"What Do These Stones Mean?":
Biblical Theology and
a Motif in Joshua

ROBERT L. HUBBARD, JR.
NORTH PARK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

The book of Joshua seems to contradict itself, praising Israel's complete conquest of Canaan while reporting the survival of Rahab and the Gibeonites. This paper responds to the problem by studying a recurrent motif in Joshua 3-10: a stone structure that memorializes past events "to this day" (used four times). The stones motif contributes to the literary coherence of the context around the theme of Yahweh's conquest of his enemies. More important, the stone structure at Gilgal (chaps. 3-4) hints that Canaanites besides Rahab might receive divine favor, while Achan's burial heap (chap. 7) suggests that Yahweh values obedience over ethnicity and welcomes religiously responsive foreigners. Similarly, the Gibeonite episode (chaps. 9-10) demonstrates divine acceptance of Israel's arrangement with Gibeon as an exception to the herem mandate. Thus, Joshua 3-10 not only reports the survival of foreigners but also quietly advocates divinely-sanctioned exceptions to the mandate in certain cases. In this way, the perceived tension between the mandate and the survival of foreigners lessens. This article also explores the theological themes that the motif sounds and the model of biblical theology that underlies it.

Key Words: Joshua 3-4; Joshua 7; Joshua 10; Deut 7:1-2; Deut 20:16-18; stones, monuments, non-Israelites, biblical theology

> The book of Joshua . . . is an enigma. . . . The book teases the reader with affirmations of coherence and then dismantles the coherence it has rendered. The reader is caught within the tension. How do the pieces fit?[1]

With these words, L. D. Hawk voices the consensus that internal tensions deny the book of Joshua a sense of literary coherence. For example, 11:16-17 claims, "So Joshua took all that land: the hill country and all the Negeb and all the land of Goshen and the lowland and the Arabah and the hill country of Israel and its lowland." But two chapters later, Yahweh says that "very much of the land still remains to be possessed" (13:1) and that "I will myself drive [the nations] out" (v. 6). Further, Deut 7:1-2 makes the divine mandate concerning Canaan's peoples quite clear: "When the LORD your God . . . clears away many nations before you, . . . you must utterly destroy them. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy" (compare Deut 20:16-18). Before the conquest ends, however, Joshua has spared Rahab the prostitute and her family and made a treaty with the Gibeonites (9:15; compare v. 27). Despite this, the book still affirms that Joshua "left nothing undone of all that the LORD had commanded Moses" (11:15).

This situation has elicited various explanations. For historical critics such as Volkmar Fritz, the incoherence derives from redactional activity—a combination of unedited original sources with later deuteronomistic and postpriestly additions.[2] Practitioners of the new literary criticism have proposed highly nuanced ways in which the contradictions cohere. Polzin speaks of the book's competing voices in dialogue, Hawk of its "contesting plots," and Mitchell of juxtaposed opposing viewpoints.[3] A stimulating essay by Stone explains

---

1. L. D. Hawk, *Every Promise Fulfilled: Contesting Plots in Joshua* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991) 24.

2. V. Fritz, *Das Buch Josua* (HAT 1/7; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1994) 2-9; R. D. Nelson, *Joshua* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1997) 5-9; A. H. W Curtis, *Joshua* (OTG; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994) 30-35. For a summary of the earlier discussion, see A. G. Auld, *Joshua, Moses and the Land: Tetrateuch-Pentateuch-Hexateuch in a Generation since 1938* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1980).

3. R. Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist* (New York: Seabury, 1980); note the subtitle of Hawk's book, *Every Promise Fulfilled: Contesting Plots in Joshua*; G. Mitchell, *Together in the Land* (JSOTSup 134; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993) 185-90. For an assessment of both Hawk and Mitchell, see R. S. Hess, "Studies in the Book of Joshua," *Themelios* 20/3 (1995) 12-13. Other important literary treatments include L. Rowlett, *Joshua and the Rhetoric of Violence: A New Historicist Analysis* (JSOTSup 226; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); L. Eslinger, *Into the Hands of the Living God* (JSOTSup 84; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989); cf. also D. M. Gunn, "Joshua and Judges," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (ed. R. Alter and E Kermode; Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1987) 102-12.

that Rahab and the Gibeonites survived because, unlike their con-
temporaries, they acknowledged Yahweh's greatness.[4] Thus far, the
only consensus is to concede the reality and interpretive importance
of the book's ill-fitting pieces. In this paper, I do not intend, like Mer-
lin, to wave a magic wand and—presto!—either make the tensions
vanish or offer a new solution. My purpose is to contribute additional
data to the discussion by examining a recurring literary motif—a
series of stone monuments—in three texts within the conquest nar-
rative (Joshua 3-10). As Gérard Genette has shown, narratives repeat
events to single them out as especially significant,[5] so the very rep-
etition of this motif invites careful study—thus far undone.[6] I will
focus on the motif's literary role in the developing narrative and the
stones' symbolism in the context. The fundamental question is "What
do these stones mean?"[7]

THE STONES AT GILGAL AND IN THE JORDAN RIVER

> The Israelites did as Joshua commanded. They took up twelve stones
> out of the middle of the Jordan, . . . carried them . . . to the place where
> they camped. . . . (Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the
> Jordan . . . and they are there to this day). (Josh 4:8-9)

4. L. G. Stone, "Ethical and Apologetic Tendencies in the Redaction of the Book
of Joshua," *CBQ* 53 (1991) 25-36. In his view, Joshua 2-11 contrasts the responses of
Achan and the Canaanite kings to Yahweh's actions with the responses of Rahab and
the Gibeonites. The contrast offers less a report of conquest than a "theological para-
digm" on what constitutes a proper response to God (i.e., "object lessons in respon-
siveness to Yahweh's actions and warnings against resistance," p. 35).

5. G. Genette (*Narrative Discourse* [Ithaca: Cornell, 1980] 113-60) calls the phe-
nomenon of repetition "frequency"; compare with the category of "parallelism" in the
techniques of plot in S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Bible and Literature Series
17; Sheffield: Almond, 1989) 93. For additional forms of repetition, see M. Sternberg,
The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading (Indiana
Literary Biblical Series; Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1985) 365-440;
and R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

6. See Hawk, *Every Promise Fulfilled*, 30: "Throughout the book, . . . the erection of
stones or altars marks particularly meaningful events, events whose residue contin-
ues, as the narrator sometimes informs the reader, 'to this day'"; cf. also A. H. W. Cur-
tis, *Joshua* (OTG; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994) 80; R. D. Nelson, *The
Historical Books* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998) 80; and J. Cazeaux, *Le Refus de la guerre
sainte* (LD 174; Paris: Cerf, 1998) 35.

7. Other prominent events in Joshua that involve stones include the unhewn
stones with which Joshua built the altar on Mt. Ebal (Josh 8:31-32); the stones that fell
from heaven along the Beth-horon ridge (10:11); the large stones that sealed the cave
where five Canaanites hid (10:18); the Stone of Bohan, a marker along the territorial
boundaries of both Judah and Benjamin (15:6; 18:17); and the stone erected by Joshua
at Shechem to bear witness against Israel should they violate the covenant (24:26-27).

Israel's crossing of the Jordan River (Joshua 3-4) offers one of the Bible's most memorable moments.[8] A certain literary roughness, especially in chap. 4, has fueled discussion of the text's prehistory,[9] but the final form makes reasonably good sense, as the holistic readings of Polzin and Peckham show.[10] In chap. 3, the ark's entry into the river stopped its flow, so Israel crossed on dry land. By contrast, in chap. 4 instruction about stones of remembrance (vv. 1-9 and 20-24) brackets the report of the ark's exit from the river (vv. 10-19; cf. 3:15).[11] For our purposes, four features merit special attention. First,

8. The crossing of the river culminates the detailed preparations of the two preceding chapters that had positioned Israel at the riverside. Yahweh had confirmed and Israel had accepted Joshua as Moses' successor (chap. 1); the surprising testimony of the prostitute Rahab had reassured Israel that Yahweh would indeed give Canaan into their hands (chap. 2).

9. Some argue that the present text has interlaced two originally independent narratives; cf. T. C. Butler, *Joshua* (WBC 7; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983) 41-42; E. Vogt, "Die Erzählung vom Jordanübergang, Josue 3-4," *Bib* 46 (1965) 125-48 (a war narrative and a cultic narrative). Others believe that it results from a series of redactions that expanded a simple original text; cf. Fritz, *Josua*, 43-56; F. Langlamet, "La traversée du Jourdain et les documents de l'hexateuque," *RB* 79 (1972) 7-38; J. Dus, "Die Analyse zweier Ladeerzählungen des Josuabuches (Jos 3-4 and 6)," *ZAW* 72 (1960) 107-34. For a convenient summary of the discussion, see Fritz, *Josua*, 43-46; and Nelson, *Joshua*, 55-56. See also D. M. Howard Jr. (*Joshua* [NAC; Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998] 118), who concedes that in chap. 4 "the chronology becomes difficult to follow in several places" and concludes that "the author's primary concern is not chronology but theological reflection."

10. Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist,* 94-99; B. Peckham, "The Composition of Joshua 3-4," *CBQ* 46 (1984) 413-31; cf. also P. Saydon, "The Crossing of the Jordan, Jos. chaps. 3 and 4," *CBQ* 12 (1950) 194-207; and Nelson, *Joshua*, 57 ("by using moderate effort the reader actually has no trouble making sense out of the story line"). Of the options, I find Polzin's proposed scenario the most compelling. For discussion of chronological issues, see J. A. Wilcoxen, "Narrative Structure and Cult Legend: A Study of Joshua 1-6," in *Transitions in Biblical Scholarship* (ed. J. C. Rylaarsdam; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) 60-64.

