PALESTINIAN ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE DATE OF THE CONQUEST: DO TELLS TELL TALES?

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The date of Israel's conquest of Canaan is predicated basically on the assumption that it was a military enterprise which, therefore, must have resulted in extensive destruction throughout the land. This being so, it is reasonable to expect that archaeological research would attest to this destruction. The date of the strata associated with the destruction would then yield the date of the conquest. The fallacy of this hypothesis is that the OT record does not allow for a conquest involving massive devastation; in fact, it takes quite the opposite position. It follows that any archaeological attestation of destruction cannot be used to date the conquest. Such dating must be deduced from the biblical literary data themselves, a process which allows a date compatible with the early date of the Exodus.

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IT may seem to be an exercise in futility and boring redundancy to explore once more the question of the date of Israel's conquest of Canaan under Joshua. The two prevailing views, that of an early fourteenth century[1] and that of a mid- to late-thirteenth century date,[2] appear to be so firmly entrenched among the scholarly segments which hold them that there is no further need for discussion.

[1]See conveniently John J. Davis and John C. Whitcomb, *A History of Israel from Conquest to Exile* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980) 17-18; E. H. Merrill, *An Historical Survey of the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1966, 1979) 106-8, 155; Leon Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970) 94-101.

[2]John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981) 130-33. Bright even appears to opt for a twelfth century date now (p. 133). Martin Noth (*The History of Israel* [New York: Harper & Row, 1960] 81) admits that the conquest could have begun as early as the Amarna period (ca. 1375 B.C.) but insists that it ended as late as 1100 B.C. For a 1230 B.C. date, see H. H. Rowley, *From Joseph to Joshua* (London: Oxford University, 1950, 1970) 133. Of course, virtually no critical scholars

Indeed, it may well be that the opposing schools of thought can never find rapprochement, particularly if archaeological evidence continues to be adduced and interpreted by both sides in support of their respective conclusions. The thesis of this paper is that while both parties in the debate have cited and utilized the same evidence to prove vastly different propositions, the biblical data themselves have strangely been largely overlooked. What does the OT have to say about any reasonable expectation that archaeology can shed light on the perplexing problem of dating the Conquest? Does it possibly suggest a *via media*, that archaeology, far from being friend or foe, has nothing at all to say to the question?[3]

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A few years ago Bruce Waltke pointed in the right direction when he argued that one should not expect archaeological documentation for an early or any other date for the Conquest since it was clearly Joshua's policy not to destroy the population centers but only to "take" (לכד) them.[4] That is, the biblical account itself presupposes an interpretation quite to the contrary of that held by the vast majority of both conservative and liberal scholars.[5] Indeed, he says, if

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view the conquest as a homogeneous, united effort by twelve tribes under one leader and in one comparatively brief period of time.

[3]This has been expressed recently by J. Maxwell Miller but only by maintaining that "there was never an Israelite invasion of the sort envisioned in Josh. 1-12" ("Archaeology and the Israelite Conquest of Canaan: Some Methodological Observations," *PEQ* 109 [1977] 92). He correctly observes that there is little or no archaeological evidence for the conquest, no matter the date, but concludes that since the OT narrative presupposes vast destruction that narrative itself cannot be correct. Our thesis is that both the narrative and the "negative archaeological evidence" (Miller, 92) are correct when correctly interpreted.

[4]Bruce K. Waltke, "Palestinian Artifactual Evidence Supporting the Early Date for the Exodus," *BSac* 129 (1972) 35. M. F. Unger had pointed out the same thing nearly thirty years ago but did not follow up on his observations. See his *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954) 163-64.

[5]Thus, H. T. Frank (*Bible, Archaeology, and Faith* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1971] 95) states flatly, ". . the conquest was sparked by a warlike invasion of the central highlands leaving in its wake a series of smoldering ruins where once-proud Canaanite cities had stood." Among these he includes Hebron, Eglon, Jarmuth, and Lachish. An evangelical scholar, R. K. Harrison, likewise assumes such a position when he points out that "Archaeological excavations along the route of the occupation have afforded clear indications of violence and destruction during the second half of the thirteenth century B.C. . . .," a period he associates with the Joshua conquest (*Old Testament Times* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970] 175-76). Similarly, K. A. Kitchen, who usually places the biblical testimony above any other, argues for a late exodus and conquest precisely on archaeological grounds. See his *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (London: Tyndale, 1966) 61-69.

the evidence were to indicate widespread and massive destruction of Canaanite sites in the early fourteenth century, the traditional conquest period, it would fly in the face of the biblical statements and would pose no end of embarrassment to the traditional view. On the other hand, such destruction, amply attested everywhere in the thirteenth century, can be attributed to the Joshua campaigns only by denying the clear biblical witness.

