

# Joshua

## 1

**Summary:** *After Moses's death, God commissions Joshua to lead Israel across the Jordan, commanding him to be strong and courageous. Joshua orders the people to prepare provisions and reminds the Transjordan tribes of their commitment.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The phrase chazaq ve'emats ('be strong and courageous') appears three times in God's speech to Joshua (vv. 6, 7, 9) and once from the people back to Joshua (v. 18). The repetition is structural: courage is not assumed but commanded, and it is rooted in the promise of divine presence, not in military capability. The book's first word — 'after the death of Moses' — signals a permanent transition: the Torah is complete, and now comes the test of whether Israel can live by it.*

**Translation Friction:** *The phrase sefer haTorah hazzeh (v. 8, 'this book of the Law') is the first reference to the Torah as a written text that must be meditated upon. We rendered hagah (v. 8) as 'meditate' — the word implies murmuring or reciting aloud, not silent contemplation. The Hebrew concept of meditation is oral, not mental. The verb hitsliach (v. 8, 'prosper/succeed') links obedience to outcome in a way that the wisdom tradition will later complicate (Job, Ecclesiastes).*

**Connections:** *The commissioning echoes Deuteronomy 31:7-8, 23. The phrase 'every place the sole of your foot treads' (v. 3) quotes Deuteronomy 11:24. The Transjordan tribes' pledge (v. 16-18) will be tested in Joshua 22. The strong-and-courageous formula recurs in 1 Chronicles 22:13 and 28:20 for Solomon's temple-building.*

<sup>1</sup>After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses's attendant: <sup>2</sup>"Moses my servant is dead. Now rise up and cross this Jordan — you and all this people — into the land that I am giving to the Israelites. <sup>3</sup>Every place where you set foot, I have given to you — just as I promised Moses. <sup>4</sup>From the wilderness to this Lebanon, as far as the great river — the Euphrates — all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the setting sun: this will be your territory. <sup>5</sup>No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, I will be with you. I will not let you down, and I will not abandon you. <sup>6</sup>Be strong and courageous, because you will lead this people to inherit the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. <sup>7</sup>Only be strong and very courageous — careful to obey all the instruction that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may succeed wherever you go. <sup>8</sup>This book of the instruction must never leave your lips — recite it day and night so that you are careful to do everything

written in it. Then you will make your path prosperous, and then you will succeed. <sup>9</sup>Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not be terrified, and do not lose heart, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." <sup>10</sup>Then Joshua gave orders to the officers of the people: <sup>11</sup>"Go through the camp and command the people: 'Prepare provisions for yourselves, because within three days you will be crossing this Jordan to go in and take possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving you to possess.'" <sup>12</sup>To the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said: <sup>13</sup>"Remember what Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you: 'The LORD your God is granting you rest and has given you this land.' <sup>14</sup>Your wives, your children, and your livestock may stay in the land that Moses gave you east of the Jordan, but you must cross over ahead of your brothers in battle formation — every fighting man — and help them, <sup>15</sup>until the LORD grants your brothers rest just as he has granted you, and they too have taken possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving them. Then you may return to the land of your own possession and settle in it — the land that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you east of the Jordan, toward the sunrise." <sup>16</sup>They answered Joshua, "Everything you have commanded us, we will do. Wherever you send us, we will go. <sup>17</sup>Just as we obeyed Moses in everything, so we will obey you — if only the LORD your God is with you as he was with Moses. <sup>18</sup>Anyone who defies your orders and does not obey your words — whatever you command — will be put to death. Only be strong and courageous!"

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The opening *vayyehi acharei mot* ('and it was after the death of') is a standard Hebrew narrative transition, linking Joshua directly to the close of Deuteronomy. The book begins not with a new story but with the continuation of an unfinished one — the land promise remains unfulfilled at Moses's death.
1. The term *mesharet* ('attendant, minister') is distinct from *eved* ('servant, slave'). A *mesharet* serves in close personal proximity — Joshua was Moses's trusted aide and protégé, not a subordinate in a hierarchical chain. The same term describes Samuel's service to Eli (1 Samuel 2:11) and angelic service before God (Psalm 104:4). Moses is called *eved YHWH* ('servant of the LORD'), a title of covenant honor; Joshua is *mesharet Mosheh* ('attendant of Moses'), marking him as the apprentice now stepping into the master's role.
2. The declaration *Mosheh avdi met* ('Moses my servant is dead') is blunt and unsentimental — three words in Hebrew that close an era. God does not eulogize Moses; He announces the succession. The possessive *avdi* ('my servant') maintains the covenant honor even in the death notice.
2. The participle *noten* ('giving') is present tense — God is actively in the process of giving the land. This is not a past act recalled but an ongoing divine action unfolding in real time. The land is simultaneously gift (God gives it) and task (Israel must cross over and take it).
2. *Ha-yarden ha-zeh* ('this Jordan') with the demonstrative pronoun suggests proximity — Joshua can see the river. The Jordan is not an abstract boundary but a visible, physical barrier between promise and fulfillment.
3. This verse directly echoes Deuteronomy 11:24, where Moses relayed the same divine promise. The phrase *kaf raglekhem* ('the sole of your foot') creates a vivid image: the land becomes Israel's one footstep at a time. Possession requires physical presence — the gift must be walked into, not merely claimed from a distance.
3. The verb *n'tattiv* ('I have given it') is in the perfect tense — in God's reckoning, the gift is already completed before Israel takes a single step across the Jordan. The conquest narrative that fills the rest of Joshua is not Israel earning the land but Israel receiving what God has already granted. The tension between divine gift (perfect tense) and human action (crossing, fighting, settling) is central to the theology of the book.
4. The boundaries described here correspond to the land grant of Genesis 15:18-21, the covenant with Abraham. The four compass points define the maximum extent of the promise: wilderness (Negev) to the south, Lebanon to the north, the Euphrates to the east, and the Mediterranean ('the Great Sea,' *ha-yam ha-gadol*) to the west. Israel under Joshua never fully controlled this entire territory; the broadest historical extent was achieved under Solomon (1 Kings 4:21).
4. *Erets ha-chittim* ('land of the Hittites') likely refers broadly to the territory formerly dominated by the Hittite empire in Syria and southern Anatolia. By Joshua's era the Hittite empire had collapsed, but the geographic designation persisted. Some scholars suggest it may refer to a more localized Hittite population in Canaan.
4. *Gevul* ('territory, border, boundary') is a key term throughout Joshua's land allotment sections (chapters 13-19). Here it establishes the total scope of the divine land grant before the first battle is fought.
5. The verb *yityatsev* ('to take a stand, to position oneself against') is reflexive — no one will successfully mount a stand against Joshua. This is a military guarantee framed in personal terms: *kol yemei chayekha* ('all the days of your life') makes it lifelong, not situational.
5. The parallel *ka'asher hayiti im Mosheh ehyeh immakh* ('as I was with Moses, I will be with you') establishes the theological basis for the Mosaic succession. What transfers is not Moses's skill or charisma but God's presence — the same divine companionship, not merely divine approval.