11. T. B. Dozeman ("The *yam-sûp* in the Exodus and the Crossing of the Jordan River," *CBQ* 58 [1996] 411-14) argues plausibly that vv. 21-24 mark a later, supplementary catechism that addresses a wider audience than the older, more narrowly focused, one (vv. 6b-7). An additional important theme in the narrative concerns Yahweh's elevation of Joshua in Israel's eyes (4:14; cf. 3:7-8). For a grammatically superfluous definite article in vv. 11,14, and 17, see R. G. Boling, "Some Conflate Readings in Joshua-Judges," *VT* 16 (1966) 293-98. Concerning the Greek tradition of vv. 15-17, see L. Greenspoon, "The Qumran Fragments of Joshua: Which Puzzle Are They Part of and Where Do They Fit?" in *Septuagint, Scrolls and Cognate Writings* (ed. G. J. Brooke and B. Lindars; SBLSCS 33; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992) 166-67. Cf. also S. Sipilä, "The Septuagint Version of Joshua 3-4," in *Seventh Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies: Leuven, 1989* (ed. C. E. Cox; SBLSCS 31; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991) 63-74; and L. Mazor, "The Septuagint Translation of the Book of Joshua," *BIOSCS* 27 (1994) 29-38.

the text portrays the episode as a ceremonial invasion of Canaan.[12] The people are to "sanctify" themselves (*hitqaddāšû*, 3:5)—standard preparation for proximity to Yahweh's presence (Exod 19:10, 14, 22; Num 11:18; 1 Chr 15:12; cf. Josh 7:13), a presence soon to display itself in *niplā'ôt* ("wonders" or "stunning feats," 3:5).[13] The order and manner of crossing also follows strict divine guidelines. Second, the ark of the covenant, the historic symbol of Yahweh's presence, dominates the scene. The ark leads the way (3:3, 14) and defiantly stands mid-Jordan, a kind of Divine Crossing Guard, stopping river traffic to let Israel safely pass.[14] Associated with it are the "feet" of priests who bear it (3:6, 8). Their entry stops the river (3:13, 15-16), and their exit frees its flow again (4:18). In my view, since the feet occasion the stoppage, those human feet symbolize the Jordan's subjection "under Yahweh's feet."[15]

Third, the ark leads Israel into battle, what I call "Yahweh's war."[16] The two and one-half Transjordanian tribes (v. 12) and "about

12. See Polzin (*Moses and the Deuteronomist*, 92), who regards 3:1-5:1 as the book's first example of the very important framing device, "the *liturgical narrative*" (italics his), whose concluding counterpart is the ritual in Joshua 24. C. L. Seow (*Myth, Drama, and the Politics of David's Dance* [HSM 46; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989] 71) reckons Joshua 3 among the texts that belong to "the tradition of ritual conquest and ark procession at Gilgal, a tradition which betrays influences of the Ban myth. Not only are the motifs of the drying of the river and driving out of the enemies reminiscent of Ba'l's victory over Prince Sea *alias* Judge River (*KTU* 1.2.4), the deity is called the 'living god' (*'l ḥy*) and 'lord of all the earth' (*'dwn kl h'rṣ*)" (cf. also p. 73). The latter titles appear in Josh 3:10, 11, 13.

13. Biblical writers know Yahweh as Wonder Worker (Judg 13:19; 1 Chr 16:9; Ps 86:10), often citing as examples the Exodus from Egypt (Exod 3:20; Judg 6:13; Ps 78:11; 106:7, 22; Mic 7:15) and his mysterious work in creation and history (Job 5:9; 9:10; 37:5, 14; Isa 28:29); cf. Exod 34:10; Ps 40:5; 72:18; 78:4; 98:1; 111:4; Jer 21:2; Joel 2:26.

14. Compare *krt* Niphal, "be cut off" (3:13, 16; 4:7, 23). Here the ark is identified with the "living God" (*'ēl ḥay*) and "the Lord of all the earth" (*'ădôn kol-hā'āreṣ*, vv. 11, 13; cf. Ps 97:5; Mic 4:13; Zech 4:14; 6:5) who will "drive out" (*yrš*, Hiphil) the other peoples (Josh 3:10). As for the Jordan, neither the Bible nor the ancients regard it as a god. Rather, it symbolizes "boundary crossings," perhaps even the netherworld (Ps 42:7; cf. Heb 3:17-19); cf. M. Gorg, "*yrdn*," *TDOT* 6.324; H. O. Thompson, "Jordan River," *ABD* 3.957-58. See also T. Powell, "Jordan," *NIDOTTE* 4.802-5. For the Jordan as a boundary, see D. Jobling, "The Jordan as Boundary: Transjordan in Israel's Ideological Geography," in *The Sense of Biblical Narrative: Structural Analyses in the Hebrew Bible II* (JSOTSup 39; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986) 88-134.

15. In the Bible, to conquer a foe is to put it "under [one's] feet" (see 10:24-25 and texts cited below).

16. This term improves on the older term, "holy war," which is considered too modern and misleading, since it denotes war waged by humans for religious reasons. By contrast, "Yahweh's war" better fits the Old Testament understanding that religious wars are always waged by Yahweh, the Divine Warrior, albeit occasionally

forty thousand" other warriors follow (v. 13)[17]—a fully armed, united Israel, an invasion force formidable enough to terrify Jericho (2:9, 11) and to panic Canaan's kings (5:1).[18] Finally, Yahweh institutes a way for Israel to remember this event. Twelve Israelites carry one stone each (one for each tribe) from below the priests' feet to Israel's lodging site on the west bank (4:1b-5, 8). This step is no surprise, since 3:12 anticipated it, and 4:20 reports that Joshua erected the stones at Gilgal.[19] What seems odd, however, is the report (v. 9) that Joshua erected

---

through human means; cf. G. H. Jones, "The Concept of Holy War," in *The World of Ancient Israel* (ed. R. E. Clements; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 299-321; R. Smend, *Yahweh War and Tribal Confederation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970). For a convenient overview of the subject, see T. Longman III, "Divine Warrior," *NIDOTTE* 4.545-49; T. Longman III and D. G. Reid, *God Is A Warrior* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

   17. Biblical usage suggests that "forty thousand" constitutes a round figure meaning "huge army" (Judg 5:8; 2 Sam 10:18 // 1 Chr 19:18; 1 Kgs 4:26; 1 Chr 12:36). Alternatively, the phrase may denote "forty (military) units," since *'elep* denotes a military contingent of considerable size though not statistically "1000," as the traditional rendering suggests; cf. R. G. Boling, *Joshua* (AB 6; New York: Doubleday, 1982) 176. For a survey of alternative views, see Howard, who accepts possible semantic confusion in MT or the symbolic use of numbers in such contexts (*Joshua*, 189 n. 76). M. H. Woudstra (*Joshua* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981] 93) apparently accepts 40,000 as a number.

   18. The phrase "armed for war" (*ḥămušîm*, v. 12) always designates fully armed soldiers (Num 31:5, 27; 1 Chr 12:24 [cf. v. 23]; 2 Chr 17:18); but cf. Nelson, *Joshua*, 63 ("organized for war"); Woudstra, *Joshua*, 93 ("in formation"). Compare also *ḥălûṣê haṣṣābā'* ("equipped for war," v. 13; Num 31:5; 32:27; 1 Chr 12:24; 2 Chr 17:18; cf. 1 Chr 12:23); BDB 323. For the "plains of Jericho," their arrival point, see Josh 5:10; 2 Kgs 25:5; Jer 39:5; 52:8; compare "plains of Moab opposite Jericho" (Num 22:1; 26:3, 63; 31:12; et al.). The plains of Jericho offered Israel's army a clear, level path westward toward its attack on Jericho (Joshua 6). The focus here on the Transjordanian tribes serves to confirm that they kept their earlier promise to Moses (Num 32:25-21) and to Joshua (1:12-18). For a defense of taking v. 13 as referring to all Israel, see Butler, *Joshua*, 50; but compare Nelson, *Joshua*, 70 and Howard, *Joshua*, 138, who understand it as referring only to the eastern tribes.

   19. As Coats observes, the stones come from the spot where the priests stood and, hence, where the ark was; see G. W. Coats, "The Ark of the Covenant in Joshua: A Probe into the History of a Tradition," *HAR* 9 (1985) 141. The language of the divine mandate (vv. 2-3) is repeated for the execution (vv. 4-8), which confirms that the latter carries out the former; compare with *'îš-'eḥād 'îš-'eḥād miššābeṭ* (vv. 2, 4); and in vv. 3 and 8 the phrase *nś' mittôk hayyardēn* ("lift up from the middle of the Jordan"), *'br* Hiphil ("carry across"; cf. Qal "cross over," v. 5), *nûḥ* Hiphil ("deposit"); *bammālôn/'el-hammālôn* ("at/to the lodging place"). The claim that Joshua had prepared them (*hēkîn*, v. 4) probably recalls Joshua's abrupt, terse command that Israel set aside "twelve men, . . . one from each tribe" (3:12); cf. Boling, *Joshua*, 167-68. As Nelson rightly observes (*Joshua*, 61), the command of 3:12 interjects a new topic in anticipation of 4:2 (i.e., the twelve stones), and its abruptness and brevity also "creates suspense and signals that there will be more to this story than the report of a miraculous crossing."

twelve other stones in the dry riverbed, apparently on the very spot from which the first twelve were taken. Nothing in the larger narrative anticipates or follows up this report but, to give it credibility, the narrator invokes the "testimony formula," affirming that these stones "are there to this day" (*wayyihyû šām 'ad hayyôm hazzeh*).[20]

The disjunctive syntax marks v. 9 as parenthetical, but does its content amplify v. 8 or contrast it?[21] Following C. F. Keil, David Howard favors amplification, arguing that vv. 8-9a actually concern only one set of stones; that is, the twelve carried off (v. 8) were stones that Joshua had put there beforehand (v. 9).[22] I prefer the latter option, however (contrast), as do the versions and a sizable consensus of scholars.[23] In other words, in contradistinction to v. 8, v. 9 introduces a second formation of twelve stones in the Jordan, an action that the text reports without explanation. The testimony formula implies that they were apparently still visible in the writer's day whenever the Jordan ran low. But their location at "the place where the priests' feet had stood" points to their probable purpose—to mark the spot where the ark had been, the spot where Yahweh had

20. As Bar-Efrat says (*Narrative Art in the Bible*, 24), through the phrase "to this day," the narrator "furnishes proof of the story which the people in the audience can verify for themselves"; cf. Nelson, *Joshua*, 69 ("A redactional testimony formula seeks to undergird the reliability of the narrative"); N. Na'aman, "The 'Conquest of Canaan in the Book of Joshua and in History," in *From Nomadism to Monarchy: Archaeological and Historical Aspects of Early Israel* (ed. I. Finkelstein and N. Na'aman; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994) 230 ("a special effort of the author to affirm the authenticity of episodes portrayed in his composition"). The classical study of this formula remains B. S. Childs, "A Study of the Formula 'Until This Day,'" *JBL* 82 (1963) 279-92; cf. also his "Etiological Tale Re-examined," *VT* 24 (1974) 387-97.

21. The syntax of *waw* + subject ("twelve stones") + verb (*hēqîm*) is clearly disjunctive; cf. T. O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (New York: Scribner, 1971) §132; P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Subsidia Biblica 14; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1991) §1550; for constrastive sentences, see F. I. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew* (Janua Linguarum, Series Practica 231; The Hague: Mouton, 1974) 150-53.