Though Waltke's suggestions were correct he did not pursue them fully nor make a convincing case exegetically for their relevance to the issue. In fact, he went on to argue that archaeology has validity when interpreted correctly, a point which is undeniable, but he appears to have failed to appreciate the two-edged nature of the archaeological evidence from most of the sites adduced in support of either date. When equally eminent and competent scholars can look at artifactual data and come to diametrically opposite conclusions based on them, it might be time to abandon the pursuit and follow up on Waltke's own suggestion that the biblical testimony and it alone is adequate to provide satisfying answers.[6]

THE MOSAIC CONQUEST POLICY

Central to the promise of YHWH to Israel concerning the land which he would give them in Canaan was the fact that it would become their property virtually intact.[7] They would need to fight for

[6]This paper will make no attempt to relate the date of the conquest to that of the exodus though we are persuaded that such a connection only confirms the position taken here that the conquest began ca. 1400 B.C. Neither biblical nor archaeological evidence militates against the early (mid-fifteenth century) date for the exodus. See now John J. Bimson, *Redating the Exodus and Conquest*, JSOT Supplement Series 5 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978) *passim*. Bimson in fact argues for a slightly earlier date than that of most conservative scholars.

[7]Only Canaanite sites will be considered here in detail since Canaan is specified as the land of inheritance to be given to Israel with ready-built structures. Of non-Canaanite cities, only the following in Transjordan are named in the records as having been either taken or destroyed: Heshbon (Num 21:25) and Aroer (Deut 2:36). Though Nelson Glueck's allegation that the Transjordan contained no sedentary population from ca. 1900-1300 was at one time almost universally accepted, recent research at Tell Hesban (Heshbon) indicates to some scholars that the site was occupied by people of some culture during the Late Bronze period. If this is correct it could, therefore, have been taken by the Israelites at 1400 B.C. See Bimson, *Redating*, 72. The OT narrative does not indicate that Israel destroyed Heshbon but, to the contrary, "took" (לכד) it and "dwelt ... in Heshbon" (Num 21:25). One should not expect archaeological confirmation or denial of this. Aroer (now ʿAraʿir) was explored by E. Olávarri in 1964 and he showed that the site, though abandoned throughout the MB period, was occupied continuously in the LB through the mid-ninth century ("Sondages à ʿArôʿer sur l'Arnon," *RB* 72 [1965] 91). This of course supports the OT picture of the "taking"

it, of course, but in only exceptional cases would it be necessary for them to destroy its cities and towns physically.[8]

The first statement of this policy is in the Book of the Covenant where, in Exod 23:24, YHWH commands Israel to put the Canaanite gods under the חָרֶם and to destroy their מַצֵּבוֹת. There is no word here of the destruction of cities. In fact, the passage goes on with the promise of YHWH to drive the inhabitants of the land out gradually so that the land will not become uninhabitable (vv 23-30).[9]

En route to Canaan Moses reminded the people once again of the policy to be implemented in conquering and occupying the land (Num 33:50-56). They must drive out the inhabitants, destroy their cult objects, and take possession of the land. There is not a word about the destruction of the cities and/or buildings.

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of the city but not its destruction and means that Aroer, like Heshbon, can say nothing of the conquest date.

Moses' rehearsal of events in Transjordan describes the disposition of Heshbon, Aroer, and the other cities by saying "we took (לכד) all [Sihon's] cities at that time and totally destroyed (נחרם) each 'city of men' (עִיר מְתִים) together with the women and children. . . ." (Deut 2:34). Since women and children are mentioned together, עִיר מְתִים can only refer to the male population. Again, there is no evidence of material devastation (see also Deut 3:5-6).

The only other relevant non-Canaanite towns are the Philistine cities Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron, all of which were only "taken" (לכד), not destroyed, and not until after Joshua's death (Judg 1:18).

As for the cities of the Negev, only Arad and Hormah are mentioned by name (Num 21:1-3) and only the latter is said to have been destroyed (cf. Judg 1:17). Y. Aharoni has identified Arad with Tel Malḥata and Hormah with Tel Masos and has assigned both to the Hyksos (MB IIb) period ("Nothing Early and Nothing Late: Re-Writing Israel's Conquest," *BA* 29 [1976] 71). He maintains that there is no evidence of LB habitation of the Negev and so views the biblical conquest narrative as a conflation of traditions which include a Middle Bronze Age attack on Arad and Hormah by one or more tribes of Israel but having nothing to do with the conquest originally (p. 73).

