

## Joshua 1-8, 23-24 Podcast Notes

### Joshua - Introduction

The book of Joshua, which derives its title from the name of its chief character, begins after the death of Moses (Deut. ch 34) and continues until the death and burial of Joshua (Josh. 24.29-30). Its narratives recount how Joshua leads the people of Israel across the Jordan River into the land promised to the ancestors, takes possession of that land, divides it among the tribes, and leads them in swearing allegiance to the covenant. Many of these narratives, such as the story of Rahab and the spies and the conquest of Jericho, are well known; others, such as the treaty with the Gibeonites and the land grant to Achsah, are more obscure. Even less familiar are other parts of Joshua: lists of tribal towns and boundaries, and descriptions of rituals.

As the first biblical book following the Torah, Joshua has many features in common with some of those books, especially Deuteronomy. **Some passages are nearly direct quotations of texts from Deuteronomy.** In addition, just as Deuteronomy is cast as a series of hortatory speeches by Moses, Joshua is replete with declamatory speeches-by Joshua, the leaders, Rahab, the people, and even God. As in Deuteronomy, the focus on the covenant is central to Joshua, with obedience to the covenant a prerequisite for God's blessings.

These similarities and the fact that the land promise of Genesis is only fulfilled in Joshua led many scholars in the 19th and early 20th centuries to speak of the Hexateuch, the first six books of the Bible, comprising Genesis through Joshua. Even more widely accepted now is the idea that, because Deuteronomic features are found throughout the Former Prophets (Joshua to 2 Kings), **Joshua in its final form is the result of the compilation of a comprehensive historical work called the Deuteronomistic History**, which begins in Deuteronomy and ends in 2 Kings. Such a work might have initially taken shape in the late 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE, when King Josiah is said to have found a "scroll of the Teaching" and subsequently instituted reforms that reflect Deuteronomic rules and perspectives (see 2 Kings chs 22-23). Because the last events of this "history" take place during the exile, it probably received a final editing in the 6th century BCE. This sequence of redactions may explain some of the duplications and inconsistencies of the book.

Although **the completed book may date to the middle of the first millennium BCE, some of its elements may be much older.** It clearly draws on materials-such as town lists, battle stories, and etiologies-that are similar to ancient historiographic and folkloristic traditions known from other ancient Near Eastern cultures of the second and first millennia BCE. In addition, it contains twelve personal names of non-Israelites (including Rahab, Jabin, and Adonizedek), and these names are attested in Near Eastern documents dating from or before the period of early Israel.

The reputation of Joshua-the leader and the book-usually is based on the belief that the land was entirely conquered by Israelites in the early post-Mosaic period. There are **two problems with this view of the narrative**, however. First, the book's idea of total acquisition of the land

involves carrying out the command to annihilate all the inhabitants of the land (see, e.g., 6.21); **carrying out this *herem*, or "proscription," would have been a project of genocidal proportions.** Second, the intense archeological investigation of virtually all of the places mentioned in Joshua that can be identified with current sites reveals **no pattern of destruction that can be correlated**, in either chronology or location, with the period of early Israel. **The moral horror** of the first problem **may, in fact, be diminished by the historical data** provided by the second. That is, the military and destructive aspects of the so-called conquest are **probably not entirely historical**, but rather are literary-theological constructions to portray the overarching idea of Israelite acquisition of all the land promised to the ancestors. Indeed, most scholars now speak of Israelite settlement in the land, rather than of conquest, especially because archeology has also shown that earliest Israel consisted of scores of new villages-settlements of previously unoccupied territory in the central highlands-rather than rebuilt towns on destroyed Canaanite strongholds. In this understanding, **the *herem* is not historical but rather an ideological expression of the divine ownership of the land being transmitted to the Israelites as the rightful heirs to their inheritance (*nahalah*)** from the Lord. It also emphasizes that the Deuteronomistic authors of Joshua felt that the native population of Canaan posed a serious religious threat, which in theory should be dealt with through annihilation (see also Deut. 7.2; 20.16-18). That the *herem* was not applied to all these Canaanites is also suggested by references in Joshua and Judges that non-Israelites did indeed survive in the land for generations to come.

The structure of the book is straightforward, with an overall division into two parts: The first twelve chapters present the conquest, and the second twelve describe the apportionment of the land. Within each half there are several units. The conquest part contains an elaborate account of crossing the Jordan (chapters 1-5), followed by military narratives (chapters 6-12). The latter focus mainly on the center of the country (chapters 6-9), giving only cursory attention to the south (chapter 10) and the north (half of chapter 11). The apportionment consists of a unit delineating tribal lands (chs 13-21) followed by an epilogue of closing speeches and ceremonies (chapters 22-24).

The religious aspects of the book, aside from the overall concern with following God's teaching, are manifest in several institutions and ceremonies that appear in Joshua. Circumcision and the Passover sacrifice mark the entry to the land and thereby provide didactic value in emphasizing two traditions, introduced in the Torah, that were to become defining practices of Judaism. Similarly, the important role of the Ark of the Covenant along with priests, altars, and sacrifices-**reflects the integral relationship of the sacral and political in ancient Israelite life.** This prominence of the Ark, as the repository of the covenant, foreshadows the centrality of the synagogue Ark (*'aron*), which serves as the repository of the Torah scrolls in later Jewish tradition.