5. The pair *lo arpekha ve-lo e'ezvekka* ('I will not let you go and I will not abandon you') forms a double negative for emphasis. The verb *raphah* ('to let go, to slacken one's grip') and *azav* ('to abandon, to forsake') cover both gradual disengagement and sudden departure — God will neither slowly loosen His hold nor abruptly walk away. This pair is quoted in Hebrews 13:5 as a promise extended to all believers.
6. First occurrence of the keynote phrase *chazaq ve'ematz* ('be strong and courageous'). This identical command appears in Deuteronomy 31:7 (Moses to Joshua before all Israel), Deuteronomy 31:23 (God to Joshua directly), and now three times from God in this chapter (vv. 6, 7, 9), with a fourth from the people (v. 18). The fourfold repetition in chapter 1 alone signals the weight of the task and the depth of reassurance Joshua needs as he steps into Moses's role.
6. The verb *tanchil* (hiphil of *nachal*) means 'to cause to inherit, to apportion as an inheritance.' Joshua's function is not merely to conquer but to distribute — he gives the people their *nachalah*. This verb reappears throughout chapters 13-21 as the allotment process unfolds.
6. *Nishba'ti la'avotam* ('I swore to their ancestors') anchors the entire conquest in the patriarchal oath. The land promise rests on divine oath (*shevu'ah*), not merely divine intention — God has bound Himself by His own word. The ancestors in view are Abraham (Genesis 15:18-21), Isaac (Genesis 26:3), and Jacob (Genesis 28:13).
7. Second occurrence of *chazaq ve'ematz*, now intensified with *me'od* ('very, exceedingly'). The critical shift: verse 6 tied courage to the military task of land allotment; verse 7 ties courage to Torah obedience. In Joshua's theology, the harder task is not fighting Canaanites but maintaining covenant faithfulness. The *raq* ('only') at the beginning marks this as the essential condition.
7. The idiom *al tasur mimmenu yamin us'mol* ('do not turn from it right or left') pictures a traveler on a straight path — the Torah is the road, and any deviation leads away from God's purpose. This image recurs throughout Deuteronomy (5:32; 17:11, 20; 28:14) and appears to be a signature phrase of the Deuteronomic tradition.
7. The verb *taskil* (from the root *sakal*) carries both intellectual and practical dimensions — 'to have insight, to act wisely, to prosper.' It implies not just favorable outcomes but wisdom expressed through effective action. Success in Joshua is not luck or military genius but the natural consequence of Torah-shaped living.
8. This verse is programmatic for the entire book of Joshua and is foundational to the biblical concept of meditation. The verb *hagita* (from the root *hagah*) does not mean silent contemplation in the modern Western sense — it means to murmur, recite aloud, moan over. Torah meditation is vocal and physical: the text is meant to be spoken, rehearsed, and internalized through repetition on the lips. Psalm 1:2 uses nearly identical language (*u-v'torato yehgeh yomam va-lailah*, 'on his instruction he meditates day and night'), creating a direct literary connection between Joshua's commissioning and the ideal of the righteous person in the Psalter.
8. The phrase *sefer ha-torah ha-zeh* ('this book of the instruction') implies a written, codified text already in existence — Moses's teaching has been set down and can be read, recited, and obeyed. *Lo yamush mipikha* ('must not depart from your lips') reinforces the oral dimension: the Torah should be constantly spoken and discussed, not merely stored on a scroll.
8. The pair *tatsliacha* ('make prosperous,' from *tsalach*) and *taskil* ('succeed/act wisely,' from *sakal*) doubles the promise of verse 7. Both verbs link prosperity and wisdom exclusively to Torah faithfulness — military strategy is irrelevant apart from covenant obedience. This verse effectively makes the book of Joshua a test case for the Deuteronomic principle: obey and prosper, disobey and fail.
9. Third and final occurrence of *chazaq ve'ematz* from God, now framed as a rhetorical question: *halo tsivvitikha* ('Have I not commanded you?'). The question form transforms encouragement into obligation — courage is not a suggestion but a divine command. To give in to fear would be disobedience.
9. The pair *al ta'arots ve'al techat* uses two distinct Hebrew words for fear: *arats* denotes visceral dread or terror (the gut-level reaction to overwhelming threat), while *chatah* denotes discouragement, loss of nerve, being shattered in resolve. Together they address both the emotional and the volitional dimensions of fear — God commands Joshua to resist both the feeling and the collapse.
9. The closing clause *ki immekha YHWH Elohekha* ('for the LORD your God is with you') provides the sole ground for all three courage commands in this chapter. Joshua's strength does not come from his own capacity, his military experience, or the size of his forces — it comes entirely from the divine presence. The same theological logic will drive every victory and explain every defeat throughout the book.
10. The *shot'rim* ('officers') were administrative officials responsible for organization and communication, not military commanders (those are designated by other terms such as *sar* or *nasi*). The root *shatar* is likely related to writing or record-keeping. These officials appear in Exodus 5:6-19 as the Israelite foremen under Egyptian taskmasters and in Deuteronomy 20:5-9 as those who organize the militia before battle. Joshua immediately exercises the command authority God has just conferred — the narrative moves without delay from divine commissioning to human action.
11. The verb *la-reshet* (from *yarash*, 'to take possession, to dispossess') appears twice in this verse — as an infinitive of purpose ('to take possession') and in a possessive construction ('to possess'). This repetition underscores that crossing the Jordan is not mere relocation but a legal and theological act of claiming divinely granted territory. The verb *yarash* carries the dual sense of receiving an inheritance and displacing the current occupants — this duality runs throughout Joshua and the notes should not flatten it.
11. *Tseidah* ('provisions, food supplies') is practical preparation — dried food, bread, portable supplies for the march. The manna had not yet ceased (it continues until Joshua 5:12), but the text signals a transition from miraculous sustenance to ordinary human provision.

11. Sh'loshet yamim ('three days') sets the narrative clock and creates urgency. This three-day timeframe connects to the spy mission in chapter 2 and to the three-day preparation period before the Jordan crossing in 3:2. The number three carries its own narrative weight — a period of preparation before a decisive event.
12. These three groups had received their territorial allotment east of the Jordan under Moses (Numbers 32; Deuteronomy 3:12-20). Their situation is unique in Israel: they already possess their land but are obligated to cross the Jordan and fight alongside the other tribes before settling permanently. Joshua addresses them separately because their covenant obligation differs — they must fight for land that will not be theirs. This arrangement will remain a source of tension (see chapter 22, the altar controversy).
13. The command *zakhor* ('remember') carries theological weight throughout the Hebrew Bible — remembering is not merely cognitive recall but active covenant obligation. To 'remember' is to act on what one knows. Joshua calls these tribes to honor the terms of the agreement they made with Moses in Numbers 32.
13. *Meniach lakhem* ('granting you rest') uses the hiphil of *nuach*, a theologically loaded concept in Joshua. God gives *menukhah* ('rest') — settled, secure, peaceful possession of land, free from enemies and anxiety. This promise of rest runs through Joshua (cf. 21:44; 22:4; 23:1) and becomes a theological metaphor in Hebrews 3-4, where the 'rest' of the promised land points to a greater rest. The present participle *meniach* suggests the rest is ongoing — God is actively establishing it.
13. This verse echoes Deuteronomy 3:18-20, where Moses gave the original command. Joshua claims Mosaic authority: he does not issue new orders but enforces existing ones. His legitimacy rests on continuity with Moses.
14. The term *chamushim* is debated among scholars. It may mean 'armed, equipped for battle' or 'in ranks of five' (from *chamesh*, 'five'), indicating a specific military formation. The same word appears in Exodus 13:18 to describe Israel leaving Egypt, creating a deliberate structural parallel between the Red Sea crossing and the Jordan crossing — both are divine deliverances, both are ordered marches, and both lead to a new phase of covenant history.
14. *Gibborei ha-chayil* ('mighty men of valor, fighting men') is a technical term for the warrior class — men of demonstrated military capability and courage. The phrase recurs throughout Joshua, Judges, and Samuel as a standard designation for Israel's fighting force.
14. *Lifnei acheikhem* ('ahead of your brothers') is significant for two reasons: the eastern tribes must serve as the vanguard (not the rear guard), bearing the first risk; and the designation 'brothers' (*achim*) rather than 'the other tribes' underscores the unity of all Israel. They fight not for strangers but for family.
15. *Yaniach* (hiphil of *nuach*, 'grant rest') echoes verse 13 but extends the concept: the eastern tribes' own rest is incomplete until their brothers across the Jordan also possess rest. Rest in Joshua is communal, not individualistic — no tribe's settlement is secure while others remain landless. This theology of mutual obligation will be tested in chapter 22.
15. The phrase *mizrach ha-shemesh* ('toward the sunrise') is a vivid directional marker — literally 'the rising of the sun.' It is more poetic than the prosaic *qedmah* ('eastward') and places the reader in the landscape, facing the dawn.
15. *Yarash* appears twice more in this verse: *yarsh'u* ('they have taken possession') and *virishtem otah* ('you settle in it'). The noun *yerushah* ('possession') is a related form marking the eastern tribes' already-received grant. The repetition of possession language in various forms across this verse and verse 11 creates a drumbeat: the land is being given, the land must be possessed, the land will be settled. Divine grant and human action are inseparable.
16. The eastern tribes' response is total and unconditional: *kol asher tsivvitanu na'aseh* ('everything you commanded, we will do'). This language deliberately echoes Israel's covenant pledge at Sinai — *kol asher dibber YHWH na'aseh* ('everything the LORD has spoken, we will do,' Exodus 19:8; 24:3, 7). By placing this Sinai-like pledge on the lips of the eastern tribes in response to Joshua, the narrative positions Joshua's commissioning as a covenant-renewal moment. To obey Joshua is to uphold the Sinai covenant.
16. The pair *na'aseh* ('we will do') and *nelekh* ('we will go') covers both action and movement — they will obey his commands and deploy wherever he sends them. There is no negotiation, no reservation, no qualifying condition in this verse. The conditions come in verse 17.
17. The pledge *k'khol asher shama'nu el Mosheh* ('just as we obeyed Moses in everything') is historically ironic. Israel's track record of obedience to Moses was spectacularly uneven — they grumbled about water (Exodus 17:2-3), built the golden calf (Exodus 32), rejected the land at Kadesh-barnea (Numbers 14), and rebelled repeatedly throughout the wilderness period. The statement functions as aspirational commitment rather than accurate historical summary. The narrative does not comment on the irony, but a reader of the Pentateuch would notice it.
17. The conditional *raq yihyeh YHWH Elohekha immakh* ('if only the LORD your God is with you') mirrors God's own promise in verse 5. The people's condition for obedience is precisely what God has already guaranteed. There is an undertone of both loyalty and shrewd assessment: they will follow Joshua as they followed Moses, provided Joshua carries the same divine mandate. The legitimacy of leadership in Israel rests not on human authority but on divine presence.
18. The verb *yamreh* ('rebels, defies') from the root *marah* is the same verb used for Israel's rebellion against God and Moses in the wilderness (Numbers 20:10, 24; 27:14; Deuteronomy 1:26, 43; 9:23). By applying this covenant-rebellion term to disobedience against Joshua, the people effectively place him in the Mosaic succession: to defy Joshua's command is to rebel against the one God has appointed, which is functionally to rebel against God. This is a theological statement about authority, not merely a military code of discipline.

18. The death penalty for insubordination (yumatz, 'he will be put to death') echoes Deuteronomy 17:12, which prescribes death for defying the judge or priest who mediates God's decision. The severity reflects the nature of the moment — this is a sacred military campaign under divine mandate, not a democratic assembly.
18. Fourth and final occurrence of chazaq ve'ematz in this chapter, now spoken by the people to Joshua. The exhortation has come full circle: God to Joshua (vv. 6, 7, 9), the people to Joshua (v. 18). What began as divine command ends as communal encouragement — leader and people mutually reinforcing covenant courage. This structural inclusio frames the entire chapter as a commissioning ceremony.

