48 cities with their surrounding pasturelands.”** This fulfilled the word of Yahweh to Moses, that the Levites (and priests) were to get 48 cities to live in (Num. 35:1-8).

Jos 21:45

**“of all the good things.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “of all the good word,” but it is using “word” as a collective singular to refer to the “things,” “matters” that Yahweh had spoken about.

**Joshua Chapter 22**

Jos 22:3

**“these many days to this day.”** This does not mean the men of the Transjordan tribes never went home to see their families, but they did what it took to help the other tribes of Israel conquer their territory.

**“kept the requirement.”** The literal is more like, “kept the keeping,” or “guarded the guarding,” which is idiomatic for keeping the requirement of the commandment of God.

Jos 22:4

**“beyond the Jordan.”** In this context, Joshua was on the west side of the Jordan River, so “beyond the Jordan” was east of the Jordan.

Jos 22:5

**“to do the commandment.”** Joshua’s command to the tribes in the Transjordan is specific and complete: do the commands, love Yahweh, walk in His ways, keep His commands, hold fast to Him, and serve Him. Sadly, they, like Israel in the Promised Land on the west side of the Jordan, forgot God.

Jos 22:6

**“went to their tents.”** The people of the Transjordan (the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh) had flocks and herds, so although some of them lived in houses, many lived in tents.

Jos 22:7

**“beyond the Jordan, to the west.”** That is, on the west side of the Jordan.

Jos 22:9

**“out of Shiloh.”** The camp of Israel had moved from Gilgal to Shiloh (cf. Josh. 18:1).

**“which is in the land of Canaan.”** The Bible is not embarrassed to say this was the land of Canaan but now God has driven them out and given the land to Israel.

**“to go to the land of Gilead.”** The majority of the tribes in the Transjordan would have gone to Gilead, and the tribe of Reuben might have traveled east to Gilead and then south to their own tribal land.

**“according to the commandment of Yahweh by Moses.”** The Hebrew is very concrete, and is literally, “by the mouth of Yahweh by the hand of Moses.”

Jos 22:10

**“that is in the land of Canaan.”** The altar built by the Reubenites, Gadites, and the eastern half-tribe of Manasseh may have been on the west side of the Jordan River in the tribal area of west Manasseh. However, the vocabulary of Joshua 22:10-11 has so many meanings that the altar could have been on the east side of the Jordan as well as the west side. It is very difficult given the different meanings the Hebrew words can have to determine where the altar was built, and arguments can be made for both sides.

Jos 22:11

**“an altar opposite of the land of Canaan, in the region of the Jordan, across from the children of Israel.”** The scholars are divided, and the translation can differ considerably. If the altar was on the west side, the translation would read that the altar “at the frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region about the Jordan, on the side that belongs to the people of Israel” (Josh. 22:11 ESV).

Jos 22:12

**“at Shiloh.”** Where the Tent of Meeting was (Josh. 18:1).

Jos 22:14

**“Phinehas.”** The Hebrew reads “him,” referring to Phinehas.

Jos 22:16

**“the whole congregation.”** That is, the whole gathering of Israel. It is a covenant word; this is the covenant community.

Jos 22:17

**“Peor.”** In Numbers 25:1-9, the Israelites got involved with the worship of Baal at Peor, and participated in the sexual sin and pagan worship of Baal. The result of that was the death of the head-men of Israel and some 24,000 other Israelites (Num. 25:9). Phinehas himself had to spear two flagrant sinners to death (Num. 25:6-8).

**“which we have not *yet* cleansed ourselves from to this day.”** This is a very startling and important statement. The sin of Peor occurred in Numbers 25, which was toward the end of Israel’s 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, so many of the people who experienced the sin at Peor would still be alive, since the event at Peor was likely only a decade or so earlier than Joshua 22. Phinehas was an astute priest, and sensitive to the people and the spirit of God, and he realized that what happened at Peor was still having an effect in Israel. It seems the attraction of the sex involved with the worship of Baal-peor and the promises made by pagan gods still pulled Israel toward paganism, and surely enough, as we see popping up in Joshua and Judges, pagan worship and worship practices did indeed pull Israel away from Yahweh.