In its frequent usage of Deuteronomistic forms (e.g., speeches), language, and themes, the book of Joshua reveals its didactic intent rather than its interest in accurately depicting the past for its own sake. Furthermore, the telling of Israel's early "history" is not simply to provide a narrative of claim for the land; it also provides a way to make features of the land itself become

signals of the past. For example, the **numerous etiologies (origin accounts), many of them connected with stone heaps presumably visible on the ancient landscape of the later authors,** provide instructional associations for geographic markers. The continuity with Deuteronomy, and with the Torah in general, is most striking in the way Joshua mirrors aspects of Moses' leadership. **Just as Moses led a miraculous crossing of the parted waters of the Reed Sea, so Joshua leads a miraculous crossing of the divided waters of the Jordan.** Both leaders send out spies and apportion the land. The exodus itself is thus replicated, to a certain extent, in the experiences of the Israelites described in Joshua. Perhaps most important, the unity of all Israel, exhorted to act in obedience to the Teaching of the Lord, is emphasized in Joshua as in the Torah. This unity will dissipate in the succeeding biblical books. But it is an ideal, along with the concept of an extensive territorial holding with no foreign enclaves, that dominates the book of Joshua. That Israel falls short of the covenant and territorial ideals is alluded to; but it remains for the rest of the Bible to develop those tensions between the ideal and reality.<sup>1</sup>

### Portrayals of God in Joshua: The Main Problem

The main problem with the portrayal of God as depicted in Joshua, as I (Mike Day) see it, is that God is shown to be a vindictive, murderous, and tyrannical God who demand complete and total obedience of his subjects upon pain of death. The inhabitants of the land of Canaan are to be wiped out,<sup>2</sup> as well as the livestock<sup>3</sup>. Included on this list of people to be killed are also Israelites who disobey their commands from their leaders<sup>4</sup>. Not only are the disobedient to be killed, but their entire families<sup>5</sup> (including innocent children<sup>6</sup>), and even their livestock<sup>7</sup> are also

<sup>1</sup> Carol Meyers, in [The Jewish Study Bible](#), The Jewish Publications Society, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 462-464.

<sup>2</sup> But of the cities of these people, which the Lord thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, **thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth: But thou shalt utterly destroy them**; namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee: **That they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods**; so should ye sin against the Lord your God. When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, **thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them**: for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down (for the tree of the field is man's life) to employ them in the siege... (Deuteronomy 20.16-19). I would add that it is good that at least the trees are to make it out of the war alive! See also Deut. 7.20, 23-24.

<sup>3</sup> Joshua 6.21.

<sup>4</sup> **The rebellious Israelites are to be killed**, for we read that "he that doth rebel against the commandment, and will not hearken unto thy words in all that thou commandest him, he shall be put to death..." Joshua 1.18. See also Joshua 7, where the text relates the story of Achan, an Israelite of the tribe of Judah who kept some of the spoils of the battle (Josh. 7.21).

<sup>5</sup> Joshua 7.24.

<sup>6</sup> Moroni 8.10, 14-16; D&C 68.27. Indeed, Boyd K. Packer, an apostle of Jesus Christ, speaking of the epistle contained in Moroni 8 on the status of children, has written, "**Read his entire epistle. It is true doctrine. It will inspire a reverence for little children.** Thereafter, who could even think to neglect, much less to abuse one of them?" See: Packer, "[Little Children](#)," *Ensign*, Nov. 1986. Accessed 4.01.22.

<sup>7</sup> Joshua 7.24 relates that Achan's "oxen, and his asses, and his sheep" are taken, after which these animals are "burned with fire" (Joshua 7.25). This corporate punishment is right at home in the zeitgeist of the ancient Near East. Joseph Lam addresses the notion of corporate sin in the Hebrew Bible when he writes, "As with the household and its head, so too a connection can exist between the people as a whole and the sin of a leader. For instance, in Leviticus, the sin of a priest is said to have ramifications for the rest of the people: "If it is the anointed

annihilated! It was for this reason that Marcion (85-160 AD)<sup>8</sup> rejected the Old Testament, and worked to develop his own canon, one that threw out the entire Hebrew Bible.<sup>9</sup> As a result, “Orthodox” Christianity was faced with the issue of having to answer Marcion’s claims, and to develop their own canon in response to Marcion’s assertion that his canon represented the truth of Christian teachings.<sup>10</sup>

I would argue that we sometimes need to reject certain portrayals of God that run counter to those in the Book of Mormon or in the New Testament. But we also need to read the text as it is, to work to understand how the writers saw God manifest in their lives, working to see how the Old Testament gains a foothold in the writings and ideas of the authors of the New Testament and in the lives of Book of Mormon prophets that lived long ago. Seeing the Hebrew Bible this way may enable modern readers to see how to interpret these often difficult and sometimes horrifying passages. Marcion saw these passages of the Hebrew Bible and rejected them outright, thus he rejected the entire “Old Testament” as Scripture. Obviously, that is not what I am sponsoring. I have no desire to discard, diminish, or otherwise discredit the Old Testament. But I do want to read it with a different lens, for I believe the Old Testament is a rich resource for spiritual and theological reflection, something that Nephi as a priest and king used in stressing the power of Christ to save his people, and something that the New Testament authors used in their understanding of how Jehovah was “God made flesh” in the life and person of Jesus of Nazareth. Marcion’s decision to abandon the Hebrew Bible was

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priest who sins, resulting in guilt for the people, then he is to bring, for the sin that he committed a bull from the herd, unblemished, to YHWH as a sin-offering (Lev 4:3). Similarly, the sin of a king can potentially have disastrous consequences for the people, as described in the story of David’s census of Israel and Judah (2 Sam 24:1–25). In at least one case—the story of Achan in Joshua 7—even the sin of an ordinary individual of the group can have corporate consequences. The introductory statement of this text presents the episode as a corporate act (“But the Israelites acted unfaithfully with regard to the *herem*... so the anger of YHWH burned against the Israelites,” Josh 7:1), even though the story explicitly identifies the violating act as that of one particular individual, Achan son of Karmi. Upon Joshua eradicating the source of the sin (through identifying Achan and stoning him and his household to death), the divine wrath is appeased.” Lam addresses the complexities of both corporate and individual sin, stressing that “both individual and corporate understandings of sin co-existed in ancient Israel.” Some scholars see this as a development that came through time and experience, with the notion of corporate sin being the earlier version, and that individual punishment and accountability for sin arising out of the beliefs of many Jews who returned to Jerusalem following the exile in the sixth century. Lam, *The concept of sin in the Hebrew Bible*, *Religion Compass*. 2018;12:e12260. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12260> accessed 4.14.2022.