## 2

*Summary: Joshua sends two spies into Jericho. Rahab the prostitute hides them, confesses that the LORD has given Israel the land, and negotiates protection for her family with a scarlet cord.*

*What Makes This Remarkable: Rahab's confession (vv. 9-11) is a theological earthquake: a Canaanite prostitute articulates Israel's creed — 'the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on earth below.' She has heard what Israel's own generation doubted (Numbers 13-14). The scarlet cord (v. 18, tikvat chut hashani) may carry a secondary meaning: tikvah means both 'cord' and 'hope.' Rahab's lifeline is literally her hope.*

*Translation Friction: The verb vatitspenom (v. 4, 'she hid them') uses an unusual form that may suggest she had already hidden them before the king's messengers arrived. We rendered the sequence as the Hebrew presents it. Rahab's lie to the king's men (v. 4-5) raises an ethical question the text does not resolve — we noted the interpretive tension without resolving it, as the Hebrew narrator offers no moral comment.*

*Connections: Rahab enters the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). Her faith is cited in Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25. The spy narrative echoes Numbers 13 but with a different outcome. The scarlet cord resonates with the Passover blood on the doorposts (Exodus 12:7, 13) — both mark a household for preservation amid destruction.*

1Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two men as scouts from Shittim, telling them, "Go, survey the land — especially Jericho." They went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab, and spent the night there. 2It was reported to the king of Jericho: "Israelite men have come here tonight to spy out the land." 3The king of Jericho sent word to Rahab: "Hand over the men who came to you — who entered your house — because they have come to spy out the entire land." 4But the woman had already taken the two men and hidden them. She said, "Yes, the men did come to me, but I did not know where they were from. 5At dark, when the gate was about to close, the men left. I do not know which direction they went. Go after them quickly — you can still catch them!" 6In fact, she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax that she had spread out on the rooftop. 7The pursuers chased after them on the road toward the Jordan, as far as the fording places. As soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut. 8Before they had fallen asleep, Rahab went up to them on the roof 9and said to the men, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the dread of you has fallen on us, and that all who live in this land are melting in fear before you. 10For we have heard how the LORD dried up the waters of the Sea of Reeds before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan — Sihon and Og — whom you devoted to destruction. 11When we heard this, our hearts sank and no one had any courage left because of you — for the LORD your God is God in the heavens above and on the earth below." 12Now then, I ask you — swear to me by the LORD, since I have shown you faithful love, that you will also show faithful love to my father's household. Give me a sure sign 13that you will spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and everyone who belongs to them — and save our lives from death." 14The men said to her, "Our lives for yours — if you do not reveal our mission. When the LORD gives us the land, we will deal with you in faithful love and good faith." 15Then she lowered them by a rope through the window, because her house was built into the city wall — she lived within the wall itself. 16She told them, "Head for the hills so the pursuers do not find you. Hide there for three days until the pursuers have come back, and after that go on your way." 17The men said to her, "We will be released from this oath of yours that you made us swear 18unless, when we enter the land, you tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you lowered us. You must gather your father, your mother, your brothers, and all your father's household into the house with you. 19Anyone who goes out through the doors of your house into the

street — his blood will be on his own head, and we will be free of guilt. But anyone who is with you inside the house — his blood will be on our heads if a hand is laid on him. <sup>20</sup>And if you reveal our mission, we will be released from the oath you made us swear." <sup>21</sup>She said, "Agreed — let it be as you say." Then she sent them off, and they left. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window. <sup>22</sup>They went into the hills and stayed there for three days until the pursuers had returned. The pursuers searched the entire road but found no trace of them. <sup>23</sup>Then the two men came back down from the hills, crossed over the Jordan, and reported to Joshua son of Nun everything that had happened to them. <sup>24</sup>They said to Joshua, "The LORD has certainly given the entire land into our hands — all who live in the land are melting in fear before us."

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The phrase *meraggelim cheres* ('scouts secretly') — the secrecy distinguishes this mission from the earlier, public spy mission of Numbers 13, which ended in national disaster. Joshua, who was one of the two faithful scouts in that earlier mission (Numbers 14:6-9), now sends his own men covertly. The narrative invites comparison: will this spy mission succeed where the last one failed?
1. *Zonah* ('prostitute') is unambiguous in Hebrew. Some later traditions, including the Aramaic Targum, attempted to soften this to 'innkeeper' (based on a secondary meaning of the root *zun*, 'to feed/provision'), but the Hebrew Bible consistently uses *zonah* for a prostitute. The text states Rahab's profession without moral commentary — her social marginality is precisely what makes her theological role so striking.
1. *Vayyishk'vu shammah* ('and they lay down there') — the verb *shakav* here means simply 'lodged, spent the night,' not a sexual euphemism. The context is espionage, not immorality. *Shittim* (*ha-shittim*, 'the acacias') was Israel's last encampment east of the Jordan (Numbers 25:1; 33:49).
2. The verb *lachpor* ('to dig, to search out, to spy') from the root *chapar* literally means to dig, used metaphorically for probing or investigating. It is more aggressive than the neutral *re'u* ('survey') that Joshua used in verse 1. The king's informant characterizes the mission as hostile espionage — the same activity, described by different parties, reveals different perspectives.
2. The rapid intelligence to the king indicates Jericho's surveillance was active — strangers were noticed quickly. This heightens the danger for the spies and the risk Rahab takes in sheltering them.
3. *Hotsi'i* ('bring out, hand over') is a feminine singular imperative — the king issues a direct command, not a request. Rahab now faces the choice that defines her: obey the king of her own city or protect agents of the God she has come to recognize.
3. The phrase *ha-ba'im eleikha* ('who came to you') may carry a sexual innuendo in context, as the verb *bo* can mean 'to come to' in an intimate sense. Whether the king intends this double meaning or it is simply the narrator's irony, the text does not resolve.
4. *Vattitspenno* ('and she hid him') uses a singular pronominal suffix despite two men being involved. This may reflect a textual variant, a collective singular, or an early copying error — some manuscripts read the plural form. The Septuagint renders it as plural.
4. Rahab's deception is presented without moral commentary by the narrator. She confirms the men's visit but claims ignorance of their origin. The Hebrew Bible records lies by significant figures (Abraham in Genesis 12:13, 20:2; Jacob in Genesis 27:19) without explicit editorial judgment, leaving the ethical assessment to the reader. Later biblical tradition praises Rahab for her faith expressed through harboring the spies (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25) while remaining silent on the deception itself.
5. Rahab's lie is tactically sophisticated. She provides a plausible timeline (they left at nightfall before the gate closed), a convincing gap in her knowledge (she does not know their direction), and an urgent directive (*ridfu maher*, 'pursue quickly'). The urgency she manufactures sends the king's men out of the city and buys time for the spies on her roof.
5. *Ha-sha'ar lisgor ba-choshekh* ('the gate about to close at dark') — ancient walled cities routinely closed their gates at nightfall for security. Rahab exploits this known practice to make her cover story plausible. The detail also sets up the narrative irony of verse 7: the gate closes behind the pursuers, locking them out and the spies safely in.
6. *Pishte* *ha-ets* ('stalks of flax,' literally 'flax of the tree/wood') refers to flax in its raw, woody state before processing. Flax was harvested in spring and laid out on flat rooftops to dry — a common agricultural practice in the ancient Near East. This incidental detail confirms the spring harvest season, consistent with the Passover timing in Joshua 5:10.
6. The flax on Rahab's roof suggests she was involved in textile production (flax is processed into linen). Some scholars see this as evidence that her 'house' may have functioned partly as a workshop, which could have provided a plausible reason for strangers to visit — useful cover for the spies.
7. *Ha-ma'b'rot* ('the fording places, the crossing points') were the shallow stretches where the Jordan could be crossed on foot — the obvious route for Israelite spies returning to camp. The pursuit logic is sound but misdirected. Rahab has sent the king's men east toward the river while the spies remain safely on her roof, inside the locked city.
7. The gate shutting (*ha-sha'ar sag'ru*) behind the pursuers creates dramatic irony: the city that should be protecting itself from Israelite agents has just locked itself in with them. Jericho's own security measures now serve Rahab's plan.
8. *Terem yishkavun* ('before they lay down') — the archaic verbal suffix *-un* appears in several forms in Joshua and may reflect older poetic or narrative style. The timing is narratively significant: Rahab speaks before the men sleep, indicating urgency and deliberation. What she is about to say in verses

9-13 is not improvised — it is a carefully prepared theological statement and a negotiated covenant.