22. Howard, *Joshua*, 136; C. F. Keil, *The Book of Joshua* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975 [reprint]) 48-49; NIV. Specifically, Howard limits the disjunction to v. 9a, in his view "a (parenthetical) circumstantial clause," and argues that v. 9b continues the thought of v. 8. Two weaknesses undercut Howard's view, however: first, it fails to argue why v. 9a must be taken as parenthetical rather than, for example, contrastive; second, its explanation of Joshua's actions ("to mark the importance of the spot where the priests stood") fails to convince. In my view, to bear the meaning Howard gives it, I would expect v. 9a to read something like *wehĕn / hēnnâ (šĕtêm) – 'eśēh 'ăbānîm 'ăšer hēqîm yĕhôšu'a* ("Now they are the twelve stones that Joshua set up . . .").

23. The Septuagint (*állous*) and Vulgate (*alios*) understand v. 9 to refer to stones that were different from the stones in v. 8 (i.e., "other stones"). Cf. Woudstra, *Joshua*, 92; Nelson, *Joshua*, 69; et al.

subdued the Jordan.[24] In sum, rather than trouble us, the juxtaposition of two stone memorials in vv. 8-9 actually beckons us to associate them, perhaps even to assume that they share comparable if not identical configurations.[25]

     Contextually, however, the twelve, stones inland at Gilgal hold center stage, so we must ask what they mean. According to vv. 6-7, they serve as both a "sign" (*'ôt*, v. 6), that is, a visible object to authenticate the reality of the Jordan crossing,[26] and a "memorial" (*zikkārôn*, v. 7), that is, a reminder of its continuing significance for later generations.[27] Specifically, they cause curious Israelite children to ask in the future, "What do these stones mean to you [pl.]?" (vv. 6, 21).[28] Chap-

---

24. See my comments above concerning the ark's domination of the narrative (see 3:3, 6, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17; 4:5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 16, 18), especially the credit its presence receives for drying up the Jordan (3:8, 13, 16-17; 4:7, 23); compare with Fritz, *Josua*, 52 ("a special interest in the spot at which the miracle of the crossing was released" [my translation]). In his view, the verse is dependent on 3:17 and is the work of the deuteronomistic editor (pp. 49-50), who stressed the ark's role in this miracle as well as in the fall of Jericho (pp. 45, 75). Alternatively, the formation may comprise a stone platform (Boling, *Joshua*, 174), "a permanent memorial to the priests" (Butler, *Joshua*, 49), or "a processional causeway or the rocks of a ford exposed at low water . ." (Nelson, *Joshua*, 69). Polzin (*Moses and the Deuteronomist,* 108-9) suggests that this second formation may be Joshua's improvisation, an action that neutralizes "the one-sided view of Israel's religion as unchanging allegiance to an unchanging law [cf. Deut 13:1], by complementing an unswerving loyalty to God's commands with the image of change and mobility" (p. 108) and opens up "the very possibility of interpreting the Mosaic law and the word of God" (p. 109).

25. See Coats, "The Ark in Joshua," 142: "Perhaps two traditions come together there. One would undergird a memorial near the river, perhaps at Gilgal. The other would suggest a memorial in the river."

26. Other examples of "signs" include the rainbow after a rainstorm, which verifies God's covenant with earth's living creatures (Gen 9:11-12), and the weekly Sabbath, which reminds Israel of its covenant obligations to Yahweh (Exod 31:13, 17; Ezek 20:12, 20). The plagues in Egypt served as a "sign" to inform Pharaoh that "I the LORD am in this land" (Exod 8:22; cf. 8:19, 23; 7:3, 5; 10:2), while Isaiah offered King Ahaz a "sign" to authenticate Yahweh's announced destruction of the king's enemies (Isa 7:7-9) in order to strengthen the king's faith and to banish his fears (v. 11). See E Helfmeyer, "*'ôt*," *TDOT* 1.168-70, and his discussion of the various functions of signs (pp. 170-86); P. Kruger, " *'ôt*," *NIDOTTE* 1.331-33.

27. As Keller says, the purpose of a *zikkārôn* is "to prevent something from being forgotten which deserves to be handed down, and to make it real over and over again"; quoted in Helfmeyer, *TDOT* 1.168. Cf. H. Eising, "*zākar*," *TDOT* 4.77-79. For the verb's usage, see W Schottroff, " *zākar*," *THAT* 1.507-18. For the juxtaposition of *'ôt* and *zikkārôn*, see Exod 13:9; Num 17:3, 5[16:38, 40]; cf. Exod 12:13-14; Num 5:15.

28. Verse 21 lacks "to you" (*lākem*). For the whole phrase *mah (hā) 'ēlleh lĕ* + suffix (lit., "what [are] these . . . to X?"), see 2 Sam 16:2; Ezek 17:12; 24:19; 37:18; cf. 1 Kgs 9:13; 2 Kgs 3:13; Ezek 17:12; Zech 1:21; 4:4, 13. For the similar phrase *mah zō't* (lit., "what is this [fem.]?"), see Exod 13:14 (cf. Exod 12:26; Zech 5:6); for *mah zeh* (lit., "what is this [masc.]?"), see Gen 27:20; Exod 4:2; 1 Sam 10:11; Esth 4:5.

ter 4 provides the adult respondent with two answers. First, the stones confirm the simple fact that the ark cut off the Jordan's flow (and at flood stage, no less) as if slashed by a giant sword (v. 7).[29] They attest a marvelous deed by the ark. In the second, more climactic answer (v. 22), the spotlight shifts from the ark to the result of its deed (the "dry ground" on which Israel crossed) and to Yahweh (who "dried up the waters of the Jordan," v. 23a). Apparently, the text assumes that the Jordan never ran dry, so it portrays this event as absolutely unprecedented. Strikingly, to underscore its magnitude, the writer ranks the dry Jordan-crossing on a par with the dry Red Sea during the Exodus (v. 23b). Literarily, the words "Yahweh dried up the Red Sea" affirm that Yahweh is just as powerfully at work now as he was then (see 2:10; 5:1).[30] Further, besides connecting locales, the comparison also connects generations: Yahweh dried up the Jordan "for *you* until *you* crossed over," as he did the Red Sea "for *us* until *we* crossed over" (italics mine). The writer apparently reads both crossings as key turning points in a single history. He thereby portrays both generations—the Exodus group and the Jordan group—as one people of God. In effect, the comparison also tells younger Israel, "This is your Exodus."[31]

29. Verse 7 also says that the waters were "cut off when it [the ark] crossed," as if the very sight of the ark sent the waters packing in terrified retreat, as in Ps 114:3 (see below). For *krt* Niphal + *mayim*, see Josh 3:13; cf. 3:16.

30. See Dozeman ("The *yam-sûp* in the Exodus," 413), who suggests the presence of "mythic overtones in the combining of sea and river." More subtle linguistic echoes of the Red Sea crossing (Exodus 14-15) appear earlier in the context of Joshua 3-4. Its thematic verb, '*br* ("to cross"), also appears in the Song of the Sea (Exod 15:16) as does the noun *nēd*, "heap [of water]" (Josh 3:13, 16; Exod 15:8; cf. Ps 78:13); the nouns for "dry ground," *ḥorābâ* (Josh 3:17; 4:18; Exod 14:21; cf. 2 Kgs 2:8) and *yabbāšâ* (Josh 4:22; Exod 14:16, 22, 29; 15:19; Neh 9:11; Ps 66:6); and the verb '*lh*, "to come up" (Josh 4:16, 17, 18, 19; Exod 12:38; 13:18; Judg 11:13, 16; Isa 11:16; Hos 2:17). Furthermore, the comment that "the waters of the Jordan returned to their place" (*šûb* + *mayim*, Josh 4:18) probably alludes to the Red Sea's swamping of Pharaoh's chariots and their drivers (Exod 14:26, 28; 15:19; cf. Gen 8:3).

31. According to Dozeman ("The *yam-sûp* in the Exodus," 413), the connection between the *yam-sûp* and the Jordan River (in his view, a connection made by "Deuteronomistic tradents") aims "to outline a history of salvation from the exodus to the conquest of the land," the crossing marking "a concluding episode of salvation history" (p. 414). Ps 114:1-3 similarly connects the Red Sea and Jordan events: "When Israel went out from Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language, Judah became God's sanctuary, Israel his dominion. The sea looked and fled; Jordan turned back." Compare Hawk, *Every Promise Fulfilled*, 97-98: "It is perhaps significant that the crossing of the Jordan connects the present generation with that of the Exodus generation (4:23). Both generations have participated in a crossing and share experiences of deliverance and wonder. Will they share experiences of failure as well?" See also J. Wagenaar, "Crossing the Sea of Reeds (Exod 13-14) and the Jordan (Joshua 3-4): A Priestly Framework for the Wilderness Wandering," in *Studies in the Book of*

But why did Yahweh dry up the Jordan? First, according to
Joshua (v. 24), the act addresses a wide, universal audience—"all
peoples of the earth" (*kol-'ammê hā'āreṣ*).[32] It shows them "just how
mighty the hand of the LORD really is!" (my translation).[33] Else-
where, such awesome displays defeat or afflict both other nations
(Exod 9:3; 1 Sam 5:6, 9; 7:13; Isa 19:6) and Israel (Judg 2:15; Ruth
1:13; 1 Sam 12:15; cf. Job 12:9).[34] Is its purpose here to unleash panic
among the nations as the first salvo of Yahweh's war (cf. 5:1) or to
seek their surrender to Yahweh's supremacy, like Rahab's surrender
(chap. 2)?[35] Suppose other Canaanites were to respond as Rahab did.
Suppose they also recognized "the mighty hand of the LORD" and
submitted to him. Would not Yahweh offer them similar salvation?
In my view, coming on the heels of Rahab's affirmation of Yahweh's
sovereignty and her bargain with Israel (2:9-14), the attention to the
nations in 4:24 hints at just such a possibility. If so, the verse de-
creases the narrative tensions within the book noted earlier. Second,
the act of drying up the Jordan also addresses Israel, seeking the

---

Exodus (ed. M. Vervenne; BETL 126; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996) 461-70.
He credits the so-called Priestly writer with inventing the connection between the
two crossings in his redaction. In his view, they mark the beginning and end of the
wilderness wandering, thereby framing the whole period with the rituals of circumci-
sion and Passover.