<sup>8</sup> Marcion was an early Christian, a theologian, and an important historical figure in the Christian movement. Marcion saw many of the difficulties in identifying Jesus with the portrayal of God in the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>9</sup> Marcion preached that the benevolent God of the Gospel who sent Jesus Christ into the world as the savior was the true Supreme Being, different and opposed to the malevolent Demiurge or creator god, identified with the Hebrew God of the Old Testament. He considered himself a follower of Paul the Apostle, whom he believed to have been the only true apostle of Jesus Christ. Marcion’s canon, possibly the first Christian canon ever compiled, consisted of **eleven books**: a gospel, which was a shorter version of the **Gospel of Luke**, and **ten Pauline epistles**. **Marcion’s canon rejected the entire Old Testament**, along with all other epistles and gospels of what would become the 27-book New Testament canon, which during his life had yet to be compiled. Pauline epistles enjoy a prominent position in the Marcionite canon, since Paul was considered by Marcion to be Christ’s only true apostle

<sup>10</sup> See: Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities, The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*, Oxford University Press, [chapter 5](#).

extreme, but I see why he did what he did. He did not have the interpretive lens that Nephi and his contemporaries have given us, and for whatever reason, he rejected those other Christians of his day who did see the value of reading the Hebrew Bible in their quest to understand the person of Jesus.

## **Warfare as it is portrayed in the Book of Mormon**

### **When Is War Justified?**

The “war chapters” in Alma cover some basic principles when it comes to war, when Christians are “justified” in entering a war, and the attitudes and motives that Christians should have when engaging in warfare. The main principle that is taught in the “war chapters” could be stated this way: “When you enter a conflict the Lord’s way, you get the Lord’s help.”

### **Principles involving justified warfare**

#### **Attitude**

The Lamanite attitude toward warfare is much different than the Nephite attitude. In Alma 43:7-8 we read that the Lamanites were “stirred up” to have anger towards their enemy.

The Nephites (see Alma 43:13-14) were compelled, obliged, and with (see Alma 48:21) much reluctance did they contend with the Lamanites. We read in Alma 48:21-23 that they were compelled reluctantly, and were sorry to be in conflict with the Lamanites (see also Alma 55:18-19). Righteous leaders of the Nephites did not desire conflict, and they were not quick to arms, rather they had been compelled to fight.

#### **Motives/Reasons**

The Lamanites were seeking power over the Nephites (Alma 43:8), to put them into bondage (Alma 43:8) or under the tribute system, to destroy them (Alma 43:29), to me this seems to be used in the sense of culturally destroying their religious egalitarian system of belief. The Lamanites were power seeking (Alma 44:2), as well as seeking to destroy (Alma 43:10) and sought for revenge (Alma 54:24).

The Nephites sought to preserve their rights, their lands and their liberty (Alma 43:9, 30), and this was their only desire. They fought a war to defend themselves (Alma 43:45-48, 44:5, 46:12) and that which was most dear to them (their wives, children, and their faith). The Nephites fought to protect their liberty and the things they valued most (Alma 46:12, 53:17)

#### **Not guilty of 1st or 2nd strike**

Another general rule in warfare that we get in the war chapters is the idea that we are not to be guilty of the first or the second strike. We see this teaching illustrated in the Doctrine and Covenants (see Alma 43:46; D&C 98:22-44; 134:11). This is a general rule that serves as a test for your heart. The idea is that if someone attacks you and you immediately retaliate, you both deserve each other. By not becoming a “second striker,” you prove your motives, that you are

willing to endure, if only for a time, unjust treatment. I do not believe or maintain that the pacifist approach under all circumstances is the right approach to conflict, and neither does the editor of the accounts of war in the book of Alma. The war chapters in Alma show that defense is not only justifiable, but essential if we are to maintain liberty and protect the innocent.

### **How Do You Fight Justified War? A list of Book of Mormon Examples**

Righteousness more valuable than armaments:

Alma 44:3-4; 46:13, 18, 21-23, 27; 48:7; 50:21-23; Helaman 4:12-16; 12:2.

Must be led by men of God:

Alma 48:11-13; Jarom 1:7.

God prospers us according to our danger:

Alma 48:14-15.

Sometimes they are to submit: Mosiah 20:22; 23:28-29.

Sometimes they did bury their weapons: Alma 24:16-17.

A nation may be saved by the righteous within it:

Alma 10:22-23; Genesis 18:26-32.

For more on this subject, see: [Alma 53-63 The War Chapters – Quotes and Notes](#) from episode 64 of the podcast.