9. Rahab's confession opens with *yada'ti ki natan YHWH lakhem et ha-arets* ('I know that the LORD has given you the land') — a statement of extraordinary theological weight from a Canaanite. She uses the divine name YHWH (not a Canaanite deity name), she recognizes the divine gift of the land (echoing God's own words in 1:2-3), and she places herself among the already-defeated before any battle has been fought. This is a gentile's theology of the conquest, and it will be echoed almost verbatim by the spies in their report to Joshua (v. 24).
9. *Naflah eimatkhem aleinu* ('the dread of you has fallen on us') echoes the language of the Song of the Sea in Exodus 15:16 (*tipol alehem eimatah va-fachad*, 'dread and fear shall fall on them'). Rahab is confirming that the exodus accomplished precisely what that victory song predicted — the terror of YHWH's acts has reached Canaan's interior.
9. *Namogu* ('they are melting') — the verb *mug* means to melt, to dissolve, to lose all structural integrity. It describes the total collapse of morale across Canaan. The conquest begins not with Israelite military strength but with the prior collapse of Canaanite resolve.
10. *Yam Suf* ('Sea of Reeds') — rendered as 'Sea of Reeds' rather than the traditional 'Red Sea.' The Hebrew *suf* means 'reeds, rushes,' not 'red.' The identification with the modern Red Sea comes through the Greek Septuagint (*erythra thalassa*). The exact location of the crossing remains debated among scholars.
10. *Hecharamtem otam* ('you devoted them to destruction') — this is the first appearance of the root *ch-r-m* (*cherem*) in Joshua, and remarkably it comes not from an Israelite narrator but from a Canaanite witness. Rahab knows what *cherem* means — total, sacred destruction. The concept was not unique to Israel; similar practices of dedicating enemies entirely to a deity are attested in Moabite and other ancient Near Eastern sources (notably the Mesha Stele).
10. Rahab's evidence cites two categories of divine action: power over nature (drying up the sea) and power in war (defeating Sihon and Og). These are precisely the two types of evidence that would carry weight in the ancient Near Eastern worldview, where a deity's power was measured by visible acts in the world.
11. *Vayyimmas l'avenu* ('our hearts melted') — the verb *masas* describes complete dissolution. Combined with *lo qamah od ruach be'ish* ('no spirit/courage rose in anyone'), Rahab testifies to the total psychological defeat of Jericho before any siege begins. The military conquest is preceded by — and arguably made possible by — this internal collapse of will.
11. Rahab's confession reaches its theological climax: *YHWH Eloheikhem hu Elohim bashamayim mimma'al ve'al ha-arets mittachat* ('the LORD your God is God in the heavens above and on the earth below'). This is a confession of universal divine sovereignty — not merely that YHWH is powerful, but that He is God, period. The language echoes Deuteronomy 4:39, Moses's own formulation. A Canaanite prostitute has arrived at the core confession of Israelite faith — a theological achievement that Israel itself repeatedly failed to sustain.
11. The narrative significance is profound: God's reputation precedes His army. The conquest is already accomplished in the hearts of Canaan's people before Israel crosses the Jordan. Rahab represents a Canaanite who draws the right conclusion from the evidence — faith, in the form of active response to what she has heard about YHWH.
12. *Chesed* appears twice in this verse — *asiti immakhem chesed* ('I have done chesed with you') and *va'asitem gam attem im beit avi chesed* ('you also will do chesed with my father's house'). This is covenantal reciprocity: Rahab has demonstrated covenant loyalty by protecting the spies, and she now claims the right to receive it in return. The term *chesed* in the mouth of a Canaanite is theologically remarkable — she uses Israel's own covenant vocabulary to bind Israel to her.
12. *Hishav'u na li ba-YHWH* ('swear to me by the LORD') — Rahab demands an oath in YHWH's name, not in the name of any Canaanite deity. She binds the spies by the very God whose sovereignty she has just confessed. The oath by YHWH makes the agreement a sacred commitment, not merely a tactical bargain.
12. *Ot emet* ('a sign of truth/faithfulness, a sure sign') — Rahab wants something tangible and verifiable, not a verbal promise alone. This will be answered in verse 18 with the scarlet cord. The word *emet* ('truth, reliability') demands a sign that can be trusted — one that will actually function when the moment comes.
13. *V'hachayitem* ('and you will keep alive') — the *hiphil* of *chayah* means to cause to live, to preserve life. In a context where *cherem* (sacred destruction) is the expected fate of Jericho's population, Rahab negotiates an exception for her entire family. The scope is precisely defined: father, mother, brothers, sisters, and all who belong to them. When Jericho falls in chapter 6:23, this exact list will be honored.
13. *V'hitsaltem et nafshoteinu mimmavet* ('and rescue our lives from death') — *nephesh* here means the living self, the person at risk of dying. Rahab is not asking for property rights, citizenship, or status within Israel — she is asking simply to survive. The minimalism of the request underscores its urgency.
14. *Nafshenu tachteikhem lamut* ('our lives in place of yours to the death') — the spies pledge their own lives as surety for Rahab's family. The preposition *tachat* ('in place of, instead of') creates a substitutionary pledge: if they fail to protect her, they forfeit their own lives. This is covenant-binding language of the most serious kind.
14. *Chesed ve'emet* ('faithful love and good faith') — the pairing of *chesed* with *emet* is the fullest expression of covenant reliability in Hebrew. *Emet* means truth, faithfulness, reliability — it guarantees that the *chesed* will actually be carried out. This paired phrase appears in God's self-revelation at Sinai (Exodus 34:6, *rav chesed ve'emet*, 'abounding in faithful love and truth') and in human covenant pledges (Genesis 24:49; 47:29; 2 Samuel 2:6). The spies respond to Rahab's covenant language with equally binding covenant language.

14. The condition *im lo taggidu et d'varenu zeh* ('if you do not reveal our mission') limits Rahab's obligation to secrecy — she must keep quiet, not take further active steps. The oath is conditional and bilateral: both parties have obligations.
15. *Ba-chevel be'ad ha-challon* ('by a rope through the window') — the same method of escape used by Michal for David (1 Samuel 19:12) and referenced for Paul (Acts 9:25; 2 Corinthians 11:33). The window in the outer wall is both Rahab's vulnerability and her strategic advantage — it faces outside the city, providing the only route of escape that bypasses the sealed gate.
15. *Beitah b'qir ha-chomah u-va-chomah hi yoshevet* ('her house was in the wall of the wall and in the wall she was dwelling') — archaeological evidence from Jericho and other Canaanite cities confirms that houses were built into casemate walls, with the outer fortification wall serving as one wall of the house. Rahab's position is literally marginal — on the boundary between inside and outside the city — which mirrors her social position and anticipates her theological position: she is a Canaanite who belongs to Israel.
16. *Ha-harah* ('toward the hill country') — the limestone hills west of Jericho, riddled with caves and rocky terrain ideal for concealment. Rahab sends the spies in the opposite direction from the pursuers, who have gone east toward the Jordan fording places. Her tactical thinking throughout this episode is consistently sharp.
16. *Sh'loshet yamim* ('three days') parallels the three-day preparation period announced in 1:11. The narrative creates parallel countdowns that will converge: three days for the camp to prepare, three days for the spies to return. Rahab's intimate knowledge of the pursuit timetable — she knows the pursuers will return in three days — further demonstrates her intelligence and reliability as an ally.
17. *N'qiyim anachnu* ('we are free/innocent/released') — the spies now stipulate the conditions under which their oath remains binding. The legal precision is striking: even while dangling from a rope outside a city wall, the terms of the covenant agreement must be clearly defined. The oath is attributed to Rahab (*mishvu'atekh*, 'your oath') — she initiated it in verse 12, and the spies now set its boundaries.
18. *Tiqvat chut ha-shani* ('cord of scarlet thread') — the word *tiqvah* means both 'cord, rope' and 'hope' (from the root *qavah*, 'to wait, to hope'). The wordplay may be intentional: the scarlet cord is literally Rahab's hope. The scarlet color (*shani*) has prompted extensive typological commentary connecting it to the blood of the Passover lamb on the doorposts (Exodus 12:7, 13). Whether the narrator intends this parallel or it emerges naturally from the literary pattern, the structural similarity is striking: a visible marker on the dwelling, protection for everyone inside, destruction for those outside.
18. *Ta'asfi eleikha ha-baitah* ('gather to yourself into the house') — Rahab becomes the center of her family's salvation. Her house, built into the wall of a doomed city, becomes a sanctuary within the zone of destruction. The Passover parallel is reinforced: just as each Israelite household gathered inside behind the blood-marked door in Egypt, so Rahab's household must gather inside behind the scarlet-marked window in Jericho.
19. *Damo v'rosho* ('his blood on his head') is a standard biblical formula assigning legal and moral responsibility for a death (cf. 2 Samuel 1:16; 1 Kings 2:37; Ezekiel 33:4). The threshold of the door defines the boundary of protection: inside the house means protected, outside means exposed. This is structurally identical to the Passover logic of Exodus 12:22-23, where the blood on the doorframe marked the boundary between safety and judgment.
19. *Im yad tihyeh bo* ('if a hand is laid upon him') — the spies accept personal, bloodguilt-level responsibility for any harm that comes to someone inside Rahab's house. The commitment is not abstract — they put their own lives at stake. The oath is precisely bilateral: Rahab's obligations are the cord, the gathering of family, and silence; the spies' obligation is physical protection of everyone under her roof.
20. This final condition restates the secrecy requirement from verse 14 as a formal termination clause. The covenant between Rahab and the spies has three binding conditions: (1) the scarlet cord in the window (v. 18), (2) the family gathered inside the house (v. 18), and (3) silence about the mission (vv. 14, 20). Failure in any one releases the spies from the oath. The legal structure is clear, bilateral, and conditional — this is treaty language, not an informal promise.
21. *K'divreikhem ken hu* ('according to your words, so it is') — Rahab accepts every condition without negotiation or modification. Her immediate action — tying the cord in the window before the invasion, before she knows when or whether it will come — demonstrates the same faith that the New Testament writers will celebrate: she acts on what she believes to be true about YHWH (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25).
21. The narrator places *vattiqshor et tiqvah ha-shani ba-challon* ('she tied the scarlet cord in the window') as the final image of the scene. This structural emphasis gives the act of tying the cord a weight beyond the practical — it is Rahab's public, irreversible declaration. The cord in the window faces outward, visible to anyone approaching the wall. She has broken with Jericho before Jericho falls.
22. The spies follow Rahab's instructions exactly — three days in the hills, then departure. The narrative confirms her reliability: her plan works. The pursuers searched *b'khol ha-derekh* ('along the entire road') — the Jordan road — but found nothing, because the spies were never on that road. Rahab's misdirection was complete.
22. The three-day wait completes the parallel timeline begun in 1:11. The preparation for crossing and the spy mission converge — Joshua now has both a prepared people and actionable intelligence.
23. *Et kol ha-mots'ot otam* ('everything that had found/befallen them') — the root *matsa* ('to find') in the feminine plural participle describes events that 'found' them, a vivid Hebrew idiom for things that happened. Their report would have included Rahab's theological confession, the terms of the agreement, the state of Jericho's morale, and the practical details of the city's defenses — intelligence of both military and theological value.