Jos 22:18

**“he will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel.”** People do not realize that when a people group, clan, or nation relies on God for help or says they will follow God, that God holds them to that commitment. Satan wants everyone to forget that people are connected together with God in communities and that if people in the community sin, the whole community can suffer the consequences of that sin. Not paying attention to the fact that a whole community can suffer if a segment of that community sins allows Satan to spread an “each person for themselves” mentality, and also a “You should not care what I do by myself” mentality. But that mentality denies the way that God has created the earth and its inhabitants and can lead to immense suffering. Wise leaders know the problems that sin in the community can cause and work to keep it in check.

Jos 22:20

**“unfaithful, yes, unfaithful.”** The Hebrew has the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis (see commentary on Gen. 2:16).

**“die.”** The Hebrew verb *gava* (#01478 גָּוַע) refers to dying and is fundamentally synonymous with the verb “die,” *muth* (#04191 מָוֹת), although *gava* can imply a violent death (see commentary on Gen. 25:8, “breathed his last”).

Jos 22:22

**“The Mighty One, God, Yahweh; the Mighty One, God, Yahweh.”** This could be translated “Yahweh is God of gods; Yahweh is God of gods.”

Jos 22:23

**“burnt offerings or grain offerings.”** The Hebrew is singular; a collective singular expressed in English as a plural.

**“from *following* after Yahweh.”** People follow Yahweh in the same sense that students follow the Rabbi.

**“let Yahweh himself examine it.”** The Transjordan tribes had nothing to hide and were willing to prove it. If the altar was in rebellion, Yahweh’s wrath would be upon them.

Jos 22:24

“**In the future.”** The literal Hebrew is an idiom, “tomorrow,” meaning, “in the future.”

**“What do you have to do with.”** The literal Hebrew is, “What to you and to Yahweh, the God of Israel.”

Jos 22:25

**“You have no portion.”** That is, no inherited portion of land associated “in” Yahweh. It is almost as if a person had land from Yahweh they had a right to a share of Yahweh.

**“So your children might make our children cease fearing Yahweh.”** Good parents know the value of fearing God and do what they can to make sure their children love and reverence God.

Jos 22:27

**“carry out the service of Yahweh.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “serve the service” (or even, “work the work”) and it refers to worship. The worship of Yahweh was not with hollow words, but with work. The worship of God, as dictated by the Torah, involved the making of sacrifices and offerings, which was a lot of work.

**“in his presence.”** The Hebrew is literally, “before him,” but it means “in his presence,” and God is in the Tent of Meeting which at this time in history was at Shiloh. The people of the Transjordan tribes knew they would have to go to the Tent of Meeting to serve him. The NIV adds specificity to the text and says, “at His sanctuary.”

Jos 22:29

**“Far be it.”** A single word in Hebrew that is an idiomatic expression and therefore difficult to bring exactly into English. Some scholars would go with “God forbid.”

**“before his tabernacle.”** The altar of burnt offering was in front of, to the east of, the Tabernacle.

Jos 22:31

**“Today we know that Yahweh is in the midst of us because you have not committed this unfaithfulness.”** If the Transjordan tribes had committed an act of unfaithfulness against Yahweh, then He would not be in their midst, and the hand of Yahweh would have been against Israel. The leaders of Israel sensed that Yahweh was still present with them.

Jos 22:34

**“A Witness Between Us that Yahweh is God.”** A long name for an altar was not uncommon (cf. Exod. 17:15; Judg. 6:24).

**Joshua Chapter 23**

Jos 23:1

**“well advanced in years.”** The same phrase is used in Joshua 13:1. This is a type of inclusion, that the wars of Joshua were basically over and it was after those wars that Joshua divided up the land.

**“when Yahweh had given rest to Israel.”** The “rest” that Yahweh gave to Israel is a type of the full rest that Jesus will give to his people (cf. Heb. 4:8).