As Seibert has written,

Just because we find some portrayals of God problematic, we should not repeat the mistake of Marcion. **Marcion treated the Old Testament as though it came from one cloth**, so to speak, equally bad and problematic from start to finish. In doing so, he robbed himself of many valuable and unobjectionable insights that can be derived from the pages of the Old Testament. **Moreover, by failing to appreciate the rich diversity of the Old Testament, Marcion lost the opportunity to hear the Old Testament's own critique of certain problematic portrayals of God...** Some of what the Old Testament has to say about God is simply unthinkable for many people today. To imagine that God really is the kind of Being who wishes to see all Canaanites, men, **women and children, exterminated**, just because they happened to be Canaanites and, very understandably, fighting in defense of their own territory, **is shocking. We rightly recognize now that in this the Israelites shared very much the same religious outlook as their contemporaries.** The remarkable fact is that the same Old Testament records a growth in religious understanding on the part of at least some, who did not remain satisfied with such a nationalistic, limited view of God. They began to glimpse that he cared for all people and that he looked for high standards of ethical conduct from his own people as well as others .... **There are then glaring differences of level of religious awareness**

**and insights in the Old Testament**, and the perception of this has enabled us to judge one piece of it by another, the more bloodthirsty parts of the book of Joshua, for example, by the insights of a prophet like Amos or the author of the book of Jonah.<sup>11</sup>

## The Origins of Israel

### 1- Outside Invaders

There is probably no issue more debated by today's biblical scholars than that of Israel's origins... Today the idea of a Canaan-wide conquest is supported by very few scholars. Some nonetheless maintain that part of the future Israel was indeed created out of an ethnic group or groups originally foreign to Canaan—people who entered Canaan from the east or southeast and, through armed conflict or otherwise, ended up settling in the Canaanite highlands and from there extending their influence to other parts of the country.<sup>12</sup> In the meantime, however, other approaches to the question of Israel's emergence in Canaan have been advanced.

### 2- Bedouin Nomads

One theory Kugel suggests, coming from the studies of Alt's observations, is that the Israelites came from the nearby desert wastes of the Levant. He writes, "The Israelites, semi-nomadic grazers, moved in and out of settled Canaan for a long while and then, gradually and at first peacefully, began to settle down themselves, leaving the first traces of their habitation in the sparsely populated mountain highlands. They went there, Alt said, precisely because these areas were underpopulated; they could move in and start farming on their own without ruffling anyone's feathers. Only later did they begin encroaching into the valleys and such urban centers as Shechem. At that point their infiltration may have ceased to be unopposed—after all, signs of conflict and conquest were found at Hazor, Bethel, and elsewhere. But if there was no evidence of a countrywide conquest, and if places like Jericho and most other sites had never been put to the sword, that was because the conquest was basically a later invention: Israel's real origins were in the desert wastes."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Eric Seibert, *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Images in the Old Testament*, Fortress Press, 2009, p. 211-212. This quotation of Seibert is also combined with thoughts from Rex Mason. For his quote, see: Rex Mason, *Propaganda and Subversion in the Old Testament*, London: SPCK, 1997, 6-7.

<sup>12</sup> Frank Moore Cross (1999: 50–70); Ziony Zevit 2001, p. 84–121. Zevit tackles this difficult issue when he says that there "is a broad consensus among liberal students of the Bible and archaeologists that no archaeological data or any data external to the Bible itself confirm the patriarchal or exodus stories as narrated in Genesis and Exodus." Ziony Zevit, "Three Debates about Bible and Archaeology," [Biblica, 2002, Vol. 83, No. 1, p. 11](#). Caution must be taken when making claims based on archaeological evidence, however. As Daniel Peterson has remarked, "We must remember that **only 5 percent of the sites of the biblical world have been excavated**; and most of these sites have only been partially excavated. In any case, must every ancient narrative be corroborated by archaeological discoveries? If we insisted on archaeological corroboration before trusting our literary sources, very little history — biblical or otherwise — could be written." Peterson, ["Biblical 'minimalists' and the historical record," Deseret News, Feb. 16, 2017](#), accessed 4.13.2022.

<sup>13</sup> Kugel, p. 378.

## Canaanite Revolutionaries – The El Amarna Letters<sup>14</sup>

In 1887 a group of clay tablets was discovered a little more than a hundred miles south of Cairo, Egypt, at the site of what had once been the magnificent palace of the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten (otherwise known as Amenhotep IV, ca. 1350–1334 BCE). The tablets eventually made their way to local antiquities dealers and thence to various European museums and private collectors. Scholars soon identified the tablets as letters, most of them written by various Canaanite vassals to Akhenaten or his father, Amenhotep III. Although the Egyptians generally used hieroglyphic writing for their own language, these foreign ministry letters were in Akkadian, the language of international diplomacy; the writing system used was thus cuneiform, the wedge marks sunk into wet clay tablets.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the El Amarna letters to historians looking for the origins of ancient Israel. The letters present a picture of the land of Canaan more or less in the same period in which the Israelites were supposed to be invading it... **The letters paint a detailed picture of the political situation in which their writers lived.** In particular, the vassals frequently complain about a group of marauders—apparently scattered all across the land of Canaan—who raid the Canaanite cities and wreak havoc among the urban population. Interestingly, the letters refer to these marauders by the same name that may have been used of the underlings in Egypt, the *'apiru or abiru*... Out of these letters developed another theory of where Israel came from.<sup>15</sup> The Israelites were neither outside conquerors nor peaceful semi-nomads who gradually infiltrated from the desert. **Instead, they were Canaanite revolutionaries.** Dissatisfied with the Egyptian hegemony that operated in Canaan through a network of puppets and vassals, the *'apiru* and other disgruntled elements eventually overthrew these entrenched powers and took over. The letters frequently mention the danger of people being “joined to the *'apiru*,” suggesting that there was **some sort of grassroots movement** afoot. In one of the passages cited above, the trembling ruler confesses: “Look, I am afraid the peasantry will strike me down.” This too might suggest some sort of popular revolt.<sup>16</sup>

### 3- A Combination of Events

Most scholars today would probably admit (some grudgingly) that we will probably never know exactly where the people of Israel came from or how they got started on their separate existence. There is some merit to all of the theories mentioned, they say, but none of them alone can decisively account for all of the biblical and extrabiblical data. One thing is clear, however: **something must have happened.** The name “Israel” had not always been associated

<sup>14</sup> The Amarna Letters are diplomatic correspondence on cuneiform tablets, most of which were discovered in 1887 at Tel el-Amarna, about 180 miles south of Cairo, Egypt. The Egyptian king Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV, 1352-1336 B.C.) founded Amarna, called Akhetaten anciently, as his new capital city. See: [Mike Day, The Amarna Letters](#).