[8]Another factor that should be mentioned is the expectation voiced by some scholars that Israelite seizure and occupation of Canaanite cities should be reflected by a cultural transition in each case. That is, Israel's imposition of its own material civilization upon existing Canaanite sites should be evident at 1400-1375 if the early date and the OT's own picture of the conquest are correct. However, most cultural historians recognize that there is virtually no difference between the material culture of the Hebrews and that of the Canaanites, so that one would be unable to tell where the one began and the other ended apart from decisive proof that a Hebrew destruction of a Canaanite site introduced a new occupation. But since our very argument is that the transition occurred at ca. 1400 and did not involve destruction, there can be no evidence archaeologically of a new, intrusive Hebrew culture. See, e.g., Frank, *Bible, Archaeology, and Faith*, 102.

[9]This implies also that not all the inhabitants of the land, even the Canaanites, were to be placed under the חֵרֶם. There was a principle of selectivity even in this policy. For the theological significance of חרם see L. J. Wood, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. by R. L. Harris, *et al.* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), s.v. *חרם, 741-42.

In the reaffirmation of the covenant in the plains of Moab, Moses picks up the theme of conquest and reiterates the method to be followed in its execution. He states that the ancient promises made to the fathers are about to be fulfilled and that these include the possession and occupation of cities which they had not built as well as the seizure of houses, cisterns, vineyards, and olive-trees, all intact (Deut 6:10-11). They will not be required to destroy the cities of the land physically and then to rebuild them, but YHWH will graciously allow them to destroy or drive out the population and retain for their own use the abandoned and undamaged properties. The exception, of course, will be the pagan altars, מַצֵּבוֹת, אֲשֵׁרִים, and images (Deut 7:5; 12:2-4), all of which must be placed under חֵרֶם as Moses had previously instructed.

Other examples of the promise are in Deut 19:1-2 where, in connection with the establishment of the three cities of refuge in Canaan, Moses relates that they will simply be appropriations of Canaanite cities already existing and undamaged following the cutting off of their inhabitants.[10] Also very instructive in this respect is the "Manual of War" of Deuteronomy 20. It is here, if anywhere, that regulation concerning the disposition of conquered cities and peoples ought to be found.

The instruction is as follows. First of all, those cities which are "far off" (i.e., non-Canaanite) must be given an opportunity to become tributary to Israel. If they refuse to surrender, they will be besieged and, after capitulating, the male population must be totally destroyed. The women, children, cattle, and spoil, however, may be

[10]These cities are Kedesh of Naphtali, Shechem, and Hebron (Josh 20:7). Nothing is related of a destruction or capture of Kedesh or Shechem by Israel in the conquest, but Hebron, as we shall see, was certainly not destroyed (p. 116). Kedesh (modern Tell Abu Qudeis, 7 miles NNW of Hazor) was occupied in the LB period, with no evidence of destruction until well into the Iron Age (1200-1150). See B. Mazar, "The Sanctuary of Arad and the Family of Hobab the Kenite," *JNES* 24 (1965) 301, n. 21. Archaeology thus does not contradict the statement of Deut 19:1-2 that Israel, having defeated the Canaanites, will "succeed them and dwell in their cities," three of which are the cities of refuge. As to Shechem, it is well known that it fell to the Ḫabiru as attested in EA 289 (see W. F. Albright, "Akkadian Letters," in *ANET*, 489): "Or shall we do like Lab'ayu, who gave the land of Shechem to the 'Apiru?" While one no doubt should not make the facile equation Ḫapiru = Hebrew, here at least it is tempting to see something of Joshua's activity. In any event, as E. F. Campbell and J. F. Ross suggest, "The Late Bronze inhabitants of the site were content merely to re-use and rebuild the structures of their predecessors" ("The Excavation of Shechem and the Biblical Tradition," *Biblical Archaeologist Reader*, 2, ed. by D. N. Freedman and E. F. Campbell [Garden City: Doubleday, 1964] 283). These same scholars are struck by the absence of destruction at any reasonable period of the conquest and suggest that its capture "was achieved without resort to force of arms" (p. 284), precisely the point of the OT narrator.

retained as booty. But there is no word about the destruction of the material city itself. Presumably it is captured and preserved intact. On the other hand, the Canaanite cities are to be given no opportunity to become subject or client states, but their populations must be placed under חֵרֶם. Again, nothing is said of reducing even Canaanite cities to rubble as normal policy. In fact, the opposite is indicated. A city under siege, whether Canaanite or not, must not suffer even the loss of its fruit trees, for the tree is innocent—it is not a man that it should be destroyed (v 19)!

JOSHUA'S STRATEGY OF CONQUEST

The story of the conquest, which makes up the bulk of the book of Joshua, reveals the implementation of this policy first enunciated by Moses. The exceptions, such as Jericho, are always singled out, and their destruction is usually narrated in some detail.[11] These will be considered as a group at a later point.