Jos 23:2

**“all Israel.”** “All Israel” was not there, but is represented by the leaders.

Jos 23:4

**“Great Sea.”** The common Old Testament name for the Mediterranean Sea.

Jos 23:5

**“drive them out.”** This has the meaning (as at many other places as well) of dispossessing the native population and living where they had lived.

Jos 23:6

**“the book of the Law.”** This is more good evidence that the Law was written down and not just passed on in oral tradition (cf. Josh. 8:31, 32, 34).

**“the Law of Moses.”** The Hebrew is “the *torah* of Moses,” where “*torah*” is much more than “law.” The *torah* involves instruction in many different ways (see commentary on Prov. 1:8).

Jos 23:7

**“mix with.”** Literally “come into.” In some contexts, “come into” is idiomatic for sexual intercourse, but that may be going too far in this context (cf. Josh. 23:12, which uses the same phrase).

**“nor serve them.”** This refers to the work of worship.

**“bow down.”** The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth. It is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

Jos 23:8

**“as you have done to this day.”** At first, this seems to contradict the fact that the Israelites had foreign gods among them (cf. Josh. 24:14, 23). However, it shows that although there was some worship of foreign gods among the people, they had not wholly deserted Yahweh as later generations of Israelites would. Thus, the situation is likely similar to Christians today who love God but also practice astrology, have “lucky” objects, etc.

Jos 23:9

**“numerous.”** That is, full of people; well populated.

Jos 23:11

**“watch yourselves.”** This could be “watch your souls,” or even guard your souls, where “your soul” means yourself. The text is telling us that it takes a certain amount of diligence to love Yahweh. There are many forces against it: our own sin nature and the pull of the ungodly society around us.

[For more on the biblical use of “soul” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Jos 23:12

**“turn away, yes, turn away.”** The Hebrew uses the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis (see commentary on Gen. 2:16).

**“hold fast.”** In Joshua 22:5 and 23:8, Israel was instructed to “hold fast” to Yahweh.

**“make marriages.”** The verb is accurately translated, and does not mean simply “marry.” In the biblical culture, the father (usually with the advice of the mother and other female family members) arranged for the marriage of his daughters, so he “made marriages” with others. Marriages were usually treated quite seriously because they often involved forming family alliances, and that would be the case here; a marriage alliance between Israel and the pagans near them.

**“mix with.”** Literally, “come into them” (see commentary on Josh. 23:7).

Jos 23:13

**“out from before you.”** That is, out of your presence. This explains why some versions read “out of your sight.”

**“a whip for your sides.”** The image is most likely that of whipping the side of a horse (cf. Prov. 26:3; Nah. 3:2).

**“thorns in your eyes.”** There were so many thornbushes and thistles in Israel that it occasionally happened that someone would get a thorn in their eyes. In Numbers 33:55, the thorn would be in the side, but a “barb” in the eyes (although the Hebrew in Numbers is really a different Hebrew word for “thorn”).

Jos 23:14

**“going the way of all the earth.”** An idiom for dying. But Joshua does not die that day, but later on.

**“not one word has failed of all the good things.”** The Hebrew has “not one word (*dabar*; word, thing, matter) has failed of all the good things (*dabar*: word, thing, matter), that Yahweh” spoke.

Jos 23:16

**“transgress.”** The Hebrew uses the word “cross over” where to cross over the covenant is to go beyond it, to transgress its boundaries.

**“you will perish quickly from off the good land.”** This is also stated in Deuteronomy 11:17.

**“bow down.”** The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth. It is the same Hebrew word as “worship.”

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

**Joshua Chapter 24**

Jos 24:1

**“and they presented themselves before God.”** They seem not to be in front of the Tabernacle, because it was at Shiloh (Josh. 18:1). So they were before God in the sense that they were before the representatives of God, Joshua, and likely the priests.

Jos 24:2

**“served.”** The Hebrew means “to work for, to serve.” The worship of pagan gods (and Yahweh) often required quite heavy work, such as getting water, wood, and sacrifices.