<sup>15</sup> First advanced by an Albright student, George Mendenhall (1961; see also his 1973). A similar approach, but with a somewhat different coloring, was adopted; Gottwald (1979: esp. 210–19).

<sup>16</sup> Kugel, p. 378-380.



with the region that Israel eventually occupied. The El Amarna letters mention no such name, for example, nor do numerous and detailed earlier documents dealing with the region.<sup>17</sup>

As contemporary scholars have wrestled with earlier theories, as well as with new archaeological data, most of them have come to agree on one point: at least a good part of what was to become the future nation of Israel had probably always been there—or, to put it somewhat sharply, “We have met the Canaanites and they are us.” **There may indeed<sup>18</sup> have been a mini-exodus from Egypt<sup>19</sup>**, and there may likewise have been **a further infiltration** from the east or southeast at some point, but from the standpoint of the overall population, these movements were minor; most of what was to become Israel’s population was most likely there from the start.<sup>20</sup> On this point, scholar Baruch Halpern has emphasized the importance of the conquest of Canaan as a story of Israel’s origins as it is connected to the survivability of national myth. He wrote, “The Exodus, without the conquest, would never have survived as a story.”<sup>21</sup>

### Was Canaan Ever Conquered?

Jericho is only one piece of evidence in the larger puzzle presented by the book of Joshua. What actually did happen when the Israelites crossed the Jordan into the land God had promised them? The book of Joshua says that the Israelites swept across the whole land in a series of three separate campaigns (chapters 6–8, 9–10, and 11). Nothing stood in their way. The various Canaanite “kings” (we would more properly call them mayors or governors, that is, rulers of individual cities and the surrounding countryside) were all mercilessly put to the sword: a list of thirty-one executed kings (identified by place, however, not by name) appears in Josh. 12:9–24. The Israelites overcame all opposition “from Baal-gad in the valley of Lebanon to Mount Halak, that rises toward Seir” (Josh. 12:7), that is, from the far north to the far south. Then they proceeded to divide up the land among different Israelite tribes (chapters 13–21).

This record of conquest cannot, however, be confirmed by archaeologists.<sup>22</sup> Not only Jericho, but other allegedly defeated Canaanite cities turn out to have been either undefended or

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<sup>17</sup> Kugel, p. 381.

<sup>18</sup> Friedman lays out many arguments that an Exodus happened, but that perhaps it did not happen in the exact ways that it is laid out in the Exodus narrative. See: Richard Elliott Friedman, [\*The Exodus: How it Happened and Why it Matters\*](#), Harper One, 2017.

<sup>19</sup> The archaeologist William Dever wrote, “Some of Israel’s ancestors probably did come out of Egyptian slavery, but there was no military conquest of Canaan.” See: Dever, “The Western Cultural Tradition is at Risk,” *Biblical Archaeological Review* 32/2 (March/April 2006): 76; Dever, “Is There Any Archaeological Evidence for the Exodus?,” in Ernest Frerichs and Leonard Lesko, eds., *Exodus: The Egyptian Evidence*, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997, p. 67-68; Fritz, *The Emergence of Israel*, p. 74-76.

<sup>20</sup> Kugel, p. 381-382.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Elliott Friedman, *The Exodus: How it Happened and Why it Matters*, Harper One, 2017, p. 81. See also: Baruch Halpern, “The Exodus from Egypt: Myth or Reality?,” in Hershel Shanks, William Dever, Baruch Halpern, and P. Kyle McCarter, *The Rise of Ancient Israel: Lectures Presented at a Symposium Sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution*, Washington D.C., Biblical Archaeology Society, 1992, Kindle edition location 1761.

<sup>22</sup> On this subject see the recent survey of scholarship in Weippert (1971); W. Dever (1991 and 1995); and A. Naaman (1994), Callaway and Miller (1999). Finklestein and Silberman write, “It is King Josiah who lurks behind the mask of Joshua in declaring that the people of Israel must remain entirely apart from the native population of the

unoccupied sites in the Late Bronze period (including Ai, Jericho's close neighbor—"destroyed" in Joshua 8). Indeed, of more than a dozen sites that archaeologists have identified with the various cities reported conquered by Joshua and the Israelites, only two—Lachish and Hazor—have yielded signs of destruction in the appropriate period.<sup>23</sup> To make matters worse, **what the book of Joshua says does not even seem to match what is said elsewhere in the Bible. If Joshua conquered everything in sight, scholars ask, then why does the next biblical book, Judges, present a picture so contradictory to this claim?** The Canaanites, supposedly annihilated or exiled by the Israelite invasion in Joshua's time, are everywhere in evidence. Indeed, the very first sentence of Judges says: "After the death of Joshua, the Israelites inquired of the LORD, 'Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites to fight against them?'" (Judg. 1:1). This seems to imply that the Canaanites had not been routed by Joshua, as reported in the previous book.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, as modern scholars have examined the book of Joshua, they have determined that, although it presents the picture of a Canaan-wide conquest in general terms, when it comes down to specifics, the incidents reported include only a very small swath of territory. **The great Canaanite city of Shechem, for example, is never mentioned among Joshua's conquests;** wouldn't that be the first place to which a mighty invading army would march?<sup>25</sup> (The area of **Shechem** is mentioned in Josh. 8:30–35, but there is **no indication of any conflict**, indeed, of any enemy presence whatsoever. Shechem then reappears in Judges 9, now somehow the province of a reportedly Israelite ruler named Abimelech. It thus seems to scholars that Shechem's Canaanite population at one point—perhaps then or perhaps much later—simply "became" Israelite without a drop of blood being spilled.) **In fact, the most detailed part of the story of Joshua's conquest (Joshua 5–8) centers on a tiny area—Jericho, Ai, and Gilgal are all within a few miles of one another.** To many scholars it thus seems that **the Deuteronomistic History adopted a few stories connected specifically to the Jericho region and the territory of the tribe of Benjamin, then used them to**