23. The successful return of these two spies contrasts sharply with the catastrophic spy mission of Numbers 13-14, where ten of twelve scouts brought a faithless report that triggered forty years of wandering. That mission failed because the spies saw only obstacles; this mission succeeds because the spies receive testimony of what God has already accomplished in the hearts of the enemy.
24. The spies' report echoes Rahab's own words almost verbatim: *natan YHWH b'yadenu et kol ha-arets* ('the LORD has given the whole land into our hands') mirrors her *yada'ti ki natan YHWH lakhem et ha-arets* ('I know the LORD has given you the land') from verse 9. The military intelligence they deliver to Joshua is essentially Rahab's theology — a Canaanite woman's confession of YHWH's sovereignty becomes the strategic foundation for Israel's campaign.
24. *Namogu kol yosh'vei ha-arets mippanenu* ('all the inhabitants of the land are melting before us') repeats Rahab's testimony from verse 9 with one shift: *mippeneikhem* ('before you') becomes *mippanenu* ('before us'). The spies have internalized Rahab's perspective — they now own her theological assessment as their own.
24. The contrast with Numbers 13:31-33 is total and deliberate. Those spies said 'we are not able to go up against this people, for they are stronger than we' (*lo nukhal*, Numbers 13:31); these spies say 'the LORD has given the land into our hands.' The difference is not in the military situation but in the theological lens. These spies, informed by a Canaanite woman's faith, see what the earlier generation's spies refused to see: God has already acted.

### 3

*Summary: The priests carry the ark of the covenant into the Jordan River at flood stage, and the waters stop flowing. All Israel crosses on dry ground, echoing the Red Sea crossing.*

*What Makes This Remarkable: The Jordan crossing is a deliberate replay of the Exodus: dry ground (charavah, the same word as Exodus 14:21), priests leading with the ark (replacing Moses's staff), and the entire nation passing through divided water. But this generation does what their parents refused to do — they actually enter the land. The timing is precise: the Jordan is at flood stage during harvest (v. 15), making the miracle maximally visible and minimally natural.*

*Translation Friction: The phrase me'adam ha'ir Adam (v. 16) is textually difficult: 'from Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan.' The waters piled up far upstream, implying a massive stoppage. The city Adam is otherwise unknown. We rendered the geography as given and noted the uncertainty. The ark is called 'the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth' (v. 11) — the title adon kol ha'arets makes a universal claim at the moment of local entry.*

*Connections: The dry-ground crossing echoes Exodus 14:21-22 and is celebrated in Psalm 114:3-5. The twelve-stone memorial (ch. 4) mirrors the twelve pillars of Exodus 24:4. Elijah and Elisha will cross this same Jordan on dry ground (2 Kings 2:8, 14), forming a prophetic bookend.*

1Joshua rose early in the morning, and they set out from Shittim and came to the Jordan — he and all the Israelites — and camped there before crossing. 2At the end of three days, the officers went through the camp 3and commanded the people: "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, with the Levitical priests carrying it, then set out from where you are and follow it. 4But keep a distance between yourselves and it — about two thousand cubits — do not come near it, so that you can see the way you are to go. For you have never traveled this way before." 5Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you." 6Then Joshua said to the priests, "Lift up the ark of the covenant and cross ahead of the people." So they lifted the ark of the covenant and went ahead of the people. 7The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they will know that just as I was with Moses, I will be with you. 8Command the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: 'When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, stand still in the Jordan.'" 9Then Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God. 10Joshua said, "By this you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly dispossess before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites: 11Look — the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is about to cross ahead of you into the Jordan. 12Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel — one man from each tribe." 13When the soles of the feet of the priests carrying the ark of the LORD — the Lord of all the earth — come to rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan will be cut off — the waters flowing down from above — and will stand up in a single mass. 14When the people set out from their tents to cross the Jordan, with

the priests carrying the ark of the covenant ahead of the people — <sup>15</sup>and when those carrying the ark reached the Jordan, and the feet of the priests carrying the ark were dipped in the edge of the water — now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the harvest season — <sup>16</sup>the waters flowing from upstream stood still — they rose up in a single mass far away at Adam, the city near Zarethan — while the waters flowing down toward the Sea of the Arabah (the Salt Sea) were completely cut off. And the people crossed over opposite Jericho. <sup>17</sup>The priests carrying the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan while all Israel crossed on dry ground, until the entire nation had finished crossing the Jordan.

#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Vayyashkem Yehoshua ba-boqer ('Joshua rose early in the morning') — the verb hashkim ('to rise early') signals urgency and decisiveness throughout the Hebrew Bible; it frequently introduces moments of divine obedience or military action (cf. Abraham in Genesis 22:3, Moses in Exodus 24:4). Joshua acts at first light.
1. The movement from Shittim to the Jordan covers approximately seven miles across the plains of Moab. Vayyalinu sham ('they camped there') — the entire nation pauses at the river's edge. The narrative builds suspense: they arrive but do not cross. Three days of preparation follow (v. 2).
2. Miqtseh sh'loshet yamim ('at the end of three days') connects to the three-day timeline established in 1:11 and the three-day spy mission of chapter 2. All the narrative threads converge: the spies have returned, the people have prepared, and the moment of crossing has arrived.
2. The shot'rim ('officers') from 1:10 now execute the orders Joshua gave them — the chain of command established in chapter 1 is functioning.
3. Aron berit YHWH Eloheikhem ('the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God') — the ark appears for the first time in Joshua and will dominate chapters 3-6. It is not merely a religious artifact but the visible symbol of God's presence and covenant with Israel. The ark leads the crossing, not Joshua — the theological point is that God goes first into the Jordan, and Israel follows.
3. Ha-kohanim ha-leviyyim ('the Levitical priests,' literally 'the priests, the Levites') — this Deuteronomic designation (cf. Deuteronomy 17:9, 18; 18:1) identifies the priests as members of the tribe of Levi who serve at the ark. They are the authorized bearers of God's covenant presence.
4. K'alpayim ammah ba-middah ('about two thousand cubits by measure') — approximately 3,000 feet or 900 meters. This distance serves dual purposes: it maintains the sacred reverence due to the ark (no one may approach God's presence casually), and it ensures the entire camp can see the ark from a distance and follow its lead through unfamiliar territory.
4. Lo avartem ba-derekh mit'mol shilshom ('you have not passed this way before,' literally 'yesterday or the day before') — the phrase is both practical (they do not know the terrain) and theologically loaded. Israel is entering something genuinely unprecedented. The wilderness wandering is over; a new era begins with this crossing. The ark must lead because no human guide knows this road.
5. Hitqaddashu ('consecrate yourselves') — the hitpa'el of qadash, meaning to set oneself apart, to make oneself ritually ready. This typically involved washing garments, abstaining from sexual contact, and other purification rituals (cf. Exodus 19:10-15 before Sinai). The parallel to Sinai is deliberate: just as Israel consecrated before encountering God at the mountain, they now consecrate before encountering God at the river.
5. Nifla'ot ('wonders, extraordinary things') — from the root pala, meaning acts that surpass normal human capacity. The same term describes God's acts in Egypt (Exodus 3:20; 34:10). Joshua announces that what is about to happen is not military strategy but divine intervention on the scale of the exodus.
6. The command-execution pattern (Joshua commands, the priests obey immediately) mirrors the pattern of chapter 1: God commands Joshua, Joshua commands the officers, the officers obey. The chain of authority flows from God through Joshua to the priests. No one deliberates or questions — the obedience is instant.
6. Ivru lifnei ha-am ('cross ahead of the people') — the ark and its bearers go first. This is not a rearguard religious decoration; the ark leads the column into the water. The structural parallel to the pillar of cloud and fire leading Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 13:21-22) is unmistakable: God's visible presence goes first into danger.
7. Achel gadd'lkha ('I will begin to make you great/exalt you') — God explicitly ties Joshua's authority to the miracle that is about to happen. The Jordan crossing is Joshua's credentialing event, just as the Red Sea crossing credentialed Moses (Exodus 14:31: 'they believed in the LORD and in Moses his servant'). Leadership legitimacy in Israel comes through visible divine endorsement, not human appointment.
7. Ka'asher hayiti im Mosheh ehveh immakh ('as I was with Moses, I will be with you') — this exact phrase from 1:5 now receives public demonstration. What God promised privately to Joshua in chapter 1, He now makes visible to the entire nation. The Jordan crossing is the public proof of the private commission.
8. Ba-yarden ta'amodu ('in the Jordan you shall stand') — the priests must step into the river and stop. They do not walk through; they stand in it while the nation crosses. This requires extraordinary trust: they enter the water before anything happens, standing in a flooding river (v. 15) with only a divine promise that the waters will stop. The obedience precedes the miracle.