**“other gods.”** The fact that Abraham’s ancestors did not worship Yahweh is at least part of the reason that when God called Abraham to go to the Promised Land, He said, “Get out of your country and from your relatives and from your father’s house *and go* to the land that I will show you” (Gen. 12:1). God did not want Abraham’s family taking their pagan gods with them into the Promised Land, so He told Abraham to leave his family behind.

Jos 24:3

**“from beyond the River.”** That is, from the other side of the Euphrates River.

**“led him throughout all the land of Canaan.”** Indicative that God was going to give “all the land” to Abraham and his descendants.

**“and multiplied his seed.”** Abraham fathered eight children: Ishmael by Hagar the Egyptian, Isaac by Sarah, and six children by Keturah after Sarah died, Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah (Gen. 25:1-2).

Jos 24:4

**“and I gave Mount Seir to Esau.”** Mount Seir is the biblical name for the mountainous area stretching between the south end of the Dead Sea and the north end of the Gulf of Aqabah. It is not all of biblical Edom, but the northwest part of it. It was originally controlled by a Horite name Seir (Gen. 14:6; 36:20), but Esau and his descendants conquered it and took it from the Horites and then lived in the area (Deut. 2:12, 22).

**“but Jacob and his children went down into Egypt.”** It is interesting that God gave Esau the area of Mount Seir, Edom, and Esau became a nation there. But the spiritual battle around the Promised Land was such that although Jacob had been given the land of Israel, the Israelites did not become a nation there, but were made into a nation while they were slaves in Egypt, and came out and traveled and fought as one nation although composed of different tribes.

Jos 24:5

**“and afterward.”** That is, after the plagues.

Jos 24:6

**“with chariots and with horsemen.”** Even after the plagues, the Egyptian military was intact, and then God dealt with them in the Red Sea.

Jos 24:7

**“he put darkness.”** Joshua switches from God in the first person to God in the third person, “he.”

**“between you and the Egyptians.”** Although most of the people with Joshua were dead, some were likely under 20 at the time of the Exodus and thus alive with Joshua, having seen the plagues and the Exodus. Also, the Jewish people tend to see themselves as part of the Exodus.

**“And your eyes saw what I did.”** There are many examples in history of the power of God and the futility of fighting against Him. The wise believer submits to God and obeys Him. Even if it is hard at first due to our sin nature and human stubbornness, in the end, there is true peace in following God. In contrast, the end of standing arrogantly against God is destruction.

Jos 24:8

**“the Amorites that lived beyond the Jordan.”** The phrase “beyond the Jordan” can refer to either east (Deut. 3:8; Josh. 24:8) or west (Deut. 3:20; 11:30) of the Jordan River depending on the context or the location of the speaker. In this case, the Amorites lived on the east side of the Jordan, in the Transjordan (Num. 21:21-35).

**“I gave them into your hand.”** An idiom meaning that God put them under the power (“hand”) of Israel.

**“I destroyed them.”** Israel did the fighting, but the battle was fought with God’s power and God gave the victory.

Jos 24:9

**“Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab.”** The army of Israel traveled around Moab and then conquered the territories north of it; the Amorite kingdoms of Sihon and Og. Then they turned south again and camped just east of the Jordan River and across from Jericho in the plains of Moab (Num. 22:1).

**“arose and fought against Israel: he sent.”** Balak “fought against Israel,” but initially the fighting was in the spiritual world; curses against Israel.

**“called Balaam the son of Beor to curse you.”** This record starts in Numbers 22:1-6.

Jos 24:10

**“blessed, yes, blessed.”** The Hebrew uses the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis.

[For more on polyptoton and its translation, see commentary on Gen. 2:16.]

Jos 24:11

**“leaders of Jericho.”** The Hebrew word translated “leaders” is Baal, which was used of lords, leaders, landowners, and occasionally of free citizens. The men of Jericho fought as well, but the people were represented by the leaders.