32. Syntactically, the two main clauses open with *lĕma'an* and therefore constitute
final or result clauses ("so that . . ."). In my view, although no conjunction links them,
their contrasting content favors interpreting them as semantically parallel rather than
as v. 24b being subordinate to v. 24a. Their one grammatical difference—that is, *lĕma'an*
+ an infinitive construct (v. 24a; cf. Deut 2:30; 1 Sam 15:15; Jer 27:15) versus *lĕma'an* +
a finite verb (v. 24b; cf. Exod 4:5; Gen 18:19)—is typical of such clauses; cf. B. K. Waltke
and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisen-
brauns, 1990) §36.2.2b; §38.3.3b–c; H. A. Brongers, "*lĕma'an* in der Biblisch-Hebräi-
schen Sprache," *OtSt* 18 (1972) 86-88. The versions (e.g., the LXX and the Vulgate)
support MT *yĕrā'tem*, "you fear" (Qal pf. 2d masc. pl.) against the BHS editor's pro-
posed *yĕrā'tām*, "they [the nations] fear" (Qal inf. const. + 3d masc. pl. suffix); so also
the NRSV and NIV.

33. The *kî* here is emphatic ("How . . . !"); cf. Gen 1:4; 18:20; Isa 22:9; for other
examples, see D. J. A. Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Ac-
ademic Press, 1998) 4.388; KB³ 448.

34. Yahweh's "hand" also brings Israel salvation (Isa 25:10; 41:20; 59:1; 66:14), es-
pecially the deliverance from Egypt (Exod 6:1; 13:9; 32:11; Deut 4:34; 5:15; 6:21; 7:19;
9:26; 11:2; 26:8), and empowers the prophets (2 Kgs 3:15), especially Ezekiel (Ezek 1:3;
3:22; 37:1; 40:1). For detailed treatment of "hand" in the OT, see R Ackroyd, "*yad*,"
TWAT 3.425-55.

35. Cf. L. Derousseaux, *Le crainte de Dieu dans l'AT* (LD 63; Paris: Cerf, 1970) 238
n. 92: "Nothing in the text supports the idea that the nations can enter into the
covenant. . . . The peoples of the earth will be for Israel a sign of Yahweh's power and
encouragement to persevere in its covenant" (my translation).

same response as their ancestors gave at the Exodus, to "fear the LORD your God forever" (v. 24b; Exod 14:31; cf. 15:11). To "fear" Yahweh is to treat him with the highest respect (yes, with a touch of terror, just as Chicagoans do their famous police) and to live accordingly. In sum, whenever Israel saw the stones—whenever the child asked and the adult answered—Israel imagined again the might of Yahweh and rekindled their awe of that Great God.

Three concluding comments before leaving this text: First, this episode marks a decisive new phase in Israel's history—the conquest period, which fulfills the patriarchal promise of land. Literarily, it trips the first domino of an event-chain that will run beyond the book of Joshua into the monarchy period. Second, the very question-and-answer format presupposes visits to the stones at Gilgal by future generations, probably for some ritual remembrance, if not reenactment, of the river crossing.[36] This in itself confirms the magnitude of this event. Though several vivid phrases may derive from an old liturgy,[37] attempts to reconstruct cultic ceremonies at Gilgal from the narrative strike me as too speculative to convince.[38] We must content ourselves with the simple assumption that Israel did visit Gilgal occasionally to recall the crossing. Third, the text presupposes an intriguing communal epistemology of remembrance. To passersby, the obvious design of the memorials clearly reflects human creation rather than some ancient accident of nature.[39] The presumably smooth shape of the Gilgal twelve distinguished them from the more rugged stones that typically littered the ancient landscape. From this very

36. The format "when your child /ren ask(s), . . . you shall say . . ." seems at home in several formal settings—that is, the Passover (Exod 12:26), the redemption of the firstborn (Exod 13:14), and instruction on obeying the law (Deut 6:20). In each case, the adult's answer is either to report events connected with the Exodus (the death of the firstborn [Exod 13:14-15], the deliverance from slavery and gift of the land [Deut 6:21-24]) or to make a simple declaration (Exod 12:26-27).

37. For example (lit.), "from this (place), from the middle of the Jordan" (Josh 4:3), "this Jordan" (4:22), "these stones" (4:6, 7, 20, 21). Sadly, these indicators notwithstanding, the full contours of that underlying ceremony still elude us.

38. So Fritz, *Josua*, 43-46; against, for example, H.-J. Kraus, "Gilgal: Ein Beitrag zur Kultgeschichte Israels," *VT* 1 (1951) 191-99; J. R. Porter, "The Background of Joshua 3-5," *SEÅ* 36 (1971) 5-23. Fritz flatly denies that Joshua 3-4 either founds a later cultic celebration or legitimates a specific cultic site. For a convenient overview of the interpretive options, see Helfmeyer, *TDOT* 1.180-81.

39. A common assumption is that the Gilgal site had a circle of standing stones. This assumes that Gilgal means "circle (of stones)"; so Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew,* 348; KB[3] 183; BDB 166; cf. root *gll* ("to roll"); *gilgāl* ("wagon wheel," Isa 28:28); *gālîl* ("rod, cylinder"; Song 5:14; Esth 1:6). The connection between the stones that Joshua erected and the "sculptured stones" (*happĕsîlîm*) that Ehud later passed by at Gilgal (Judg 3:19, 26) is uncertain. To call the latter "pillars" strikes me as questionable; against J. A. Soggin, *Joshua* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) 64.

smoothness, someone might suspect that they came from the nearby
river and, hence, might vaguely connect the two locales, if not the
two stone formations. An especially inquiring mind might even rea-
son that, for someone to set up the Jordan memorial, the riverbed
must have been dry at the time—a highly unusual, if not un-heard-
of, event for the Jordan. If so, the thinker would further infer that
something amazing must have happened. But, though tangibly at-
testing unusual past events, the silent stones bore merely mute tes-
timony. They bore no inscription to report their history or to explain
their meaning. Only the community, through an adult's answer, re-
moved their ambiguity. Only communal remembrance conveyed
their meaning (probably the very wording that we read here) from
one generation to the next.[40]

THE STONES IN THE VALLEY OF ACHOR

> And all Israel stoned him to death . . . and raised over him a great heap
> of stones that remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his
> burning anger. Therefore to this day that place is called the Valley of
> Achor. (Josh 7:25b-26 NRSV)

The raising of a great stone heap over Achan culminates a well-
known story (Joshua 7).[41] Verse 1 casts an "atmosphere of forebod-
ing" over the chapter by announcing, "Israel broke faith in regard
to the devoted things: Achan . . . took some . . . ; and the anger of
Yahweh burned against the Israelites."[42] Three questions concern-

---

40. I owe this insight concerning the wording to my North Park colleague, Professor
John Weborg. The role of the repeated wording in Israelite life merits further research.

41. Concerning the literary history and archaeological background of Joshua 7,
see Z. Zevit, "Archaeological and Literary Stratigraphy in Joshua 7-8," *BASOR* 251
(1983) 23-35. For the literary interplay of Outsider and Insider between Rahab
(Joshua 2, 6) and Achan, see the illuminating essay by L. Rowlett ("Inclusion, Exclu-
sion and Marginality in the Book of Joshua," *JSOT* 55 [1992] 19-23), who writes (p. 22):
"The two stories illustrate the process of negotiations and exchanges by which in-
siders may become outsiders and outsiders may become insiders." See also her *Joshua
and the Rhetoric of Violence*.

42. The phrase "atmosphere of foreboding" comes from Mitchell (*Together in the
Land*, 67 n. 1), who observes the assonance between the anger formula *wayyiḥar-'ap
yhwh* and *ḥerem*; cf. also Deut 7:4; 13:18. The curious thing, of course, is that v. 1 informs
the reader of the danger, while Joshua and Israel remain totally oblivious of it. This is
typical of Hebrew narrative. For example, in Gen 22:1 the narrator informs the reader
that the narrative to follow is Yahweh's test of Abraham, something of which Abraham
is apparently unaware. Thus, the reader understands more than the patriarch about the
purpose of God's command to sacrifice Isaac on Mt. Moriah. Ruth 2 offers another ex-
ample. The narrator introduces Boaz to the reader (2:1) before Ruth ever "luckily" lands
on his property (v. 3) or meets him personally in the field (v. 8). Until this moment, the
reader understands the Moabitess's situation better than she does. Cf. R. L. Hubbard Jr.,
The Book of Ruth (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 135.

ing this text focus our attention. First, what was Achan's offense? Yahweh had declared everything in Jericho as *ḥerem* (that is, "consecrated to him for destruction," Josh 6:17-18), but Achan had kept some for himself (vv. 1, 20-21).[43] The writer calls this act *māʻal* ("to break faith"), a priestly theological term that implies a highly serious, treacherous breach of trust between Yahweh and Israel.[44] Yahweh had trusted Israel to consecrate Jericho to himself, but Achan had, so to speak, secretly stolen some of Yahweh's money right out of the offering plate.[45] Yahweh himself angrily brands Achan's action

43. Verse 21 identifies the *ḥerem* as some silver, gold, and a beautiful coat. The latter must have been beautiful and very valuable to be on a par with silver and gold; see D. M. Stec ("The Mantle Hidden by Achan," *VT* 41 [1991] 359), who also argues that MT *šnʻr* ("Shinar") is probably an error for *śʻr* ("sheepskin, wool"). For details on the larger *ḥerem* practice, see S. Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 28-77; P. D. Stern, *The Biblical Herem: A Window on Israel's Religious Experience* (BJS 211; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991); C. Brekelmans, "*ḥerem*," *THAT* 1.635-39; N. Lohfink, "*ḥerem*," *TDOT* 5.180-99. The verb *ḥrm* Hiphil, "to consecrate to destruction," appears in the Mesha Inscription (ninth cent. B.C.E.) from Moab ("I devoted it [the Israelite city of Nebo] to Ashtar Chemosh"); see the translation by K. P. Jackson, "The Language of the Mesha Inscription," in *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab* (ed. J. A. Dearman; Archaeology and Biblical Studies 2; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989) 97-98; *ANET* 320-21. For an evaluation of other parallels, see J. S. Kaminsky, "Joshua 7: A Reassessment of Israelite Conceptions of Corporate Punishment," in *The Pitcher Is Broken: Memorial Essays for Gösta Ahlström* (ed. S. W. Holloway and L. K. Handy; JSOTSup 190; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995) 332-36.