8. The instruction echoes the Sinai pattern where Moses had to act before God intervened (lifting his staff over the sea, Exodus 14:16). In the Joshua narrative, the priests fill Moses's role — they are the human agents who step into the impossible before God makes it possible.
9. Goshu hennah v'shim'u ('draw near and listen') — Joshua summons the people to hear divine speech, positioning himself as the mediator of God's word. This is a prophetic and Mosaic role: Joshua speaks God's words, not his own. The phrase divrei YHWH Eloheikhem ('the words of the LORD your God') marks what follows (vv. 10-13) as divine oracle delivered through human voice.
10. El chai ('the living God') — a powerful epithet distinguishing YHWH from the lifeless idols of Canaan. The claim is not merely that God exists but that He is alive — active, present, and intervening in real time. The Jordan crossing will be the proof: a living God does living things.
10. Horesh yorish ('he will certainly dispossess') — an infinitive absolute construction intensifying the verb yarash: God will absolutely, without fail, drive out the current inhabitants. The seven nations listed form the standard catalogue of Canaan's peoples (cf. Deuteronomy 7:1), representing the totality of the opposition. The theological claim is that the Jordan miracle is not an end in itself but a guarantee of what follows — if God can stop a river, He can dispossess nations.
10. B'qirb'khem ('among you, in your midst') — God is not acting from a distance. He is present within the camp, among the people. The ark in their midst is the visible sign of this indwelling presence.
11. Adon kol ha-arets ('the Lord of all the earth') — a title of universal sovereignty. This is not merely the God of Israel but the ruler of all territory, including Canaan. The title appears at this moment because the Jordan crossing stakes a claim: the God crossing this river owns both banks. The Canaanite deities have no jurisdiction because YHWH is Adon kol ha-arets.
11. The phrase hinneh aron ha-berit ('look, the ark of the covenant') draws the eye — Joshua directs the people's attention to the ark as visible proof that God Himself is going first into the water. The ark 'crosses ahead' (over lifneikhem) — God enters the danger before Israel does.
12. Sh'nei asar ish ('twelve men') — one from each tribe, anticipating the memorial stones in chapter 4. The instruction is given before the crossing, though its purpose (the stone memorial) is not explained until afterward (4:2-7). The twelve-man detail reinforces the unity of all Israel: every tribe is represented in this moment, every tribe will carry a stone, and every tribe will share in the memory of what God does here.
13. K'noach kappot raglei ha-kohanim ('when the soles of the feet of the priests rest') — the same phrase kaf regel ('sole of the foot') from 1:3, where God promised 'every place the sole of your foot treads.' The first 'footprint' of possession is not on Canaanite soil but in the Jordan's waters. The priests' feet must touch the water before the miracle begins — faith precedes sight.
13. Yikkaretun ha-mayim ('the waters will be cut off') — the verb karat ('to cut') is the same root used for 'cutting' a covenant (karat berit). The linguistic echo is likely coincidental but theologically resonant: the waters are 'cut' as Israel crosses into covenant fulfillment.
13. Ned echad ('a single heap/mass') — the waters will pile up as a single standing wall. This echoes Exodus 15:8 (nits'vu kh'mo ned, 'they stood up like a heap') from the Song of the Sea. The Jordan crossing deliberately mirrors the Red Sea crossing — the same God performs the same kind of act for the next generation.
14. The narrative shifts from speech to action. Bin'so'a ha-am me'ohalehem ('when the people set out from their tents') marks the beginning of the crossing sequence. The sentence structure (a long protasis) builds suspense — the narrator delays the main clause, piling up details about the people, the priests, and the ark before describing what happens when they reach the water.
15. V'raglei ha-kohanim nitb'lu biqtseh ha-mayim ('the feet of the priests were dipped in the edge of the water') — the verb taval ('to dip') describes the first contact of skin and water. The miracle begins at the moment of touch — not before, not from a safe distance. The priests stepped into a flooding river on nothing but a promise.
15. V'ha-yarden male al kol g'dotav kol y'mei qatsir ('the Jordan was full over all its banks all the days of harvest') — this parenthetical note is devastating understatement. The narrator pauses to inform the reader that this was not a shallow, wadeable stream. The Jordan at spring harvest (March-April, when snowmelt from Mount Hermon swells the river) was at maximum flood stage, overflowing its banks. God did not arrange easy conditions for this miracle — He arranged the hardest possible conditions. The crossing occurs at precisely the moment when the river is most impassable.
16. Qamu ned echad ('they rose up in a single heap/mass') — the promised sign from verse 13 is fulfilled exactly. The waters do not merely stop; they pile up into a standing wall. The visual echo of the Red Sea (Exodus 15:8) is now a lived reality for the new generation.
16. Harcheq me'od be-Adam ha-ir asher mitsad Tsaretan ('far away at Adam, the city near Zarethan') — the city of Adam is located approximately 18 miles (30 km) north of the crossing point near Jericho, at the confluence of the Jabbok and Jordan rivers. The waters backed up for this extraordinary distance, indicating a massive blockage. Some scholars have noted that earthquake-induced mudslides at the narrow clay bluffs near Adam have historically dammed the Jordan (recorded in 1267 CE and 1927 CE), though the text presents this as a divinely timed act, not a natural coincidence.
16. Yam ha-Aravah yam ha-melach ('the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea') — the Dead Sea, identified by two names. The downstream waters drained away completely (tammu nikretu, 'were finished, were cut off'), leaving dry ground for the crossing.
16. Ha-am avru neged Yericho ('the people crossed opposite Jericho') — the crossing point faces Jericho directly. The first Canaanite city to see Israel emerge from the Jordan is the first city that will fall.

17. Be-charavah ('on dry ground') — the same word used for the dry ground through the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21, charavah). The linguistic echo confirms the parallel: what God did for the exodus generation at the sea, He now does for the conquest generation at the river. The two crossings form bookends of the wilderness period.
17. Hakhen ('standing firm, prepared, established') — the priests do not waver. They stand motionless in the center of the riverbed, the ark on their shoulders, while an entire nation files past them on either side. The image is iconic: God's presence (the ark) holds back the waters while God's people walk through.
17. Kol ha-goy ('the entire nation') — the use of goy ('nation') rather than am ('people') or b'nei Yisrael ('Israelites') may emphasize the collective, political identity of Israel at this moment. They enter Canaan not as refugees or wanderers but as a nation taking possession of its territory.

## 4

*Summary: Joshua commands twelve men to take stones from the Jordan's dry bed and set up a memorial at Gilgal. A second set of stones is placed where the priests stood. The crossing is completed and Israel camps at Gilgal.*

*What Makes This Remarkable: The memorial stones serve one purpose: to provoke children's questions. 'When your children ask in time to come, What do these stones mean to you?' (v. 6) — the entire monument exists for the next generation's catechetical moment. Israel's theology is transmitted not through abstract instruction but through objects that demand explanation. The phrase 'on dry ground' (bayyabbashah, v. 22) explicitly connects this crossing to the Red Sea, making the Jordan a second exodus.*

*Translation Friction: The relationship between the twelve stones taken from the riverbed (v. 3) and the twelve stones Joshua set up 'in the midst of the Jordan' (v. 9) is ambiguous — are there two sets of monuments or one? We rendered both references as the text presents them and noted the interpretive options. The verb yekareton (v. 7, 'were cut off') uses the same root as karat ('to cut a covenant'), subtly connecting the parted waters to covenant theology.*

*Connections: The memorial-stone catechism echoes the Passover question in Exodus 12:26 and the firstfruits confession in Deuteronomy 26:5-9. Gilgal becomes a major cultic site through Judges and Samuel (Judges 2:1, 1 Samuel 11:15). The 'forty thousand' armed men (v. 13) fulfills the Transjordan tribes' pledge in 1:12-18.*

<sup>1</sup>When the entire nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua: <sup>2</sup>"Select twelve men from the people — one man from each tribe — <sup>3</sup>and command them: 'Pick up twelve stones from right here in the middle of the Jordan, from the exact spot where the priests' feet stood firm, carry them across with you, and set them down at the place where you camp tonight.'" <sup>4</sup>So Joshua summoned the twelve men he had designated from the Israelites — one man from each tribe — <sup>5</sup>and said to them, "Go ahead of the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you lift a stone onto your shoulder — one for each of the tribes of Israel — <sup>6</sup>so that this will serve as a sign among you. When your children ask in the future, 'What do these stones mean to you?' <sup>7</sup>you will tell them, 'The waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the Jordan's waters were cut off.' These stones will be a memorial for the Israelites for all time." <sup>8</sup>The Israelites did exactly as Joshua commanded. They lifted twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, as the LORD had told Joshua — one for each of the tribes of Israel — carried them across to the camp, and set them down there. <sup>9</sup>Joshua also set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan, at the exact spot where the feet of the priests carrying the ark of the covenant had stood. They are there to this day. <sup>10</sup>The priests carrying the ark stood in the middle of the Jordan until everything was completed that the LORD had commanded Joshua to tell the people — in keeping with everything Moses had commanded Joshua. And the people hurried across. <sup>11</sup>When all the people had finished crossing, the ark of the LORD crossed over, with the priests, back to the head of the people. <sup>12</sup>The Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh crossed over in battle formation ahead of the other Israelites, as Moses had instructed them. <sup>13</sup>About forty thousand armed for war crossed over before the LORD to the plains of Jericho, ready for battle. <sup>14</sup>On that day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel, and they revered him as they had revered Moses, for the rest of his life. <sup>15</sup>The LORD said to Joshua: <sup>16</sup>"Command the priests carrying the ark of the testimony to come up out of the Jordan." <sup>17</sup>So Joshua

commanded the priests, "Come up out of the Jordan." <sup>18</sup>When the priests carrying the ark of the covenant of the LORD came up from the middle of the Jordan, the moment the soles of the priests' feet touched dry ground, the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and flowed over all its banks as before. <sup>19</sup>The people came up from the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month and camped at Gilgal on the eastern edge of Jericho's territory. <sup>20</sup>And the twelve stones they had taken from the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. <sup>21</sup>He said to the Israelites, "When your children ask their parents in the future, 'What are these stones?' <sup>22</sup>you will make known to your children: 'Israel crossed this Jordan on dry ground.' <sup>23</sup>For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed, just as the LORD your God did to the Sea of Reeds, which he dried up before us until we had crossed — <sup>24</sup>so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, and so that you may revere the LORD your God always."