The southern campaign

Following the successful division of the land of Canaan in the so-called Central Campaign, Joshua and Israel were confronted by an Amorite coalition of city-states consisting of Jerusalem, Hebron, Yarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon. The encounter occurred at Gibeon, six miles northwest of Jerusalem, a city which the Amorites had determined to punish because of its treacherous alliance with Israel (Josh 10:4). As a result of this covenant, Israel was obligated to come to Gibeon's assistance, and so the battle was joined. The result was a smashing victory for Israel, a triumph made possible because "YHWH fought for Israel" in holy war (10:14).[12]

The followup, however, is the significant aspect of the story, for it reveals the attitude that Joshua took toward hostile cities. After

[11]The instructions about Jericho's destruction are very explicit and interesting. Joshua says that it "shall be devoted (חרם), it *and everything in it*" with the exception of Rahab (Josh 6:17). The result was that "they burned the *city* with fire *and everything in it*" (v 24). In both statements the destruction of the city is distinguished from the destruction of everything in it because, as we shall see, "city" by itself usually means the population. This is seen also in the case of Ai ("I have given to you the king of Ai, his people, *his city*, and his land" [Josh 8:1; see also 8:8, 19]).

[12]Cities such as Gibeon which, according to the biblical narrative, were spared destruction by Israel may still have been destroyed by others at the same time or at other times. What might then appear to be attributable to Israel should be assigned to some other cause. As for Gibeon itself, no evidence exists of its destruction throughout the LB—Iron II periods (1500-600 B.C.). This is in keeping with the OT narrative which specifies that Joshua spared the city. See J. B. Pritchard, *Gibeon: Where the Sun Stood Still* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1962, 156-61).

briefly returning to camp at Gilgal, Joshua set out for Makkedah, located perhaps between Lachish and Eglon, where he first confined the Amorite kings in a cave (10:18). Next he ran down the enemy soldiers and slaughtered them (10:20). Then he returned to Makkedah and executed the imprisoned kings (10:28).[13] The following steps were undertaken in its capture: (1) Joshua "took" it. The verb used here, לכד, is a technical term which describes in a general way the capture of a person or place but which in no way implies destruction. In fact, when destruction is also involved לכד is accompanied by a clarifying statement to that effect. For example, Josh 8:21 says, "When Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken (לכד) the city [of Ai] *and that smoke was going up from the city* . . ." (see also vv 8, 19). Likewise, Josh 10:1: "Now Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem heard that Joshua had taken (לכד) Ai *and totally destroyed it* (החרים). . . ." Most instructive is the account of the fall of Hazor (11:10-13): "At that time Joshua turned back and captured (לכד) Hazor and put its king to the sword. . . . Everyone in it they put to the sword. They totally destroyed them (החרים), not sparing anything that breathed, *and he burned up Hazor itself.* Joshua took (לכד) all these royal cities and their kings and put them to the sword. He totally destroyed them (החרים), as Moses the servant of the LORD commanded. *Yet Israel did not burn any of the cities built on their mounds—except Hazor, which Joshua burned.*"

It is clear from these examples that לכד by itself does not connote destruction but only capture. Destruction in addition to capture must always be indicated by elaborative statements, frequently containing the verb חרם.[14]

(2) Joshua "put to the sword" the city and its king (10:28). That לכד does not mean more than capture is seen again in the case of Makkedah, for after the city was taken, it and its king were put to the sword. With reference to Makkedah, the text says literally, "he struck it and its king with the edge of the sword." Here there is no question that "it" (or "the city," NIV) refers to the population since one would not put walls and buildings to the sword.[15] Furthermore, the meaning

[13]Makkedah, perhaps modern Khirbet el-Kheisun, some 18 miles due west of Bethlehem, has yet to be identified with certainty. It, therefore, is of no help in the conquest problem. See Y. Aharoni and M. Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas* (New York: Macmillan, 1968) maps 58, 63, 130; H. G. May, *Oxford Bible Atlas* (London: Oxford University, 1974) 134.

[14]The equivalent Akkadian expression, *ṣabātu āla*, "to take (or conquer) a city" also never denotes destruction when used alone. See *CAD*, Ṣ, 5-41, esp. pp. 15-17. The usual expression for "destroy" is *abātu x. CAD*, A/1, 41-45.

[15]A common meaning of עיר, the most frequently occurring Hebrew word for "city," is, in fact, "population." See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, ed., *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: Brill, 1958) s.v. עִיר, 701. That the

is amplified by the next clause, "he put them under the ban, every person in it; he left no survivor."[16] The only destruction, according to the narrative, was that of the king and people of Makkedah.