44. The root *mʻl* describes unfaithfulness, both toward other humans (for example, the sexual infidelity of a spouse, Num 5:11-31; the deceptive withholding of a deposit, Lev 5:21[6:2]; cf. also Job 21:34; Prov 16:10) and toward God (Ezek 14:13-20; 18:24; 20:27; the Chronicles texts listed below; et al.); cf. R. Knierim, "*mʻl*," *THAT* 1.920-22; H. Ringgren, "*mʻl*," *TDOT* 8.460-63. Strikingly, *ʻāmal* reappears in Josh 22:16 (cf. v. 22 [the noun *ʻamil*]), the story about the building of the altar by the eastern tribes, which leads the western tribes to accuse the former of theological heresy. This narrative confirms both the root's priestly background and the utter seriousness of such a breach of faith with Yahweh. For the verb's roots in priestly theological vocabulary, see its uses in the Holiness Code (Lev 26:40), Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 10:2, 10; Neh 1:8; 13:27), the Chronicles (1 Chr 5:25; 10:13; 2 Chr 26:16, 18; 28:10, 23; et al.), and by the priest-prophet Ezekiel (Ezek 15:8; 17:20; 39:23, 24, 26; for other texts, see above); cf. Deut 32:51. For the priestly theology of holiness as background, see Kaminsky, "Joshua 7: A Reassessment," 336-45. Against the assumption that priestly terms are exilic or postexilic, see A. Hurvitz, "The Dating of the Priestly Source in Light of the History of Biblical Hebrew a Century after Welihausen," *ZAW* 100 (1988) 88-100; J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16* (AB 3; New York: Doubleday, 1991) 12 ("the Priestly texts are preexilic"). For the connection between *ḥerem* and purity, see Deut 7:22-26; 13:13-17.

45. Compare Yahweh's characterization of the act in v. 11 as "to sin" (*ḥāṭāʼ*, "to steal" (*gānab*), and "to act deceitfully" (*kāḥaš*, Piel), the latter "an infringement of sacral law" and, by implication, "a transgression of Yahweh's covenant"; cf. K.-D. Schunck, "*kḥš*," *TDOT* 7.134; V. Hamp, "*gnb*," *TDOT* 3.42-45. Syntactically, the string of five verbs joined by the fivefold use of *wĕgam* explains the meaning of the opening claim that

a breach of covenant (vv. 10, 11) as well as *nĕbālâ*—Hebrew for a despicable, grossly offensive, outrageous act for an Israelite ("an outrageous thing," NRSV v. 15).[46] Thus, the act amounted to an egregious intrusion into Yahweh's sacral sphere, one worthy of execution by fire (v. 15).

Second, how did Achan's sin affect Israel? Strikingly, the text holds Israel as a whole, not Achan alone, responsible for Yahweh's fury (vv. 1, 11). Achan's personal act jeopardized the well-being of the entire nation. Behind this lies a view of corporate solidarity, in which the group shares the guilt and suffers the penalty of the individual's acts (so also v. 11).[47] The narrative tells the sad effects of Achan's treachery. Israel suffered a shocking defeat at Ai that caused the same panic and terror to spread among them as had paralyzed their Canaanite foes (vv. 4-5).[48] For the first time younger Israelites experienced divine punishment for provoking Yahweh.[49] In Butler's words, "Israel has become the enemy rather than the people of God."[50] The setback at Ai revealed something that Israel did not know: by having *ḥerem* in the camp, Israel had herself become

---

"Israel has sinned"; cf. R. P. Knierim, *Die Hauptbegriffe für Sünde im Alten Testament* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1965) 20-21. For more on *gam*, see T. Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew* (Leiden: Brill/Jerusalem: Magnes, 1985) 143-46. For similar main statements joined by *wĕgam* following statements of amplification, see Gen 21:26; Isa 45:16; Jer 31:19; Zech 3:7.

46. For the phrase *'āśâ nĕbālâ bĕyiśrā'ēl* ("to do folly in Israel"), see Gen 34:7; Deut 22:21; Josh 7:15; Judg 20:6 (// *zimmâ* ["evil device"]) 10; 2 Sam 13:12; Jer 29:23. In most cases, *nĕbālâ* denotes sexual immorality (e.g., Gen 34:7; Deut 22:21; 2 Sam 13:12), but it can simply describe behavior that is foolish because it not only violates accepted norms of equity but also, in the violation, imperils the perpetrator with possible revenge (1 Sam 25:25 [*nābāl*]). Accompanying phrases like "such a thing is not done (in Israel)" (Gen 34:7; 2 Sam 13:12) assume a commonly accepted standard of conduct that the *nĕbālâ*-action transgresses.

47. See the explanation of the situation in Knierim, *Hauptbegriffe*, 106. The classic study of the larger subject remains H. W. Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel* (rev. ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1981); cf. Nelson, Joshua, 105; Howard, *Joshua*, 194; Woudstra, *Joshua*, 126; Mitchell, *Together in the Land*, 70-71.

48. The phrase wayyimmas *lĕbab hā'ām* ("the people's hearts melted") recalls similar phrases in 2:11 and 5:1. Indeed, the addition here of *wayyĕhî lĕmāyim* ("and turned to water"), a phrase without parallel among the Canaanite quotations in Joshua, might suggest that Israel experienced fear even more paralyzing than that of the land's inhabitants.

49. This marks the first appearance of a pattern prominent in the larger narrative: Israel provokes Yahweh, who responds in anger and dispatches punishment; so Mitchell, *Together in the Land,* 67, who cites D. J. McCarthy, "The Wrath of Yahweh and the Structural Unity of the Deuteronomistic History," in *Essays in Old Testament Ethics* (J. P Hyatt Festschrift; ed. J. L. Crenshaw and J. T. Willis; New York: KTAV, 1974) 99-110.

50. Butler, *Joshua*, 84.

ḥerem—an enemy of Yahweh liable to destruction.[51] The bitter fore-taste at Ai sounded a wake-up call for Israel to escape the real di-saster and to realize that Yahweh had abandoned them ("I will be with you no more") until they "destroyed/removed the *ḥerem*" from their midst (vv. 12-13). As Hess writes, "Either Israel must destroy the devoted things . . . or it will be destroyed as devoted things."[52] In short, Achan single-handedly returned Israel to their precrossing state of uncleanness (see 3:5) and drove Yahweh from their midst.[53] They were no longer "holy" enough to wage Yahweh's war; worse, without Yahweh fighting for them, disastrous defeat seemed their inescapable destiny, as Joshua's complaint implied (vv. 7-9).

Third, what was Achan's penalty? In a legal process with the casting of lots, Yahweh himself would "catch" or "conquer" (*lākad*) the anonymous traitor (vv. 13-18).[54] Since elsewhere *lākad* describes the capture of cities, the text may portray this "capture" as a unique act of Yahweh's war against an enemy.[55] In the end, the sifting of tribe, clan, and family uncovered Achan (vv. 16-18),[56] who then con-fessed his sin (vv. 19-21). A quick scene change moves everyone to

51. For the thought that Achan's actions contaminated all Israel, see Kaminsky ("Joshua 7," 336-43), who argues that the "tabooed status" of the misappropriated ob-jects spread to Israel. He roots this status in Israel's understanding of holiness. The two calls for sanctification (v. 13)—that Joshua "sanctify the people" (*qaddēš hāʿām*) and that they "sanctify themselves for tomorrow" (*hitqaddĕšû lĕmāḥār*—suggest that the hidden *ḥerem* has made Israel "unholy." Josh 6:19 and 7:21 confirm this, the former classifying silver and gold as "holy (*qōdeš*) to Yahweh" and the latter listing silver and gold among Achan's stolen goods. Thus, contact with these "holy" items would leave Israel ritually contaminated; contra Mitchell, *Together in the Land,* 9 ("The idea does not seem necessarily to be one of contamination. . . . Thus the state of *ḥerem* in chap. 7 is more like a juridical decision"). For an overview of Israel's view of holiness, see D. P. Wright, "Holiness: Old Testament," *ABD* 3.237-49 and the bibliography cited.

52. R. S. Hess, *Joshua* (TOTC; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996) 150.

53. The virtual identity of the commands in 3:5 (*hitqaddāšû kî māḥār*) and 7:13 (*hitqaddĕšû lĕmāḥār*) suggest this. Elsewhere the purification procedure prepares Israel for a theophany (cf. Exod 19:10, 14), but here it prepares the community for the next day's cult-legal procedure, including the removal of the contaminating *ḥerem* (Josh 7:13-14); cf. Mitchell, *Together in the Land,* 71; H.-P. Müller, "*qdš*," *THAT* 2.605.

54. Theologically, the juxtaposition of *lākad* with Yahweh as subject (v. 14) and *lākad* Niphal in the report of lot-casting (vv. 15-18) implies that Yahweh is at work through the latter, impersonal process. The use of lots is not stipulated here, but their use in closely parallel procedures (1 Sam 10:20-21; 14:41-42) strongly suggests their use in Joshua 7. Later, Joshua casts lots to distribute the land (14:2; 15:1; chaps. 18, 19, and 21).

55. Cf. H. Gross, "*lkd*," *TDOT* 8.2-3. The verb plays a prominent role in Yahweh's war in Joshua (6:20; 8:19, 21; 10:1, 28, 32, 35, 37, 39, 42; 11:10, 12, 17; 15:16, 17; 19:47).

56. For a recent treatment of Israel's tribal structure, with particular attention to the nature of the conquest, see J. D. Martin, "Israel as a Tribal Society," in *The World of Ancient Israel* (ed. R. E. Clements; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 95-117.

the Valley of Achor (v. 24), where Joshua pronounces the death sentence, rhetorically punning on the root ʿ*ākar* "to bring trouble" (v. 25a): "Why did you bring trouble on us (ʿ*ăkartānû*)? The LORD is bringing trouble on you (*yaʿkorĕkā*)'today."[57] Strikingly, Achan's innocent victim, the entire community, stoned him to death, burned him with fire, then stoned everything else (25b).[58] Thus, Israel removed the *ḥerem*, source of their recent troubles, from their midst, and restored the community to ritual cleanness. Finally, they "raised over him (*wayyāqîmû*) a great heap of stones that remains to this day" (v. 26a), Yahweh's anger ended (v. 26a), and the name "trouble" (ʿ*ākôr*) stuck as the valley's name "to this day" (v. 26b).