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Tammol kol ha-goy la'avor ('the entire nation had finished crossing') — the verb tamam ('to be complete, to finish') signals that every last person has crossed. The use of goy ('nation') rather than am ('people') continues from 3:17, emphasizing Israel's corporate, political identity as they enter the land.
2. This fulfills the anticipatory instruction of 3:12. The twelve men, one per tribe, ensure that every tribe participates in the memorial act. The crossing is not the achievement of a few — it belongs to all Israel equally.
3. Mimmatsav raglei ha-kohanim hakhin ('from the standing-place of the priests' feet, firm') — the stones must come from the precise spot where the priests stood holding the ark while the waters were held back. The memorial is anchored to the exact location of the miracle, not a convenient spot nearby. The specificity turns ordinary river stones into covenant witnesses.
3. V'hinnachtem otam ba-malon ('set them down at the camp') — the stones will be carried from the riverbed to Gilgal (v. 19-20), Israel's first campsite in the promised land. River stones from the Jordan's floor, carried by human hands across dry ground that should be underwater — every element of the memorial tells the story.
4. Asher hekhin ('whom he had prepared/designated') — the verb kun (hiphil: 'to establish, to prepare, to designate') indicates Joshua had already selected these men, likely at the instruction of 3:12. The preparation preceded the miracle — Joshua trusted God's word enough to arrange the memorial before the crossing happened.
5. Ish even achat al shikhmo ('each man one stone on his shoulder') — the stones are carried on the shoulder, not in the hand. These are substantial stones, heavy enough to serve as a lasting monument. The physical weight mirrors the theological weight of what they represent. Each man bears his tribe's share of the memorial.
5. L'mispar shivtei v'nei Yisrael ('according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites') — twelve stones for twelve tribes. The memorial is structured to represent the totality of Israel, not just the tribes that happened to cross first or fight hardest.
6. Ki yish'alun b'neikhem machar ('when your children ask tomorrow/in the future') — machar can mean 'tomorrow' or 'in the future.' The memorial is explicitly designed for intergenerational transmission. The stones exist to provoke questions from children — they are teaching tools embedded in the landscape. This question-and-answer format for transmitting sacred memory echoes the Passover liturgy (Exodus 12:26; 13:14), where the child's question triggers the parent's retelling of the exodus. The conquest, like the exodus, must be remembered and retold.
6. Mah ha-avanim ha-elleh lakhem ('what are these stones to you?') — the question assumes the stones are puzzling, out of place. River stones standing in a camp miles from any river demand an explanation. The memorial works precisely because it does not explain itself — it provokes inquiry.
7. L'zikkaron liv'nei Yisrael ad olam ('as a memorial for the Israelites forever') — zikkaron ('memorial, remembrance') is the same term used for the Passover observance (Exodus 12:14). Israel's faith is sustained by physical memorials that anchor theological truth in tangible objects — stones, rituals, festivals. The olam ('forever') indicates permanence beyond any single generation.
7. The answer given to the children's question is remarkably concise: the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark. The explanation centers on the ark (God's presence), not on Joshua's leadership or Israel's courage. The memorial teaches theology, not military history.
8. Va-ya'asu khen b'nei Yisrael ka'asher tsivvah Yehoshua ('the Israelites did exactly as Joshua commanded') — the pattern of command and obedience continues without hesitation. The narrator attributes the instruction both to Joshua (ka'asher tsivvah Yehoshua) and to the LORD (ka'asher dibber YHWH el Yehoshua), reinforcing that Joshua's authority is delegated divine authority. To obey Joshua is to obey God.
9. This second set of twelve stones — placed in the riverbed rather than carried to camp — is sometimes seen as a textual doublet. However, the two sets serve different functions: the stones at Gilgal (v. 20) are a visible, accessible memorial for future generations; the stones in the Jordan are a hidden witness beneath the water, marking the precise location of the miracle. Together they create a testimony both seen and unseen.
9. Ad ha-yom ha-zeh ('to this day') — this formula signals the narrator's temporal distance from the event. The author writes from a time when the stones were still visible (or at least when the tradition of their location was still known), confirming the memorial's durability.

10. Ad tom kol ha-davar ('until everything was completed') — the priests remain standing in the riverbed, holding the ark, for the entire duration of the crossing and the stone-gathering. Their steadfastness is the physical anchor of the miracle — as long as they stand, the waters hold.
10. K'kol asher tsivvah Mosheh et Yehoshua ('in keeping with everything Moses had commanded Joshua') — this editorial note explicitly connects Joshua's actions to Moses's prior instructions, maintaining the chain of authority: God Moses Joshua. Nothing Joshua does is improvised or self-authorized.
10. Vaymaharu ha-am vayya'avoru ('the people hurried and crossed') — the verb mahar ('to hurry') suggests urgency. Standing on the dry floor of a flooded river, with walls of water held back by divine power alone, the people did not linger. The haste reflects both practical anxiety and appropriate awe.
11. Vayya'avur aron YHWH v'ha-kohanim lifnei ha-am ('the ark of the LORD crossed over, and the priests, before the people') — the ark entered the Jordan first (3:13-15) and now exits last, after everyone has crossed safely. The ark bookends the crossing, serving as both vanguard and rear guard. Lifnei ha-am ('before the people') likely means the ark resumed its position at the head of the column on the western bank, ready to lead the march to Gilgal and beyond.
12. Chamushim lifnei b'nei Yisrael ('in battle formation ahead of the Israelites') — the eastern tribes honor their commitment from 1:14-15. They cross armed and in formation as the vanguard, fighting for land that will belong to other tribes. The note ka'asher dibber aleihem Mosheh ('as Moses had told them') anchors this in the original agreement of Numbers 32 — they are keeping their word across a change of leadership.
13. K'arba'im elef chalutsei ha-tsava ('about forty thousand equipped/armed for the army') — the number forty thousand may represent the full fighting force of the eastern tribes or (as some scholars argue) elef may function as a military unit term ('contingent, clan unit') rather than the numeral 'thousand,' yielding a smaller but still significant force. The text presents it as a substantial military formation.
13. Lifnei YHWH ('before the LORD') — the troops march 'before the LORD,' meaning in the LORD's presence or under the LORD's banner. This is not secular military deployment but holy war — the army marches in the presence of its divine commander.
13. Arvot Yericho ('the plains of Jericho') — the broad, flat alluvial plain west of the Jordan where Israel now stands. They have arrived. The promised land is underfoot.
14. Giddal YHWH et Yehoshua ('the LORD made Joshua great') — this fulfills the promise of 3:7: 'Today I will begin to exalt you.' The Jordan crossing has done for Joshua what the Red Sea crossing did for Moses (Exodus 14:31). Leadership legitimacy in Israel is established not by election, appointment, or heredity but by visible divine endorsement.
14. Vayyir'u oto ka'asher yar'u et Mosheh ('they revered him as they had revered Moses') — the verb yare can mean both 'to fear' and 'to revere.' The people's response to Joshua now matches their response to Moses — the succession is complete. Kol yemei chayyav ('all the days of his life') extends this respect for the duration of Joshua's leadership, unlike the episodic loyalty Israel showed Moses.
15. A brief speech formula introducing the command for the priests to come up from the riverbed. The narrative has paused to record the memorial stones and the exaltation of Joshua; now it returns to the practical matter of completing the crossing — the priests are still standing in the Jordan.
16. Aron ha-edut ('the ark of the testimony') — a different title for the ark than the aron ha-berit ('ark of the covenant') used throughout chapter 3. Edut ('testimony, witness') refers to the stone tablets inside the ark, which serve as the physical testimony of the Sinai covenant. The two names highlight different aspects of the same object: the covenant relationship (berit) and the inscribed terms of that covenant (edut).
17. Joshua relays the divine command to the priests without alteration or delay. The command-execution chain (God Joshua priests) operates with precision throughout the crossing narrative.
18. Nit'qu kappot raglei ha-kohanim el he-charavah ('the soles of the priests' feet were pulled up to the dry ground') — the verb nataq ('to pull away, to tear away') suggests the waters resumed the instant the priests' feet left the riverbed. The miracle was precisely bounded: it began when their feet touched the water (3:15) and ended when their feet left the water. There was no margin, no gradual transition — God's intervention was exact.
18. Vayyashuvu mei ha-yarden limqomam vayyel'khu kitmol shilshom al kol g'dotav ('the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and flowed as before over all its banks') — the river returns immediately to full flood stage. Anyone looking at the Jordan after the crossing would see a river in full spate with no evidence that anything had happened — except the nation now standing on the western bank, and the stones.
19. Be'asor la-chodesh ha-rishon ('on the tenth of the first month') — this date is theologically loaded. The tenth of Nisan is the day the Passover lamb was selected (Exodus 12:3). Israel enters the promised land on the same calendar day that the exodus story began in Egypt. The literary symmetry is deliberate: the Passover lamb was chosen on the tenth, leading to deliverance from Egypt; Israel crosses the Jordan on the tenth, entering the land that deliverance was always pointed toward. The exodus is now complete.
19. Gilgal (ha-gilgal) — Israel's first base camp in the promised land, located on the eastern approach to Jericho. The name likely derives from gal ('circle,' perhaps a stone circle), though it will receive a folk etymology in 5:9. Gilgal will serve as Joshua's operational base for the early conquest campaigns.
20. Heqim Yehoshua ba-gilgal ('Joshua set up at Gilgal') — the verb qum (hiphil: 'to raise up, to erect') indicates the stones were arranged upright as a standing monument, not simply piled in a heap. The memorial at Gilgal became a permanent feature of the site, visible to future generations and serving as the physical anchor for the story of the crossing.