The next object of Joshua's punitive raid is Libnah,[17] just five miles north of Lachish. This time the verb לכד is not used but is replaced by נתן, the converse of לכד. YHWH "gave" the city and its king to Joshua and just as he had done to Makkedah he did to Libnah: he put it and its king to the sword, leaving no survivors. Similarly, Joshua moved on to Lachish[18] which he "took" (לכד) on the second day after YHWH had "given" (נתן) it to him (10:32). He followed up its capture by putting the city and its people to the sword. He then "took" (לכד) Eglon,[19] put it to the sword, and "totally destroyed" (החרים) everyone in it (10:35). Next he "took" (לכד) Hebron[20] and put it to the sword with its king and people. However,

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reference to city means "population" is also conclusive in light of the earlier instruction by Joshua about Makkedah and the other cities: "Do not allow them to enter their cities, for the LORD your God has given them to you" (10:19). The second "them" grammatically and syntactically best refers to the cities and not the people.

[16]The phrase is difficult. MT reads הַחֲרֵים אֹתָם וְאֶת־כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר בָּהּ לֹא הִשְׁיר שָׂרִיד. Many MSS and some LXX and Targumic readings prefer אֹתָהּ ("it") for MT אֹתָם ("them"), thus requiring the translation, "he put it under the ban and every person in it; he left no survivor." While this may be attractive in some ways, the *lectio difficilior* would retain MT and, as we will show below, the plural pronoun is preferable on other grounds. The *waw* on וְאֶת could well be a *waw explicativum* (GKC § 154a note), yielding the meaning, "he put them (the population and king) under the ban; that is, every person in it—he left no survivor."

[17]Libnah now is identified as Tell Bornat, 5 miles NE of Lachish. It appears to have been occupied at the end of LB and beginning of Iron I, but the site has not yet been excavated so nothing can be said about its relationship to the conquest. See R. de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978) 544.

[18]Lachish, modern Tell ed-Duweir, is about 25 miles SW of Bethlehem. Two Tell el-Amarna letters (nos. 328, 329) were written from Lachish and in a third (no. 333) its king, Zimreda, is accused of collaborating with the Ḫabiru. The site was obviously occupied in the LB early fourteenth century in line with the early conquest date. The only evidence of destruction in LB–Iron Age times is that of 1220 or so B.C., as indicated by an Egyptian inscription found there and dated to the fourth year of either Merneptah or Rameses III. Of course, this destruction is usually attributed to Joshua (Y. Aharoni, *IEJ* 16 [1966] 280-81; 18 [1968] 157-69; 254-55; D. Ussishkin, *BASOR* 223 [1976] 1-13).

[19]Eglon, modern Tell el-Ḥesi, is about eight miles west of Lachish. It was destroyed at the end of LB and not rebuilt until Solomonic times. See Bimson. *Redating*, 212.

[20]Hebron, of course, retains its biblical name today, though the OT city (now el-Khalil) was somewhat south of the modern site. There is no indication of its destruction throughout the LB period nor, indeed, thereafter until the end of Iron I. However, since the site is currently being excavated nothing definite can be said of the LB one way or the other as yet. See de Vaux, *Early History*, 538.

there is the addendum that at Hebron Israel "totally destroyed" (החרים) both the city and its people (10:37). Finally, the destruction of Debir[21] is recorded in practically identical terms: Joshua "took" (לכד) it, put it and its surrounding villages to the sword, and "totally destroyed" (החרים) the populations (10:39).

There is, admittedly, some ambiguity in the accounts just recited, particularly as far as the "putting to the sword" of the cities is concerned. While it might appear that this favors material destruction, the idiom is clearly inappropriate in that the sword is an instrument used to destroy life and not property. Furthermore, the summary of the Southern Campaign, which doubtless reflects the consistent and comprehensive strategy of Israel under Joshua, leaves no question as to what happened in each case:

"So Joshua subdued (נכה) the whole region. . . . He left no survivors. He totally destroyed (החרים) all who breathed . . ." (10:40). There is not a word here of devastation of walls or buildings—it is only the people who are exterminated.

The northern campaign

It is helpful now to return to the narrative of the Northern Campaign which features the destruction of Hazor[22] and the capture of the neighboring Canaanite towns. We have already pointed out that Joshua "took" (לכד) Hazor and put its king and people to the sword, "completely destroying" (החרים, Hiphil infinitive absolute) them (11:10-11). There is no reference to putting the city to the sword. Instead, the narrator relates that Joshua burned Hazor to the ground. It might be argued, then, that putting a city to the sword is synonymous with destroying it. That this does not necessarily follow is clear from the description of the fate of Hazor's allied cities. Josh 11:12-13 says that "Joshua 'took' (לכד) all these royal cities and their kings and put them *to the sword. He totally destroyed them*, as Moses the servant of the LORD has commanded. Yet Israel did not

[21]Debir, identified by Albright as Tell Beit Mirsim, is fifteen miles SW of Hebron and eight SE of Lachish. As Albright showed in his extensive excavations, Debir was fortified in the Hyksos (MB) period, abandoned until the LB period, and totally destroyed at the end of the LB (ca. 1225). Again, the destruction is attributed to the conquest when, in fact, the OT does not indicate conquest destruction, a fact borne out by a mid-LB conquest. See Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960) 108-9. Miller ("Archaeology," 87) rejects Albright's identification of Debir and suggests instead Khirbet Rabûd, with M. Kochavi (*Tel Aviv* 1 [1974] 2-33). He says that Khirbet Rabûd was occupied throughout LB–Iron I but evinces no major destruction at that time. This later identification, no doubt the correct one, confirms the thesis that Debir was "taken" but not destroyed.