What, then, did these stones mean? At the simplest level, the stone heap marks the gravesite of Achan, by ancient standards a humiliating form of burial apparently reserved for prominent rebels, such as Absalom (2 Sam 18:17), and enemies, such as the king of Ai (Josh 8:29; cf. Job 8:17).[59] Such burial mounds were common in ancient times and alerted passersby to the proximity of death and defilement. But Joshua's wordplay (v. 25) invests this particular heap with added meaning. It marks it as a monument to "double trouble"—the trouble that Achan caused Israel (defeat at Ai) and the trouble that Yahweh caused him (his execution). Achan's simple greed plunged Israel into near catastrophe,[60] soiling their holiness and, thus, spoiling their relationship with Yahweh. The loss of Yahweh's protective presence put the whole people and its destiny at grave risk. The secrecy makes it particularly fiendish: Israel cannot

57. Most likely, the Valley of Achor is the plain near present-day ʿEn-Musa (so M. Noth,, *Josua* [2d ed.; Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1953] 87-88) or one of the wadis that empties into the Arabah north of (but reasonably close to) Jericho; cf. Z. Kallai, *Historical Geography of the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1986) 118-21; J. Svensson, *Towns and Toponyms in the Old Testament with Special Emphasis on Joshua 14-21* (ConBOT 38; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1994) 148 and the flyleaf map locating the valley in modern Wadi Mukkalik; C. J. Pressler, "Achor," *ABD* 1.56.

58. The LXX omits v. 25bβ+γ, the concluding report that Israel "burned and stoned them" (i.e., Achan's family members and livestock), while the Syriac and Vulgate omit only v. 25bγ ("and they stoned them with stones"). Unless v. 25 is somehow corrupt, the MT seems to assume that the instructions to burn the guilty party with fire entail stoning as well, though v. 15 leaves the latter unstated.

59. E. Bloch-Smith ("Burials: Israelite," *ABD* 1.787) assumes the stones to be in a circle rather than a heap. The Assyrians accorded their defeated foes similar treatment; see K. L. Younger, Jr., *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing* (JSOTSup 98; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990) 224. Hess (*Joshua*, 155-56) provides additional examples. See also Gen 31:46, where a *gal ʾăbānîm* ("heap of stones") marks the touchy boundary between Jacob and Laban (cf. also the name *galʿēd* "heap of witness").

60. In his confession, Achan traced his action to covetousness (*wāʾeḥmĕdēm*, "I coveted," v. 21) a violation of the tenth commandment (Exod 20:17; Deut 5:21).

protect against the greed, since its existence only comes to light when unexpected disaster hits. Thus, the stones also remind Israel that it is by nature not a collection of individuals but a community a fragile, carefully woven fabric, in which the disobedience of one thread strains or tears at the integrity of the whole. Literarily, the Achan episode also anticipates the later altar episode (chap. 22), the investigation by west-bank tribes of possible apostasy by their east-bank relatives. The reappearance there of *mā'al* ("to break faith")[61] and the cry that "[Achan] did not perish alone for his iniquity!" (v. 22) reveal that the Achan affair taught Israel the deadly serious-ness of apostasy and the terrible corporate culpability that it entails.

　　　More important for our purposes, the Achan narrative also sig-nals something significant about how the book of Joshua regards Is-raelites and non-Israelites. The "trouble" Achan suffered was that, in not executing *ḥerem* in Jericho, he suffered the same fate as Jericho.[62] By stealing herem, he himself had become *ḥerem* and died its terrible fate. The remarkable thing, however, is that he died, while Rahab, the Canaanite originally destined for *ḥerem*, escaped. As Rowlett rightly shows, Rahab, the ultimate "outsider," becomes an "insider" in Israel by submitting to Yahweh's authority, while Achan, "the exemplary insider," makes himself an "outsider" by rejecting it.[63] Something significant emerges at this point. The fact that Achan's disobedience in effect superceded his ethnic membership in Israel implies that Yahweh reckons obedience more important than ethnic-ity.[64] Put differently, in Yahweh's eyes, to be "true Israel" is to fear God; to not fear God is in effect to renounce membership in true Israel. If so, the heap of stones at Trouble Valley addresses "potential Achans"[65] within Israel's ranks to put the fear of God into practice by doing what he commands. Literarily, this theme certainly anticipates the issue of obedience or disobedience so dominant in Joshua's fare-well speech (chap. 23) and his speech at the covenant renewal cere-mony (chap. 24). Finally, unlike Josh 3-4, chap. 7 establishes no institution or formal process to interpret these stones to future gen-erations. They may recognize them as a burial mound, perhaps of someone notorious, but they may not. Only the narrative, however, connects the grave with the evocative name, Valley of Achor, recalls Joshua's explanatory wordplay on *'ākar* ("to [bring] trouble"), and

　　　61. For the phrase *mā'al ma'al* ("to commit treachery"), see 22:16, 20, 31; for the noun *mā'al* ("treachery") alone, see 2:22. Cf. BDB 591; KB[3] 579-80.
　　　62. Cf. Cazeaux, *Le Refus de la guerre sainte*, 24.
　　　63. Rowlett, "Inclusion, Exclusion, and Marginality," 20, 22; cf. Howard, *Joshua*, 211: "Achan was expelled from Israel and treated as a Canaanite."
　　　64. Similarly, Stone, "Ethical and Apologetic Tendencies," 34-36.
　　　65. I owe this phrase to Rowlett, "Inclusion, Exclusion, and Marginality," 23.

suggests a possible pun between Achor/*'ākar* and the name Achan.[66]
The stones confirm the authenticity of the old story, but only the story
itself interprets the "great heap of stones . . . [that] still remains to
this day."

THE STONES IN THE MOUTH OF THE CAVE AT MAKKEDAH

> At sunset . . . they took [the five dead Amorite kings] down from the
> trees and threw them into the cave where they had hidden themselves;
> they set large stones against the mouth of the cave, which remain to
> this very day. (Josh 10:27)

This fourth and last stone configuration concludes Joshua 10.[67] Pan-
icked by Israel's peace treaty with Gibeon (chap. 9), five Amorite
kings had laid siege to it (10:1-5; cf. 9:1).[68] So Gibeon appealed to
Joshua for rescue (10:6), perhaps as treaty-partner, but Joshua acted
only after Yahweh promised victory: "Do not fear them, for I have
handed them over to you; not one of them shall stand before you"
(v. 8 NRSV).[69] His words echo earlier divine promises to Moses (Num

66. The LXX and Syriac consistently read *Achar* instead of Achan (Josh 7:1, 18-
20, 24; 22:20; 1 Chr 2:7), while the MT reads *Achar* only in 1 Chr 2:7. Hess explains that
"Achan" was the story's original name, "Achar" a nickname for Achan, derived from
the "trouble" (Heb. root *'kr*) that he caused Israel in the Valley of Achor; cf. R. S. Hess,
"Achan and Achor: Names and Wordplay in Joshua 7" *HAR* 14 (1994) 89-98. The ex-
planation seems likely for 1 Chr 2:7, but the MT of Joshua may perpetuate a copyist's
erroneous reading of an original final *r* as *n* (the Hebrew letters are easily confused).
In my view, the MT's persistent reading of Achan and its resistance to emendation to
enhance the wordplay on *'kr* commend its originality.

67. For a recent discussion of the structure and composition of chap. 10, see
J. Briend, "Josué 10: Une Conquête en morceaux," *Foi et Vie* 97/4 (1998) 55-65; cf. also
Fritz, *Josua*, 109-14; P. Weimar, "Die Jahwekriegerzählungen in Exodus 14, Josua 10,
Richter 4 and 1. Samuel 7," *Bib* 57 (1976) 51-62.

68. Undoubtedly, they believed that the alliance between Israel, conqueror of
Jericho and Ai, and Gibeon, a major city well known for its sizable army (10:2), had
shifted the regional balance of power against them. Certainly, Gibeon's location
"among" the Amorite cities (v. 1) exacerbated the threat. Verse 3 identifies the kings
and their cities: Adoni-zedek of Jerusalem, Hoham of Hebron, Piram of Jarmuth,
Japhia of Lachish, and Debir of Eglon. For background on Gibeon, see the convenient
overview in C. L. McCann, "Gibeon," *ABD* 2.1010-13; see also J. B. Pritchard (*Gibeon:
Where the Sun Stood Still* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962]), who excavated
the city. According to 9:17, "Gibeon" actually represented four Hivite cities: Gibeon,
Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kiriath-jearim. For a recent attempt to unravel the literary
and political prehistory of Joshua 9, see R. K. Sutherland, "Israelite Political Theories
in Joshua 9," *JSOT* 53 (1992) 65-74; cf. also A. D. H. Mayes, "Deuteronomy 29, Joshua
9, and the Place of the Gibeonites in Israel," in *Deuteronomium* (ed. N. Lohfink; BETL
68; Leuven: Peeters, 1985) 321-25.

69. Gibeon's self-designation as Joshua's "servants" suggests Israelite treaty ob-
ligations, although 9:15 omits the treaty's actual stipulations. Both Adoni-zedek's call
for a siege (v. 4) and Gibeon's plea for rescue (v. 6) invoke the roots *'lh* ("to come up")
and *'zr* ("to help"), literally implying that an affirmative Israelite answer to Gibeon's

21:34; Deut 3:2; cf. Josh 11:6) and to Joshua himself (1:5), thereby re-assuring him from both historical precedent and personal experi-ence.[70] Yahweh indeed miraculously routs the Amorites (10:10-15), but the five kings hide from Israel in a cave at Makkedah, some-where in Judah's northern or central lowlands (10:16-27).[71] When Israel discovers them,[72] Joshua first traps them inside by having large stones rolled over the cave mouth (vv. 17-19). Then he has the stones rolled back and the kings brought out (vv. 22-24a).[73]

To understand these stones, we must review the three phases of the dramatic closing scene. First, Joshua commands his officers to strike a symbolic pose—to put their feet on the necks of the prone kings (v. 24b). The Old Testament associates necks with strength,[74]

"come up" aimed to offset the effects of Adoni-zedek's "coming up." According to B. Halpern ("Gibeon: Israelite Diplomacy in the Conquest Era," *CBQ* 37 [1975] 303-16), Joshua 9-11 reflects a divide-and-conquer conquest strategy and commends itself as a credible historical source. In his view, through treaties with Gibeon and Shechem (Genesis 34), Israel separated Jerusalem and the southern city-states from their north-ern allies. This view, however, conflicts with biblical claims: first, in connecting Gene-sis 34 with the conquest era, and second, in attributing the Gibeonite treaty to Israelite strategy rather than Gibeonite trickery.

70. Concerning the last line of 10:8 ("not one of them shall stand before you"), compare MT *lō' ya'ămōd 'îš mēhem běpāneykā* ("not one of them shall stand before you," Josh 10:8b) and *lō' yityaṣṣēb 'îš lěpāneykā* " ("no one would be able to stand against you," 1:5a). For the use of roots '*md* Qal and ysb Hithpael together, see 2 Sam 18:30; 2 Chr 20:17; Hab 2:1. Strikingly, Yahweh applied that general promise in specific promises of victory prior to his conquests of Jericho (6:2) and Ai (8:1; cf. v. 18) and his defeat of the coalition of northern kings (11:6).