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land. The book of Joshua thus brilliantly highlights the deepest and most pressing of seventh-century concerns." Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts*, Touchstone, 2001, p. 96. Finkelstein and Silberman make the argument that the conquest narrative as portrayed in the book of Joshua is a "deepest wish" expressed and constructed at the time of King Josiah in the 7th century (p. 95).

<sup>23</sup> See Kugel's extensive notes on the archaeological discoveries cited in *How to Read the Bible*, on pages 735-736.

<sup>24</sup> Noted by Wright (1946). Note further 1 Kings 9:20–21, which, reporting on the period of Solomon's rule, mentions "all the people who were left of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, who were not of the people of Israel—their descendants who were still in the land, whom the Israelites were unable to destroy completely—these Solomon conscripted for slave labor, and so they are to this day." See: Kugel, p. 736.

<sup>25</sup> The inhabitants of Shechem were reported to have been killed by Simeon and Levi in revenge for the rape of Dinah (Gen. 34); Jacob likewise speaks of having captured Shechem "with my sword and bow" (Gen. 48:22). One might thus claim that there was no need for Shechem to be captured by Joshua—the city had been destroyed long before. But archaeologists find it difficult to support such a claim, and, even if Shechem had been attacked and briefly subdued in patriarchal times, there is nothing to support the notion that Shechem remained a ghost-town thereafter until the arrival of Joshua—this is in fact quite counter to the archaeological evidence as well as the testimony of the Amarna letters (see below). On the other hand, there was also no conquest of Shechem in the time of Joshua: there is no evidence of destruction there in the Late Bronze age; its temple, defensive walls, and city gate provide evidence of continued, peaceful occupation. L. E. Toombs, "Shechem," in Freedman (1992). See Kugel, p. 736.

**add detail** and, thus, the air of authenticity to its overall picture of a great Assyrian-style conquest of the land.<sup>26</sup>

### Reading the Book of Joshua as a “Condemned Text”

Thom Stark makes the following point with how to read Joshua:

Marcion simply abolished the Hebrew Bible and most of the Christian scriptures from his community’s curriculum. My position is precisely the opposite. We have to learn to read them not as records of God’s actions, but as failed attempts to act on behalf of God. We have to be able to condemn them completely. But that does not mean we are free to simply discard them. They have to stand as failed attempts to speak for God. Discarding them, or trying to take them out of the canon, is tantamount to shattering the mirror. Once properly framed, we need these texts to remind us of the kind of monstrous people we always have the potential to become in the name of some land, some ideology, or some god. To cut them out of the canon would be to hide the worst parts of ourselves from ourselves. It would be to doom ourselves to repeat history. The reality is that they are part of our tradition whether we like it or not. Thus to extricate them from the canon would be a massive dishonesty. **In condemning them, we must own them.** As participants in the Judeo-Christian tradition, we are responsible for these texts, just as the good family takes responsibility for the alcoholic uncle. In order to mitigate the damage these texts can do – the extent of which history has borne out – we must keep these texts close to us. Casual dismissals of the Crusades and of the missionary colonialism as aberrations of the faith fail to take responsibility for the complicity of our scriptures in such moral atrocities. The true modern-day Marcions are those who refuse to take responsibility for the Bible’s role in the violent expansion of Western civilization.<sup>27</sup>

### A *Sod*, or a mystical, temple centered reading of Joshua 1-6

The following is a working paper on the idea that the conquest of Jericho is a temple text in miniature. Perhaps the text is a re-creation story, illustrating the power of Yahweh to make created order out of chaos, with the king ascending unto the “hill of the Lord,” with the ark of the covenant in procession, followed by the priests, as Yahweh takes his rightful place as the king of a newly created space.

In the text we see the following:

1. The Greek rendering of Joshua’s name is Ἰησοῦς, pronounced ee-ay-sooce'. Jesus’ name is spelled in the exact same way in the Greek text of the New Testament. The Greek

<sup>26</sup> James Kugel, [How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now](#), Free Press, 2008, p. 374-375.

<sup>27</sup> Thom Stark, [The Human Faces of God: What Scripture Reveals when it Gets God Wrong \(And Why Inerrancy Tries to Hide It\)](#), WIPF & Stock, 2011, p. 231-232.

name comes from the Hebrew יהוֹשׁוּעַ (pronounced yeh-ho-shoo'-ah), meaning “Yahweh is salvation.”