**“Amorite, the Perizzite, the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Girgashite, the Hivite and the Jebusite.”** These are the seven nations mentioned in Deuteronomy 7:1 that Israel was commanded to destroy when they got into the Promised Land (see commentary on Deut. 7:1).

Jos 24:12

**“I sent the hornet before you.”** There is no mention of literal physical hornets in the text, but it may represent that God was working to give Israel the lands that were not immediately visible to Israel (Exod. 23:28; Deut. 7:20). Also, the hornet can be a metaphor for fear, and the fear of Israel did go ahead of the Israelites and caused the Canaanites to panic or lose heart.

Jos 24:13

**“cities that you did not build.”** When Israel conquered Canaan they generally did not destroy the cities, but moved into them intact and began living in them (cf. Deut. 6:10-12; Josh. 11:13). Joshua burned only three cities in the conquest of Canaan; Ai, Jericho, and Hazor (Josh. 6:24; 8:28; 11:11).

Jos 24:14

**“beyond the River.”** That is, beyond the Euphrates River, where Abraham came from. It is possible that some of the gods of Mesopotamia were still hanging around the people after hundreds of years, or, more likely, the gods of the Canaanites were the same as some of those Mesopotamian gods.

Jos 24:15

**“if it seems evil.”** In this context, “evil” does not mean morally evil, but “unprofitable,” somehow hurtful. Joshua is saying that if the people see no value in serving Yahweh, then they should choose who they will serve.

**“the gods that were beyond the *Euphrates* River.”** The gods go with the land, and influence what happens in their domain.

Jos 24:16

**“Far be it from us.”** See commentary on Joshua 22:29.

Jos 24:17

**“house of slavery.”** The Hebrew is literally, “house of slaves,” where the genitive points to quality, it was a house of slavery.

Jos 24:18

**“the Amorites.”** The Amorites were prominent enemies.

**“We also will serve Yahweh, for he is our God.”** This is the first of three times that the people of Israel say they will serve God. The Law stated that a matter was settled with two or three witnesses. After they stated it a second time (Josh. 24:21), Joshua says they are witnesses against themselves, which they agree to (Josh. 24:22). Then, in Joshua 24:24 Israel says they will serve God a third time.

Jos 24:19

**“You will not be able to serve Yahweh.”** Joshua is not saying the people cannot serve Yahweh. But Joshua is saying that as things are, and especially as time goes on and years and years go by, the people will have a hard time serving Yahweh. As we know, even as Joshua was telling people to serve Yahweh, he was also having to tell them to get rid of their other gods. Joshua also knew the predictions of Moses, that Israel would turn away from Yahweh (Deut. 29:16-28; 32:4-33). So given the present situation and Moses’ statements about Israel’s future, Joshua understood only too well that Israel would not be able to serve only Yahweh as God unless they had a change of heart toward the pagan gods and made an extreme effort to keep themselves pure in the eyes of Yahweh.

**“He will not forgive your disobedience.”** God forgives sin, but in this context, after the Israelites had ignored God’s holiness and stirred up His jealousy, there would be consequences that could not just be “wished away.” Many times when people sin they can confess their sin and be forgiven on a spiritual level, but the consequences in the physical world still occur. King David is a good example. He confessed his sin to Nathan the prophet who told him his sin was forgiven but the child born of adultery would still die ( 2 Sam. 12:13-14).

Jos 24:21

**“we will serve Yahweh.”** This is the second time Israel says they will serve Yahweh (see commentary on Josh. 24:18).

Jos 24:22

**“You are witnesses.”** The people have now twice said they will serve Yahweh.

**“*We are* witnesses!”** The Hebrew text expresses the emotion and determination of the people, who simply said, “Witnesses!”

Jos 24:23

**“stretch out your heart to God.”** Joshua is using a strong active verb to encourage the people. They must put away their pagan gods, to which they would have certainly been attached for various reasons, and then stretch out their hearts to Yahweh. We often speak of people having to “stretch themselves” when they are doing something unfamiliar or difficult, and that is the case here. The people had not been single-hearted toward Yahweh, and now they must stretch themselves to be that way.