71. For extrabiblical examples of fleeing and hiding kings, see Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts*, 220-22. Biblical data locate Makkedah in the vicinity of Azekah, Lachish, and Libnah (Josh 10:10, 11, 29; 12:15-16; 15:10, 41), probably at modern Khir-bet el-Qom; see D. A. Dorsey, "The Location of Biblical Makkedah," *Tel Aviv* 7 (1980) 185-93. Other scholars regard the location as uncertain; compare W. R. Kotter, "Makkedah," *ABD* 4.478; Boling, *Joshua*, 281-82; against M. Noth ("Die fünf Könige in der Höhle von Makkeda," *Palästina-Jahrbuch* 33 [1946] 22-36), whose case for a loca-tion farther southeast disregards biblical geographical data and relies too heavily on dubious data in Eusebius.

72. The phrase *wayyuggad lě* ("it was told to X") often reports discoveries of se-cret actions of enemies or potential discoveries by military intelligence; cf. Exod 14:5; Judg 9:25, 47; 1 Sam 19:19; 23:7; 27:4; 2 Sam 10:17//2 Chr 19:17; 1 Kgs 1:51; 2:29, 41; 6:13; dEsa 7:2.

73. The narrative leaves unclear the details of Joshua's presumed travel from Gil-gal (v. 16) to the Israelite camp at Makkedah (v. 21). It assumes that he reached the lat-ter either between vv. 16 and 17 (i.e., before the message concerning the kings arrived) or between vv. 19 and 20 (i.e., after he commanded hot pursuit of the fleeing enemy troops). In my view, the latter makes better narrative sense. In any case, the text clearly presents him at Makkedah in vv. 21-27.

74. See Job 39:19; 41:22; Song 4:4; cf. 7:4. In addition, "to cause [one's] neck to come" (*bô'* Hiphil + *ṣawwā'r*) means "to exert effort, apply strength" to a physical task (Neh 3:5).

and control of the neck by hand or yoke symbolizes subjection.[75]
Thus, through this gesture (one also attested in Ancient Near Eastern
texts and wall reliefs)[76] the officers perform a symbolic action, acting
out what this event means—the defeat of the five kings.[77] Second,
Joshua addresses the officers, who are still holding their symbolic
pose (v. 25):

> Do not be afraid or dismayed; be strong and courageous; for thus the
> LORD will do to all the enemies against whom you fight.

The prohibition-pair "do not be afraid or dismayed" (*’al-tîr’û wě’al-
tēḥāttû* invokes the encouragement formula with which commanders
typically exhort their troops before waging Yahweh's war (Deut 1:21;
2 Chr 32:7; cf. Deut 1:29; 31:8; Ezek 2:6).[78] The command-pair "be
strong and courageous" (*ḥizqû wě’imṣû*) restates the prohibition-pair
positively: "don't fear; be resolutely brave." Strikingly, this latter
pair echoes Joshua's own personal past. He himself received the
same charge on three occasions: from Moses and Yahweh at his own
commissioning (Deut 31:6, 7, 23)[79] from Yahweh after succeeding

---

75. Compare Gen 49:8 [‘*ōrep*]; Deut 28:48 and Jer 27:2, 8, 11, 12 [*sawwā’r*; Ps
105:18 [*nepeš*]). By the same token, to break off a yoke is to regain one's freedom (Gen
27:40; Isa 10:27; 52:2; Jer 28:11; 30:8). Compare also the idiom "to stiffen the neck" (‘*ōrep*
+ *qšh* Hiphil "to make hard") as symbolic of self-assertive resistance to repentance
(2 Chr 36:13; Neh 9:16, 17, 29; Jer 7:26; 17:23; 19:15).

76. For example, the annals of the Middle Assyrian king, Tukulti-Ninurta I (ca.
1242-1206 B.C.E.), report his humiliation of a Babylonian royal captive, Kaštiliaš IV: "I
captured Kaštiliaš, king of the Kassites (alive). I trod with my feet upon his lordly
neck as though it were a footstool" (quoted from Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts,*
317 n. 86). A fragmentary text at Karnak says of the Egyptian king Ramesses II: "He
has trampled underfoot the rebellious foreign lands who have attacked his bound-
aries" (quoted from ibid., 221). For examples of the gesture from Egyptian and Me-
sopotamian reliefs, see *ANEP*, nos. 308, 319, 345, 351, 355, and 393. See also the
figurine pictured in R. W. Vunderink, "Foot," *ISBE* 2.332.

77. Briend, "Josué 10," 61; cf. 2 Sam 22:39 = Ps 18:38; 47:3; cf. 8:3; 1 Cor 15:25, 27;
Eph 1:22. Compare also the gesture of bowing at someone's feet to symbolize submis-
sion to a social superior or victor (Ruth 2:10; 2 Kgs 4:37; Esth 8:3; Isa 60:14).

78. Derousseaux (*Le crainte de Dieu dans l'AT*, 90-93) suggests that such pairs prob-
ably expand on the brief, original phrase "Don't be afraid," typical of oracles of salva-
tion; cf. H. F. Fuhs, "*yr’*," *TDOT* 6.304-5. Yahweh says the same to Joshua before the
defeat of Ai (Josh 8:1) and to Judah before its encounter with Transjordanian invaders
(2 Chr 20:15, 17). Elsewhere the phrase appears in David's exhortations to Solomon con-
cerning the building of the Temple (1 Chr 22:13; 28:20) and Yahweh's oracles of salvation
to the exiles about their return home (Isa 51:7; Jer 30:10; 46:27). This diverse usage un-
dermines Derousseaux's suggestion (p. 97) that the "fear not" component derives from
the ancient battle oracle; see ibid., 305 ("there does not appear to be enough evidence
to establish 'fear not' as a distinctive and original holy war formula. . . . [T]he exhorta-
tion . . . is based on the experience of Yahweh at work in history").

79. In fact, Moses' exhortation in Deut 31:7 carries out an earlier command by
Yahweh that he "encourage and strengthen" Joshua (Deut 3:28; *ḥzq* and *’mṣ,* both Piel).

Moses (Josh 1:6, 7, 9), and from the east-bank tribal leaders shortly thereafter (1:18).[80] Thus, here Joshua invokes on his subordinates the exhortation he himself had received, perhaps an indication of his having attained full maturity as leader. In short, through symbolism and the language of Yahweh's war, Joshua appeals for bravery by his officers in the battles ahead. As if pointing to the cowering kings, he urges fearless confidence that "the LORD will do the very same thing [*kākâ*]" (my translation) to all their future foes.[81]

Third, as he had done to the king of Ai (8:23, 29), Joshua executes the five and hangs their corpses on five nearby trees (v. 26). An Assyrian parallel that Younger cites suggests that such hangings were typical of ancient warfare,[82] but their removal before dark here specifically obeys Moses (Deut 21:2:2-23).[83] Joshua has the five corpses thrown back into the cave where the kings originally sought safety (v. 27; cf. v. 16). Surely this marks an ironic twist: the cave in which they hid to preserve life now preserves them in death. Once again, large stones seal the cave, making it a tomb—stones "that remain to this very day."

What did these stones mean? First, like the stone heap at Achor, they marked a burial site (in this case, a tomb) of fallen opponents of Yahweh and Israel. Thus, they constituted a monument to a decisive past victory that Yahweh won for Israel—in my view, the one that the larger context portrays as the decisive turning point of the conquest. Second, in light of the symbolic scene enacted by the cave, they also constituted a monument to Yahweh's defeat of all Israel's remaining enemies; literarily, they anticipate the climactic victories that follow. Observe that this scene records Joshua's final words as

80. Compare also Hezekiah's encouragement of his officers before confronting invaders (2 Chr 32:7); David's exhortations of Solomon concerning the temple (1 Chr 22:13; 28:20); and oracles of salvation spoken by Yahweh (Ps 27:14; Isa 35:3-4); cf. 2 Chr 11:17. That the formula addresses people in besieged cities (both real and metaphorical) suggests possible unique usage as an encouragement formula in that setting (Ps 27:14; Nah 2:1; cf. Ps 31:24).

81. Strikingly, the motive clause (v. 25b) reshapes into a promise of future success a phrase that elsewhere forms a question ("Why has Yahweh done this?") by which visitors seek an explanation for the horrible devastation of Israel and/or Jerusalem (Deut 29:24; 1 Kgs 9:8; 2 Chr 7:21; Jer 22:8; cf. Hos 10:15). For the use of *kākâ*, see Waltke and O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §39.3.4e; Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew,* §102h ("*kākâ* is *retrospective* [italics theirs], but has an intensive force").

82. Concerning the rulers of Edom, the Assyrian king Sennacherib says: "the governors (and) nobles who had sinned I put to death; and I hung their corpses on poles around the city"; quoted from Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts*, 223.

83. The purpose of publicly hanging the corpses of enemies is uncertain. Perhaps the victors simply sought to humiliate their victims further. The comment that "anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse" (Deut 21:23) suggests that in Israel the practice sought to put the results of divine judgment on display.

supreme commander (v. 25); [84] his next address will be as distribu-
tor of inheritances—and not until 17:15. Syntactically, the name
Makkedah emphatically opens the following pericope (v. 28), a hint
that the cave episode sparked the wildfire that swept all of southern
Canaan into Israelite hands (vv. 28-43), a *Blitzkrieg* whose success
chap. 11 narrates and chap. 12 celebrates. [85] And in this scene, beside
these stones, the motif of "feet" reappears (v. 24) to form a nice in-
clusio with the priests' "feet" at the Jordan crossing (3:13, 15; 4:18). [86]
Together they bracket chaps. 3-10 with the theme of Yahweh's tri-
umphs over his enemies. Third, through the testimony formula, the
stones offer tangible evidence of past reality to reassure readers that
Yahweh will vanquish *their* enemies, too. Interpreted by the narra-
tive, they remind later Israel that Yahweh is indeed a living, power-
ful God ready to win new victories on their behalf.

Finally, I propose a new thesis: namely, that, besides symbolizing
Yahweh's past and future victories, these stones also signal Yahweh's
acceptance of the Gibeonites within Israel. This thesis emerges from
a comparison of the episodes involving Achan (chap. 7) and Gibeon
(chaps. 9-10). In short, I argue that Israel's mistaken treaty with
Gibeon (a clear violation of Deut 20:17) leads the reader to expect a
replay of the divine wrath that befell Israel at Ai. [87] Josh 9:14b even
seems to confirm this expectation, reporting that, in testing the
Gibeonite claims, Israel "did not ask direction from the LORD." As
Israel arrives to rescue Gibeon (10:6-7), the reader expects the un-
veiling of Yahweh's anger against the treaty through a defeat. But
Yahweh surprises the reader: before Israel can attack, he suddenly
breaks his long silence, [88] promising victory rather than venting his

84. Indeed, outside of 11:6 (see below), the narrative reports no other direct
speech through the end of the conquest narrative (12:24).