[22]The archaeological evidence for Hazor is presented below, p. 120.

burn any of the cities built on their mounds—except Hazor, which Joshua burned." In other words, Joshua put all these cities to the sword and yet did not burn them. This beyond question proves that to put to the sword refers not to the physical cities but to their populations. Unless there is evidence to the contrary (and there is not), the same idiom means the same thing wherever it is found.

The summation of the total conquest is also illuminating. The historian recounts that "Joshua 'took' (לכד) this entire land: the hill country, all the Negev, the whole region of Goshen, the western foothills, the Arabah and the mountains of Israel with their foothills. . . . He 'captured' (לכד) all their kings and struck them down, putting them to death" (Josh 11:16-17). Not a word is said of material destruction.[23]

ALLOCATION OF THE CITIES

Joshua's account of the distribution of the cities to the tribes and to individuals is also instructive, especially those which are specifically mentioned as having been taken, put to the sword, or completely destroyed in the conquest. The first example is Hebron. Because of Caleb's faithful report to Moses when he returned from spying out the land, Moses had promised him a personal inheritance (Num 14:24). In fulfillment of this pledge Joshua assigned to Caleb the city of Hebron (Josh 14:13). Though one cannot prove, perhaps, that Hebron was not a pile of rubble,[24] it would appear that it must have been physically intact in order to have been a meaningful gift to Caleb. Moreover, in order to actually possess the city Caleb had to evict from it the three sons of Anak (15:14; Judg 1:10), an unnecessary task if the city was not standing.[25] It is apparent that the earlier population of Hebron had been destroyed and that the Anakim

[23]A possible exception might be seen in the latter part of the summary (11:21-23) where it is said that Joshua totally destroyed the Anakim "with their cities" (עִם עָרֵיהֶם), having first cut them off from Hebron, Debir, Anab, and other places. There is no indication from the passage, however, that the cities named are identical to the cities of the Anakim which were destroyed. Proof of this is the fact that the Anakim reoccupied Hebron and Debir, at least, and after Joshua's death had to be driven out of these cities once again by Caleb (Judg 1:20; cf. Josh 15:13-15; Judg 1:10). Marten Woudstra, (*The Book of Joshua* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 193, n. 28) agrees that the burning of Hazor was an exception not only in the north but throughout the conquest.

[24]For archaeological evidence to the contrary, see above, n. 19.

[25]The relationship of the Joshua and Judges narratives concerning the granting of Hebron to Caleb is admittedly somewhat complex. Josh 14:13-15 states only that Hebron was assigned to Caleb. There is no suggestion that he took it immediately. Josh 15:13-19 recounts the actual seizure of the city by Caleb and his dispossession of the Anakim. Since the Anakim had already been driven out by Joshua in the original

had simply moved back in to take its place. Evidently the same thing was true of Debir, for though the city had been taken by Joshua earlier, it was necessary for Caleb to retake it, thus presupposing its continued material existence and repopulation (Josh 15:15-17).

On the other hand, it is true that all the cities which we know to have been physically destroyed—Jericho, Ai, and Hazor[26]—were, with the exception of Ai, assigned to the tribes as part of their allotments (Josh 18:21; 19:36). But there is no indication that they were inhabited immediately after their destruction nor, indeed, for some time later. In short, Jericho, Ai, and Hazor, the three cities which were reduced to rubble, are not said to have been repopulated soon thereafter.[27] Of the others where there is narrative evidence—Makkedah, Libnah, Lachish, Eglon, Hebron, and Debir—the latter two were almost immediately repopulated, either by the indigenous populations or Israelites.[28] And since the account of their capture is exactly the same as that of the others ("They did to Debir and its king as they had done to Libnah and its king and to Hebron," Josh 10:39; cf. 10:32, 35, 37), it may be assumed that these others too were left standing and habitable.

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conquest (10:36-37; 11:21), Caleb's action must represent a second dispossession. Judg 1:9-10, 20, is a summary of the Caleb conquest, an event which clearly followed the death of Joshua (Judg 1:1). See C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.) 156-57. For the standard critical view that the account in Judges 1 is a rival and contradictory description of the conquest from that given in Joshua, see G. F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* (ICC; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923) 8-10.