2. The spies sent into Jericho make an agreement with רַחַב Rahab<sup>28</sup>, giving unto her “kindness,”<sup>29</sup> חֶסֶד or *hesed*, a word used to describe the covenantal mercy of the Lord.
3. **The token was a scarlet cord** that would deliver the lives of those in Rahab’s house.<sup>30</sup> **The connection to the Passover** seems to be direct (Joshua 2.12-21).
4. Twelve men of Israel, bearing the ark of the covenant, cross the Jordan River upon dry ground (Joshua 3.6-17)
5. **Twelve stones are set up** in the midst of the Jordan River (Joshua 4.5-9) as a sign.
6. After the Israelites cross the waters, the Jordan returns to its normal condition and “flowed over all his banks, as they did before” (Joshua 4.18).
7. On the tenth day of the first month, the Israelites set up twelve stones at גִּלְגָּל Gilgal, a place name that means “circle,” or “wheel.”<sup>31</sup> This **crossing of a boundary** (watery chaos) in the shape of a circular pattern, could be a connection to the Song of the Sea and early Christian forms of prayer.<sup>32</sup>
8. The stones are to be a witness of God’s mighty power, used as a reminder to teach the children of future generations (Joshua 4.21-24).
9. Another reference to “a land flowing with milk and honey” is given (Joshua 5.6), and Israel again covenants to follow God (Joshua 5.5,7), and the Israelites eat a meal (Passover – Josh. 5.10-11), their **last miraculous meal** before they come into the land to stay. This is **all related to the temple** – the milk and honey has connection to coming into God’s presence, the ritual eating and covenanting with God have to do with the second room of the temple, or the holy place.
10. It is at this point in the narrative that a man (Hebrew: אִישׁ, Greek: ἄνθρωπον) comes to Joshua. This man has a sword in his hand (Josh 5.13) and is called “the captain of the Lord’s host” and he instructs Joshua to take off his shoes (Josh. 5.15). I see this

<sup>28</sup> Rahab = “wide,” also translated as broad, large, or spacious.

<sup>29</sup> וְעַתָּה הַשְׁבַּע־נָא לִי בְיְהוָה כִּי־עָשִׂיתִי עִמָּכֶם חֶסֶד וְעָשִׂיתֶם גַּם־אִתָּם עַם־בֵּית אָבִי חֶסֶד וְנָתַתֶּם לִי אוֹת אֱמֶת And now, please, take an oath to me by the Lord, since I have shown you **hesed/mercy** with you, that you also will show **hesed/mercy** to my father’s house and give me a **true/faithful sign/token**. Joshua 2.12, my translation.

<sup>30</sup> This is another example of corporate punishment and blessing in the text. In this case, all that are part of Rahab’s house are blessed, while all others in the city are to be put to the ban.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Alter makes the following observation: “Gilgal was an important cultic site in the first two centuries of the monarch and figures significantly in the stories of Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha. As with other sacred places in ancient Israel, it may well have been a locus of pagan worship before it was taken over by the Israelites. There is some likelihood, then, that the stones arrayed in a circle were originally *matseivot*, cultic steles, and that the story is framed to make them integral to the monotheistic narrative.” Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible, volume 2: The Prophets A Translation with Commentary*, W.W. Norton and Company, 2019, p. 19. I would suggest that perhaps this circular stone construction is the original form of how the Israelites perceived their connection to Yahweh. What if the circular arrangement of twelve individuals was a way of representing their idea of how to open the heavens? What if this idea was also perpetuated in early Christianity as well? See: [Hugh Nibley, The Early Christian Prayer Circle, BYU Studies, Vol. 19, Issue 1, 1970](#). Connecting Nibley’s ideas with the idea that the song of the sea was a prayer dance provides provocative material to consider, especially in light of the content of the Acts of John as noted on the second page (p. 42) of his paper.

<sup>32</sup> See Frederick M. Huchel, [The Cosmic Ring-Dance of the Angels, An Early Christian Rite of the Temple](#), Frithurex Press, 2009, 2019.

individual as a **heavenly being**, a representative of Yahweh, from another world, coming to escort Joshua into his status as king of a newly created order.

11. The people surround Jericho (Josh. 6.1-4), with the ark, the sign of God's presence, in silence for six days (Josh. 6.10).
12. On the seventh day the walls come down, and the created order is changed, as the text says that they "put to the ban," or "devoted to destruction" *וְיָרִימוּ* all that was in the city (Josh. 6.21).<sup>33</sup>
13. After the conquest of Jericho, the silver, gold, and brass are brought into the Lord's treasury, and Rahab's house is saved. The connection to this story and the book of Judith is one that should be made: in both stories something outside of holiness is fundamentally changed and brought into holiness: in Joshua it is the items that are devoted to God- the silver and gold, as well as Rahab's family. In Judith it is the *κωνωπίω* (or the glorious veil) surrounding the bed of Holofernes, the enemy of Yahweh. All of these items will be brought into a state of holiness (Judith 10.21 and 12.29).<sup>34</sup>
14. The text of Joshua doesn't say it, but the idea that the king would ritually circumnavigate Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles, with the ark, in song, with the priests and the followers of Yahweh in a holy procession, must not be missed here. Perhaps these first chapters of Joshua are teaching this lesson: **Yahweh is the cosmic king who will eventually conquer death and hell**, bring the created order to its rightful place, end tyranny, and place justice and truth on the throne, in this case, the throne is taken by Jesus, the one true king. **Almost all of the pieces are there**: we have the name of leader *being literally* Jesus, *hesed*, or the mercy of Christ in connection to the **token of the blood of the lamb**, ritual eating and covenanting, a circular pattern of remembrance and possible prayer (of 12 priests), a change in order from chaos to holiness, and the salvation of Rahab. Enough pieces are in place to read Joshua 1-6 in a whole different light, a light that says perhaps there is more to the text than what meets the eye!