Jos 24:24

**“We will serve Yahweh our God.”** This is the third time that Israel said they would serve God (see commentary on Josh. 24:18).

**“we will listen to his voice.”** In this context, “listen” has what is sometimes called the pregnant sense, and means “obey.”

Jos 24:25

**“set down for them a statute and a judgment.”** Joshua wrote these in the book, as per Joshua 24:26.

Jos 24:26

**“the sacred precinct.”** Although many versions say “sanctuary,” the Hebrew word can refer to a holy place, which Shechem surely was, going back to the time of Abraham. The NIV reads “holy place,” while the TNK reads “sacred precinct.” There is no evidence that the Tabernacle was moved from Shiloh (Josh. 18:1) to Shechem for this event.

**“took a large stone and set it up there.”** There is still a huge stone (although some of it has been broken off) in an ancient cultic site in Shechem, that seems to have ruins associated with it, or near it, that date from this time or earlier. There is no way to tell for sure, but that could well be the very stone that Joshua had set up. This standing-stone that Joshua set up was to be a memorial and a witness of the covenant that he made with Israel concerning the worship of Yahweh.

[For more on standing-stones, see commentary on Gen. 28:18.]

Jos 24:27

**“this stone will be a witness against us.”** The idea that inanimate things that would be around for a long time could be witnesses to an oath was common in the culture and occurs a couple of different times in the Bible (cf. Gen. 31:52; Deut. 30:19). This does not mean the people thought that inanimate objects were alive and could talk, but rather that as part of God’s creation they represented Him.

Jos 24:31

**“had known.”** This is the use of “know” that means more than knowledge, it means to experience.

Jos 24:32

**“in the parcel of ground that Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for 100 qisitah.”** This transaction is recorded in Genesis 33:19. The Septuagint took the qisitah (a unit of money the value of which is no longer known) as the value of a lamb, but there is no way to verify that.

**“and they became.”** This likely refers to the bones of Joseph. Some commentators say that the plural “they” actually refers to the plot of land (singular), but the Hebrew text is plural. The bones of famous people were highly regarded and thought of as important property which is why places such as the burial plot of Abraham is still known to this day. There is no specific textual reason to ignore the plural “they” in the Hebrew text.

Jos 24:33

**“the hill of Phinehas his son.”** The location of this hill is unknown.

1. See W. Schlegel, *Satellite Bible Atlas*, 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-18735)
2. Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT* *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. [↑](#footnote-ref-25027)
3. Keil &amp; Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-30908)
4. Everett Fox, *The Schocken Bible*. [↑](#footnote-ref-18283)
5. Everett Fox, *The Schocken Bible*. [↑](#footnote-ref-17263)
6. C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-18951)
7. *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, s.v. “עוֹלָם.” [↑](#footnote-ref-27799)
8. Koehler and Baumgartner,  *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*. [↑](#footnote-ref-28865)
9. Cf. David Howard, *Joshua* [NAC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-20680)
10. Trent Butler, *Joshua 1-12* [WBC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-31322)
11. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 405, “pleonasm.” [↑](#footnote-ref-13047)
12. Everett Fox, *The Schocken Bible*. [↑](#footnote-ref-23690)
13. Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-25624)
14. William Schlegel, *The Satellite Bible Atlas*, Map 1-10 and 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-29349)
15. Herbert May, *Oxford Bible Atlas*, 49. (The names of the valleys appear in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd editions of the Oxford Bible Atlas, but not in the 4th edition, edited by Adrian Curtis). [↑](#footnote-ref-23973)
16. Cf. Freedman, *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Avvim” [↑](#footnote-ref-17435)
17. Marten Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua* [NICOT], 229. [↑](#footnote-ref-16670)
18. Everett Fox, *The Schocken Bible*. [↑](#footnote-ref-15525)
19. Everett Fox, *The Schocken Bible*. [↑](#footnote-ref-20691)
20. Everett Fox, *The Schocken Bible*. [↑](#footnote-ref-30912)
21. David Howard, *Joshua* [NAC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-23588)