[26]Jerusalem also was burned but only after Joshua's death (Judg 1:8) and apparently only partially or with little damage since the Jebusites reoccupied it and were not dislodged until the time of David (Judg 1:21; cf. 2 Sam 5:6-10). Since Jerusalem has not been thoroughly excavated it is impossible to know much if anything of the destruction level implied by the Judges 1 narrative.

[27]See below, pp. 119-20, for the archaeological evidence.

[28]It is difficult to say how long it was after the initial conquest of Hebron and Debir before the cities were repopulated by Caleb and his family. The first conquest lasted seven years, between 1406-1399, as is clear from the fact that Caleb was 40 years old some 38 years before the conquest began and was 85 when it ended and he made his request for an inheritance (Josh 14:7, 10, 13). Joshua did not die before ca. 1375 B.C. so Caleb's possession of Hebron must have been no earlier than 25 years after the Joshua conquest. This would require Caleb to be 110 years of age at the time but since Joshua lived to be 110 (Josh 24:29) and Moses 120 (Deut 34:7) there is nothing inherently improbable in Caleb's living to 115 or more. See E. H. Merrill, "Paul's Use of 'About 450 Years' in Acts 13:20," *BSac* 138 (1981) 250, 256 n. 18. This period of 25 years between conquests is sufficient to explain the repopulation of these (and other) cities by the native elements. But since there is no archaeological evidence of their rebuilding they must not have been destroyed previously.

REVIEW OF JOSHUA'S STRATEGY

The policy of Moses, as we have seen, was to leave the city structures intact to the extent that the walls, buildings, cisterns, and even orchards and vineyards should be preserved (Deut 6:10-11; 19:1). It remains now to see how successfully this policy was carried out by Joshua in the actual conquest of Canaan. We have already argued that where narrative detail is supplied the only cities which suffered structural devastation were Jericho, Ai, and Hazor. All the others were left standing, though their populations were frequently decimated. The most persuasive proof that Moses' strategy was followed, however, is that of Joshua's own testimony in the covenant context of Joshua 24. As most scholars now recognize, this chapter is largely a statement of covenant renewal with most of the essential elements of a standard covenant document. This includes the so-called "historical prologue," found in this instance in 24:2-13.[29]

After rehearsing the remotely past dealings of YHWH from the election of the fathers "beyond the river" through the Egyptian sojourn and exodus-Sinai redemptive event, Joshua recites the immediately past history of which he was a part and an eye-witness. He points out that all enemies on both sides of the Jordan had been defeated by YHWH the warrior. Then, climactically, the LORD says, "I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant" (Josh 24:13).

It might be objected, of course, that Joshua made this proclamation long after the conquest proper, in plenty of time for the Israelites to have built their own cities on the ruins of Canaanite sites. But this cannot be the case since Joshua emphasizes that the Israelites are living in cities which *they did not build.* One can only assume either that Joshua was mistaken or that indeed he had faithfully pursued the policy dictated by Moses that the conquest and occupation of Canaan should not require the leveling of the cities themselves.

EXCEPTIONS TO THE POLICY

The implication of all this should be most apparent. Scholars, whether conservative or liberal, who seek to establish the date of the conquest on the basis of evidence of destruction of Canaanite sites are missing the point entirely, for if the biblical account is correct, there is no such evidence. The exceptions, of course, are Jericho, Ai, and Hazor. To each of these we must now briefly address ourselves to see what if any information can be gained relevant to our problem.

[29]For a good analysis, see K. A. Kitchen, *The Bible in Its World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1977) 79-85.

Ai

It is possible to dismiss Ai from consideration almost out of hand because so complex are the questions relative even to its location that it can scarcely be used to resolve our thesis one way or the other.[30] Though traditionally identified with Khirbet et-Tell, there is increasing skepticism that the identification is correct. Even if it is, it is not helpful to either the traditional or a late conquest date since it apparently was desolate from the end of the Early Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age. That is, from about 2000 B.C. to about 1100 it was unoccupied, and so it cannot be identified with Ai whether the conquest be 1400 B.C. or 1250 or so. Until Ai can be firmly identified with a modern site, it can be of no use in dating the conquest.

Jericho

Unfortunately, the situation with Jericho is not much better, for though there is no question about the location of the OT city, it has suffered such ravages at the hands of both the elements and the excavators that its testimony is at best ambivalent. The first systematic investigations of the mound (Tell es-Sultan) by John Garstang led him to the view that City D was destroyed by a violent conflagration shortly after 1400 B.C. This he associated with the Israelite conquest under Joshua, thus supporting the traditional date.[31] Kathleen Kenyon, whose work was even more extensive, rejected Garstang's conclusion about City D and finally settled on a date of 1300 B.C. or a little later.[32] It is readily apparent that her position supports neither side of the question, for it is 100 years too late for the one and 50 years too early for the other.