### Other arguments/things to consider relating to the conquest

1. Peshat-Remez-Derash-Sod: How you read this text matters! Early Christians took a Remez reading, seeing the conquest as allegorical – cite examples- Origen, for example –

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<sup>33</sup> John Walton has written extensively on this idea of what it means to *hērem*, or put something "to the ban." He identifies putting the things in the land "to the ban" as having these items removed from human use, and not necessarily expressly concerned with killing. By doing this, through *hērem*, the Israelites are devoting these items to God rather than for human use. See: John Walton, [\*The Lost World of the Canaanite Conquest: Covenant, Retribution, and the Fate of the Canaanites\*](#), IVP Academic, 2017.

<sup>34</sup> καὶ ἦν Ολοφέρνης ἀναπαυόμενος ἐπὶ τῆς κλίνης αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ κωνωπίῳ ὃ ἦν ἐκ πορφύρας καὶ χρυσοῦ καὶ σμαράγδου καὶ λίθων πολυτελῶν καθυφασμένων – "Holofernes was reclining on his bed under a canopy woven of purple, gold, emeralds, and other precious stones." Judith 10.21, my translation. This canopy will be brought into the heart of Jerusalem (Judith 12.19), where, in my view, it is symbolically put to use as veil material, as its description falls in line with how the veil is described. The connection to the way Joshua presents taking things outside the created order and then transforms them into something that Yahweh can use should not be missed.

Joshua = Jesus. In other words, what if the book of Joshua is about something else entirely? What if, embedded in this horrific text, is something else that is beautiful?<sup>35</sup>

2. Ancient Near Eastern Interpretations of the text, see #5 below.
3. Know and understand how the ANE peoples talked about their enemies, ie., the Rephaim.
4. **The Book of Joshua is a “recreation” story.** God is making sacred space and casting out the chaos to make a way for his presence in the land of Israel.
5. Other nations talked this way – see [Merneptah Stele](#) as an example from the ancient Near East where it says “we wiped out all the Israelites!” when in fact, **this did not occur.**<sup>36</sup>
6. Nephi was a product of his culture.
7. *Something* happened!
8. Perhaps the story is fragmented.
9. **Literacy did exist** – counter to Erhman’s claims – see Friedman, *Exodus*.
10. Joshua is self-contradictory: did they drive out the Canaanites or not?<sup>37</sup>
11. The Book of Mormon is inspired midrashim on the book of Joshua.<sup>38</sup> We must read the Book of Mormon and use this as a lens by which to interpret this narrative.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> This is the argument Jacqueline Lapsley takes in *Whispering the Word*, where she asserts that even though many of the texts of the Bible are patriarchal in nature, that they have something to offer, and that they are “about something else as well.” Jacqueline E. Lapsley, *Whispering the Word: Hearing Women's Stories in the Old Testament*, Westminster John Knox, 2005, p. 7

<sup>36</sup> Friedman, writing on the connection between the Merneptah Stele and the conquest of Canaan, writes, “The archaeologists are right: there was no conquest. (And thank heavens for that. It is a story of violent destruction, and the Jews have been denigrated for it; but it never happened.) We might ask: would these ancient writers have really made this up? Would they invent a genocide that they never committed? But consider the earliest references to Israel in archaeological sources. We already know the first: the Merneptah stele. Pharaoh Merneptah says, “Israel is wasted. Its seed is no more.” The second is the stele of the Moabite King Mesha. It is standing in Paris in the Louvre. Mesha, who is known from the Bible, acknowledges that, as the Bible reports too, Israel conquered and dominated the land. But, he says, he broke Israel’s yoke, and now “Israel is destroyed.” These two of the earliest mentions of Israel outside of the Bible both claimed that Israel is gone, erased. Neither was true. That was just what you said in the world. “We killed ‘em.” “We slaughtered ‘em.” Egypt said it. Moab said it. And so did Israel. They said it, but they did not do it.” Richard Elliott Friedman, *The Exodus*, p. 80-81.

<sup>37</sup> The slides for this lesson really bear out the problem as seen by simply reading the text of Joshua. Clearly, the Israelites did not conquer the land. Judges also relates this reality as well.

<sup>38</sup> For more on this argument, see Bradley Kramer, [Beholding the Tree of Life: A Rabbinic Approach to the Book of Mormon \(Contemporary Studies in Scripture\)](#), Greg Kofford Books, 2014.

<sup>39</sup> Moroni shows how warfare is approached in Mormon’s editing of Moroni’s life and struggles. Also commenting on this idea are the following thoughts by **President David O. McKay**: “There are, however, **two conditions which may justify a truly Christian man to enter—mind you, I say enter, not begin— a war**: (1) An attempt to dominate and to deprive another of his free agency, and, (2) Loyalty to his country. Possibly there is a third, viz., Defense of a weak nation that is being unjustly crushed by a strong, ruthless one.

“Paramount among these reasons, of course, is the defense of man’s freedom. An attempt to rob man of his free agency caused dissension even in heaven. Scriptures tell us: ‘Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him . . .’

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“So fundamental in man’s eternal progress is his inherent right to choose, that the Lord would defend it even at the price of war. Without freedom of thought, freedom of choice, freedom of action within lawful bounds, man cannot progress. . . .

“As a Church: **‘We believe that all men are justified in defending themselves, their friends, and property,** and the government from the unlawful assaults and encroachments of all persons in times of exigency, where immediate appeal cannot be made to laws, and relief afforded’ (D&C 134:11).

“Even though we sense the hellish origin of war, even though we feel confident that war will never end war, yet under existing conditions we find ourselves as a body committed to combat this evil thing. With other loyal citizens we serve our country as bearers of arms, rather than to stand aloof to enjoy a freedom for which others have fought and died. David O. McKay, *Conference Report*, April 1942, 72-73.