85. By echoing Joshua's "Don't be afraid" (*'al-tîrû*) in 10:25, Yahweh's promise of
victory (*'al-tîrā*) in 11:6 dooms the northern kings to the same fate as the Makkedah Five.

86. Between chaps. 4 and 10, the only other mention of "feet" concerns the com-
mand for Joshua to remove the sandals from his feet because of holy ground (5:15) and
the report concerning the worn-out sandaled feet of the Gibeonites (9:5).

87. Among recent commentators, only two apparently recognize the covenant
with Gibeon as a violation of Deuteronomy 20; see L. D. Hawk, "The Problem with Pa-
gans," in *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies: Identity and the Book* (ed. T. K. Beale and D. M.
Gunn; London: Routledge, 1996) 156 ("Honoring the covenant with Gibeon will mean
failure to abide by a component of the covenant with Yahweh"); and Stone, "Ethical
and Apologetic Tendencies," 34 ("Joshua 9 represents a violation of holy war"). For an
intertextual reading of Deuteronomy 20 and Joshua 9, see M. Fishbane, *Biblical Inter-
pretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984) 206-7.

88. The book reports no speech by Yahweh after his promise of victory against
Ai (8:18) and his promise of victory against the Amorite coalition (10:8). In other
words, he remained silent throughout the treaty negotiations (chap. 9). Concerning
the linguistic structure of chap. 11, see K. L. Younger, "The Conquest of the South (Jos
10, 28-39)," *BZ* 39 (1995) 255-64; see also his *Ancient Conquest Accounts,* 226-28,251—

anger (10:8). The five kings and all southern Canaan falls (10:9-43), and a later promise (11:6) similarly precedes the fall of the north (11:7-15). In sum, I argue that, in snatching victory from the jaws of expected defeat, Yahweh shows his acceptance of Gibeon's survival and that he imputes no guilt to Israel.[89] Now, if my thesis holds, it would lessen the tension in the book of Joshua between the deuteronomic mandate to annihilate all inhabitants and the continuation of Rahab and Gibeon in Israel.[90] It would suggest the book's own awareness of divine mercy toward Israel—and Gibeon, too—mercy presumably in harmony with the book's other allegedly contradictory claims.

CONCLUSION

"The book of Joshua . . . is an enigma," writes Hawk, which leaves the reader wondering "How do the pieces fit?"[91] The present study has yielded some interesting results and suggested how at least

---

53. According to Hoffmeier, the itineraries in Josh 10:28-42 and 11:1-14 reflect Israelite borrowing of "the Egyptian daybook scribal tradition" to record military events; cf. J. K. Hoffmeier, "The Structure of Joshua 1-11 and the Annals of Thutmose III," in *Faith, Tradition and History: Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context* (ed. A. R. Millard, J. K. Hoffmeier, and D. W. Baker; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994) 165-79 (quotation, p. 176).

89. For a similar reading of chaps. 7-10, see Stone, "Ethical and Apologetic Tendencies," 34-36. As noted above, he believes that the text contrasts the Gibeonites' "positive response to Yahweh's action on Israel's behalf" (p. 34) with the Canaanite kings' resistance to it in order to promote a "nonmilitaristic, nonterritorial actualization of the text" (p. 36), in order for the reader to respond affirmatively to Yahweh's actions. More importantly, he argues (pp. 34-36) that the deuteronomists later reshaped the finished book of Joshua to promote the law as the object of Israel's acceptance or resistance. For a creative, alternate interpretation, see Polzin (*Moses and the Deuteronomist,* 117-21), who reads Joshua 9 as a "brilliant narrative meditation" (p. 119) on Deuteronomy 29 in which "the Gibeonite story plays out once more the main lines of the story of Israel's covenant with the LORD in the Book of Deuteronomy" (p. 120). In other words, the Gibeonite-Israelite relationship portrays the relationship between Israel and Yahweh: "As God once mercifully dealt with the deceitful Israelites, so Joshua now does with the Gibeonites, who are an accurate personification of the relationship between God and Israel as described in the Book of Deuteronomy" (p. 120). Whether or not his theory holds (I have my own reservations), his suggested connection between Deut 29:10 ("the aliens who are in your camp, both those who cut your wood and those who draw your water") and the Gibeonites of Joshua is intriguing. The phrases "cutters of wood" and "drawers of water" only appear in these two contexts. Perhaps by invoking these phrases from Deuteronomy 29, Joshua 9 subtly appeals to the former to justify the sparing of the Gibeonites.

90. So Hawk, *Every Promise Fulfilled; Mitchell, Together in the Land*; et al. Note, however, the caution concerning exaggerating Joshua's inner tensions voiced by Gunn, "Joshua and Judges," 107-10.

91. Hawk, *Every Promise Fulfilled*, 24.

some pieces fit. Two indicators suggest coherence at the literary level: the repetition of the stones motif itself, especially since three of the four concern graves; and the inclusio formed by the motif of feet (chaps. 3-4; 10:24) that stamps chaps. 3-10 with the theme of Yahweh's conquest. The Gilgal/Jordan formations signal the beginning of the conquest, the Makkedah pile its imminent completion. Regarding ideology, I suggest that the address to the peoples (4:24) implies divine openness to them, while the victory at Gibeon hints at divine acceptance of the Gibeonites. If this is true, my argument would be that, besides reporting the survival of some foreigners, the book also may quietly advocate them as divinely-sanctioned exceptions to the deuteronomic mandate. This implies the intention on the part of the book's compilers to advance this argument. Literarily, the stones motif sounds certain important theological themes. First, these monuments bear witness to Yahweh's awesome power and to his victories on behalf of Israel. The stones at Gilgal and the Jordan recall that, as Yahweh dried up the Red Sea to let Israel out of Egypt, so he stopped up the Jordan to let Israel into Canaan. The stones at Makkedah attest his marvelous defeat of attacking foreign foes, and the heap at Trouble Valley confirms his defeat of an internal, treacherous one. The Makkedah stones also anticipate the fall of Israel's remaining enemies. In short, these stones memorialize Yahweh's great stunning triumphs.

Second, they underscore the cruciality of Israel's obedience to Yahweh. The Gilgal formation calls Israel to fear Yahweh, and the Trouble Valley memorial warns of personal catastrophe if instead they break faith. Indeed, Israelite ethnicity entitles Troublemakers to no special treatment; on the contrary, Yahweh's burning anger still finds satisfaction only in their execution by fire. Third, they remind Israel of their corporate nature as a people and of their vulnerability to treachery in the ranks. They bear sad witness to the grave communal contamination caused by one Israelite's sin and the alienation of God from the community that results. They call Israel to increased vigilance and self-policing: to root out the Achans before disaster strikes, as they do with the suspicious altar (chap. 22). Put positively, they challenge Israel to fear God so that his anger never needs to send judgment. Finally, the testimony formula "to this day" permits the stones, tangible testimony of Yahweh's past deeds, to address readers in the writer's day.[92] Literarily, those

92. See Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 25: "The phrase 'to this day' refers to the narrator's time and not to that when the events described took place. By mentioning their own period, narrators divert attention from the stratum of the narrated events to that of their own time."

words assert that the story happened there, where the readers live, and hence speaks a word from God to their hopes, their dreams, and their fears. The text is not hawking bus tours of ancient monuments or pieces of historic stones: "Here, old stones . . . have a look . . . no charge to look!" It points to the still-visible stones so that readers will not forget the mighty acts of God done there. This is what intrigues me here: cleverly, subtly, the writer (or editor) practices a simple form of biblical theology—the theological interpretation of past events to illumine the present day.

And he is a model for all believing scholars. As the new millennium dawns, the same task beckons us. Into our hands God has entrusted something tangible: the ancient literature that we are privileged to read in its original languages. He has graciously called us to ensure that our students and readers remember that its meaning "remains to *this* day." This is why we labored through piles of vocabulary cards, memorized paradigms and charts, and learned German. This is why we hone the ability to sit for long periods (what George Ladd once called *Sitzfleisch*) and why we work long hours and lose much sleep. This is why we offer to God our bodies as a living sacrifice—our eyes to read, our minds to think, our hands to write, and our mouths to speak. This is why we spend our money on books, why we still treasure the biblical metanarrative, why we lobby our deans for more study time, and why we long for sabbaticals. Like the biblical writers, we fear the harm to God's people if preoccupation with spiritual highs means to ignore, misunderstand, or forget the Bible. Like the anonymous colleagues behind Joshua, we are the keepers and teachers of biblical theology, called to instruct all living generations in the Bible and through the Bible to promote the fear of God.

In one of his parables, Safed the Sage tells about visiting a simple monument across from the railroad station in a small Kansas town where his train had stopped for lunch.[93] It consisted of a vertical white post holding a drawbar and safety coupler from a railroad car, and a simple inscription below read, "Lest We Forget." Safed suspected that this was the town from which the inventor of the safety coupler hailed and that this was his memorial. But when he inquired, two locals said they'd never even seen it, and a third said he once knew its meaning but had forgotten it. As the train carried him away, Safed mused on how many human fingers, hands, and lives the safety coupler had spared. He imagined the lost sleep and financial

---

93. In reality, Safed was the creation of Chicago pastor and Abraham Lincoln scholar William E. Barton, who published a series of columns in the early years of the *Christian Century*.

sacrifice of its inventor—labors that, notwithstanding the plea "Lest We Forget," a later generation overlooked or could not remember. Then Safed writes:

> And I looked out of the car window, and I beheld a Church, and upon the Church was a Spire, and upon the Spire was a Cross. And I thought of the multitudes who continually pass it by, and I was grieved in mine heart; for I said, Among them are those who say, I have never seen it; and others say, I have seen it, but what it meaneth, behold, I know not. And others say, Behold, I once knew, but I have forgotten.[94]

The danger of such historical Alzheimers threatens each new generation but particularly our postmodern one. Thus, a new millennium summons all of us to be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks, "Say, what do these stones mean?"

94. William Barton, *Safed and Keturah* (Louisville: John Knox, 1978) 52-53. For a recent collection of Safed's parables, see G. Rosell and S. Flewelling (eds.), *Parables of a Country Parson* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999).