How, then, should one view Kenyon's point that there is no sign at Jericho of an early fourteenth century destruction? Bimson in his recent monograph on the problem suggests that the reason no evidence of a Late Bronze destruction exists is that Joshua destroyed not a Late Bronze but a Middle Bronze city. Though it has been

[30]In reference to what he calls "the problem city of Ai," Bimson (*Redating*, 215-25) reviews the entire controversy surrounding the identification of Ai. Though essentially favoring D. Livingston's position ("The Location of Biblical Bethel and Ai Reconsidered," *WThJ* 33 [1970] 20-24; "Traditional Site of Bethel Questioned," *WThJ* 34 [1971] 39-50) that Bethel should not be identified with Beitin but Bireh and thus that et-Tell is not Ai (so that Ai is as yet still unknown), Bimson nonetheless argues that both et-Tell and Beitin are ambiguous since both were unoccupied at the period of either usual date for the conquest.

[31]John Garstang, *The Story of Jericho* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1948) 126-30.

[32]Kathleen Kenyon, *Archaeology in the Holy Land* (New York: Praeger, 1964) 211; "Palestine in the Time of the Eighteenth Dynasty," *CAH*[3] 2/1, 545.

customary to date the end of the MB settlement at ca. 1550 B.C., Bimson, in an exhaustive treatment of all the data, prefers a date within a decade or so of 1430 B.C.[33] This means that he is within about 25 years of the traditional date, and whether one calls the city MB or LB is almost irrelevant, since such terms are not used in the OT anyway. Clearly, it is impossible to establish dates of archaeological strata with such precision as to argue for 1430 against 1406, especially in the absence of *in situ* datable inscriptions. In conclusion, there is nothing from Jericho to militate against a 1400 B.C. conquest date and much to commend it.

Hazor

Finally, the more scientifically and objectively researched mound of Tell Hazor must be considered. The chief excavator of the most recent dig, Yigael Yadin, has presented evidence of a major destruction of the city by fire, a destruction he dates from 1250-1200 and assigns to Joshua and the Israelites.[34] This, he says, offers proof of the late conquest date. However, he also refers to the overthrow of the MB IIC city at about 1400 B.C., a date he later changed to 1550 because of his revised dating of the later LB I level. This revision was itself dependent on the discovery of bichrome ware in Stratum 2 (LB I), a fact which Yadin felt required the adjustment of the dating of the stratum upward and, with it, a correspondingly earlier date for MB IIC.[35] Bimson has shown that the whole realignment is unnecessary since the basis of dating bichrome ware is itself erroneous.[36] A 1400 B.C. date for the conflagration of MB IIC Hazor can, then, be maintained and with it the early date of the conquest on the assumption that the devastation was at Israelite hands.

CONCLUSION

There are, then, only three cities in Canaan itself which are explicitly singled out as having been physically destroyed by Joshua

[33]Bimson, *Redating*, 144. For a fair review of Bimson's approach by a critical scholar, see J. Maxwell Miller, *JBL* 99 (1980) 133, 135. Miller points out that Bimson has shown that "those who hold to a thirteenth century exodus-conquest have no monopoly on the archaeological evidence."

[34]See conveniently Y. Yadin, "The Rise and Fall of Hazor," *Archaeological Discoveries in the Holy Land* (New York: Bonanza, 1967) 62-63; "Excavations at Hazor, 1955-1958," *The Biblical Archaeologist Reader*, vol. 2, ed. by David Noel Freedman and Edward F. Campbell, Jr. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1964) 224.

[35]Y. Yadin, "The Fifth Season of Excavations at Hazor, 1968-1969," *BA* 32 (1969) 55.

[36]Bimson, *Redating*, 147-83.

and the Israelites in their conquest of the land—Jericho, Ai, and Hazor—and even these cannot now be confidently identified or dated unambiguously. This means that the prodigious labors and ingenious solutions which have been expended on the host of remaining cities listed in connection with the conquest are irrelevant. If, as we have attempted to show, the policy of Israel as initiated by Moses and carried out by Joshua was indeed implemented, one should not expect to find evidence of destruction of Canaanite cities at Israelite hands in the period 1406-1385. To the contrary, if such evidence were forthcoming it would, as we have suggested earlier, prove extremely embarrassing to the biblical narrative itself. Critical scholars may or may not be influenced by the exegetical arguments adduced in this paper since their redaction-criticism and other approaches can in any event explain away the biblical witness. The conservative, however, must reexamine the procedure that would try to defend the early date of the conquest by positing a 1400 B.C. devastation of Canaanite sites on archaeological grounds. When he does this he disregards the intent of the biblical narratives and thus subjects the historicity of this part of the OT at least to painful wounds in the house of its own friends.

Do tells tell tales? Most assuredly they do, when interpreted correctly. But the OT also speaks, and in regard to the question of the date of the conquest it eloquently states that there is no conflict between text and tell when both are viewed dispassionately and objectively.