21. The question-and-answer format repeats from verse 6, now as a direct speech from Joshua. The repetition is not redundancy — it reinforces the memorial's purpose. The stones exist to generate questions, and the questions exist to generate teaching. The intergenerational transmission of faith depends on this cycle of curiosity and response.
22. V'hoda'tem et b'neikhem ('you will make known to your children') — the verb yada (hiphil: 'to cause to know, to make known') implies active, deliberate teaching, not passive transmission. The parents are commanded to teach, not merely to remember. Ba-yabbashah ('on dry ground') is the core claim — the same word used of the dry ground through the Red Sea (Exodus 14:22). The lexical connection is intentional: what happened at the sea happened again at the river.
23. Ka'asher asah YHWH Eloheikhem l'yam Suf ('just as the LORD your God did to the Sea of Reeds') — the narrator (or Joshua) explicitly draws the parallel that the entire chapter has been building. The Jordan crossing and the Red Sea crossing are presented as the same type of divine act, performed by the same God, for the same covenant people. The new generation now has their own crossing story.
23. The pronoun shift from mippeneikhem ('before you,' second person) to mippanenu ('before us,' first person) is striking. The speaker identifies with both the exodus generation ('us') and the conquest generation ('you'), collapsing the temporal distance between the two events. The same God, the same deliverance, the same people across generations.
24. The verse states two purposes for the Jordan crossing: (1) l'ma'an da'at kol ammei ha-arets et yad YHWH ki chazaqah hi ('so that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD is mighty') — a universal witness. The miracle is not only for Israel's benefit but for the nations. This connects to Rahab's testimony in 2:9-11: the surrounding peoples are meant to know YHWH's power. (2) L'ma'an y'ratem et YHWH Eloheikhem kol ha-yamim ('so that you may revere the LORD your God always') — an internal purpose. Israel's own reverence for God is sustained by remembering what He has done.
24. Yad YHWH ('the hand of the LORD') is an anthropomorphism for divine power in action — God's effective, intervening strength. The adjective chazaqah ('mighty, strong') uses the same root as the chazaq ('be strong') command to Joshua in chapter 1. The strength God commands of Joshua is grounded in the strength God Himself displays.

## 5

*Summary: Israel is circumcised at Gilgal ('the reproach of Egypt is rolled away'), celebrates Passover on the plains of Jericho, eats the produce of the land, and the manna ceases. Joshua encounters the commander of the LORD's army.*

*What Makes This Remarkable: Three thresholds are crossed: circumcision restores the covenant sign neglected in the wilderness, Passover reconnects this generation to the founding liberation event, and the manna stops the day after they eat Canaan's grain — God's wilderness provision ends precisely when it is no longer needed. The commander of the LORD's army (sar tseva YHWH, v. 14) refuses to take sides — 'neither; I have come as commander of the LORD's army.' The categories are not Israel vs. Jericho but God's agenda vs. human assumptions.*

*Translation Friction: The name Gilgal is connected to the verb galal ('to roll,' v. 9) — 'I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt.' But what was the reproach? Uncircumcision? Slavery's stigma? The text does not specify, and we preserved the ambiguity. The phrase cherpat Mitsrayim (v. 9, 'reproach of Egypt') uses cherpah, a word for shame that cuts socially, not just personally.*

*Connections: The Passover echoes Exodus 12 — the first was in Egypt before departure, this one is in the land after arrival. The manna's cessation fulfills Exodus 16:35 ('they ate manna until they came to the border of the land'). The divine commander's appearance parallels the burning bush (Exodus 3:5 — same command to remove sandals) and anticipates the angel of the LORD traditions in Judges.*

1When all the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and all the Canaanite kings along the coast heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan before the Israelites until they had crossed, their hearts sank and they no longer had any courage because of the Israelites. 2At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites once more." 3So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath-haaraloth. 4This is the reason Joshua circumcised them: all the males who had come out of Egypt — every fighting man — had died in the wilderness on the journey after leaving Egypt. 5All the people who came out of Egypt had been circumcised, but none of the people born in the wilderness during the journey from Egypt had been circumcised. 6For the Israelites had wandered in the wilderness for forty years until the entire generation of fighting men who had come out of Egypt perished — those who had not obeyed the voice of the

LORD. The LORD had sworn to them that he would not let them see the land he had sworn to their ancestors to give us: a land flowing with milk and honey. <sup>7</sup>It was their sons, whom God had raised up in their place, that Joshua circumcised — for they were uncircumcised, since they had not been circumcised during the journey. <sup>8</sup>When the entire nation had been circumcised, they stayed where they were in the camp until they had healed. <sup>9</sup>The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the disgrace of Egypt from you." So the place has been called Gilgal to this day. <sup>10</sup>The Israelites camped at Gilgal and observed the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month, in the evening, on the plains of Jericho. <sup>11</sup>They ate from the produce of the land on the day after the Passover: unleavened bread and roasted grain — on that very day. <sup>12</sup>The manna stopped the day after they ate from the produce of the land. The Israelites no longer had manna; that year they ate from the yield of the land of Canaan. <sup>13</sup>When Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua approached him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" <sup>14</sup>He replied, "No — I have come as commander of the army of the LORD." Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence and said to him, "What does my lord command his servant?" <sup>15</sup>The commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, "Remove your sandal from your foot, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Vayyimmas l'avam ('their hearts melted') — the same verb (masas) and the same psychological collapse that Rahab described in 2:11. Her testimony is now confirmed on a national scale: all the Canaanite and Amorite kings have lost their nerve. The Jordan miracle has accomplished exactly what Joshua predicted in 3:10 — it serves as proof of the living God's presence.
1. The two groups — Amorite kings 'west of the Jordan' (inland highlands) and Canaanite kings 'along the sea' (coastal plain) — represent the full geography of opposition. No region of Canaan is unaffected. The timing is narratively important: at the very moment Israel is most vulnerable (about to undergo mass circumcision, v. 2-8), their enemies are paralyzed with fear.
2. Charvot tsurim ('knives of flint') — flint blades were the traditional instrument for circumcision even in periods when metal was available (cf. Exodus 4:25, where Zipporah uses a tsur). The use of stone rather than bronze may reflect the ritual conservatism of sacred acts — the tool must match the antiquity of the practice.
2. Shuv mol et b'nei Yisrael shenit ('again circumcise the Israelites a second time') — this does not mean individual re-circumcision but a second national circumcision event. The first was under Abraham (Genesis 17); the wilderness generation was never circumcised (v. 5). The covenant sign must be renewed before the covenant land can be entered. Circumcision precedes conquest — identity before action.
3. Giv'at ha-aralot ('the hill of the foreskins') — the place name is graphic and deliberately memorable. The location receives its name from the event, as is common in the Hebrew Bible. The name serves the same mnemonic function as the stones at Gilgal — it anchors the story to a place. Whether the name persisted in later usage or was coined for this narrative moment is uncertain.
4. The narrator pauses to explain why a mass circumcision was necessary. The explanation spans verses 4-7 and constitutes a theological retrospective on the wilderness period. The entire exodus generation of fighting men (anshei ha-milchamah) died in the wilderness — this is the judgment of Numbers 14:29-35, where God decreed that the rebellious generation would not enter the land. The men who left Egypt circumcised died uncircumcised in their legacy — their sons bore no covenant mark.
5. The contrast is stark: mulim hayu kol ha-am ha-yots'im ('all who came out were circumcised') versus lo malu ('they had not circumcised') the wilderness generation. The failure to circumcise during the forty years of wandering is not explained — the text simply states the fact. Scholars debate whether it reflects the suspended covenant status of the rebellious generation, practical difficulties of wilderness travel, or a theological withholding of the covenant sign from those under judgment. The text does not resolve this question.
6. Asher lo sham'u b'qol YHWH ('who did not obey the voice of the LORD') — the cause of the forty-year wandering is stated plainly: disobedience. The Deuteronomic theology is operating: disobedience leads to exclusion from the land promise. The generation that refused to enter at Kadesh-barnea (Numbers 14) was barred from seeing the fulfillment.
6. Erets zavat chalav u-d'vash ('a land flowing with milk and honey') — this stock phrase for the promised land appears over twenty times in the Pentateuch. Milk (from herds) and honey (from bees or date syrup) represent natural abundance — a land so fertile that it overflows with provision without human effort. At this moment in the narrative, Israel is finally standing on that land.
6. The pronoun shift from lahem ('to them,' the condemned generation) to lanu ('to us,' the narrator's community) is significant — the narrator counts himself among the beneficiaries of the promise, not among the excluded.
7. Et b'neihem heqim tachtam ('their sons he raised up in their place') — the verb qum (hiphil: 'to raise up, to establish') echoes its use for the memorial stones (4:9, 20). God 'raised up' a replacement generation just as He 'raised up' memorial stones — both are testimonies to His faithfulness. The old generation perished under judgment; the new generation stands on the threshold of fulfillment.

7. The circumstantial explanation *ki lo malu otam ba-darekh* ('they had not circumcised them on the journey') implies that the parents, not God, bear responsibility for the failure. The covenant sign was neglected, not revoked — and now, before the conquest can proceed, the neglect must be corrected.
8. *Ad chayotam* ('until they were healed,' literally 'until their living/recovery') — the entire fighting force is incapacitated during recovery. This is the moment of maximum military vulnerability: Israel's army lies wounded in an open camp on enemy soil. The narrative from verse 1 now takes on its full significance — the Canaanite kings' paralysis of fear is not a footnote but a divine provision. God's timing protects Israel: He terrified the enemy before disabling His own army.
8. The parallel to Genesis 34 (the Shechem circumcision and the Simeon-Levi attack on the third day) is often noted — circumcision renders warriors helpless, and in Genesis 34 that vulnerability was exploited. Here, no Canaanite king exploits it, because God has melted their hearts.
9. *Galloti et cherpat Mitsrayim me'aleikhem* ('I have rolled away the disgrace of Egypt from you') — the verb *galal* ('to roll') provides the folk etymology for Gilgal (*gilgal*, 'rolling' or 'circle'). The *cherpat Mitsrayim* ('disgrace of Egypt') is debated: it may refer to (1) the stigma of being slaves, (2) the uncircumcised state that marked them as covenant-outsiders during the wilderness years, or (3) Egypt's potential mockery that God brought Israel into the wilderness to die (cf. Exodus 32:12). The circumcision at Gilgal removes whatever disgrace remained — Israel is now fully covenanted, fully in the land, fully free.
9. The naming etymology (*vayyiqra shem ha-maqom ha-hu Gilgal*) follows the standard pattern of place-name origins in the Hebrew Bible. Whether Gilgal's name actually derives from this event or the etymology is a secondary association with a pre-existing name is uncertain, but the narrative claims this origin.
10. *Vayya'asu et ha-pesach be-arba'ah asar yom la-chodesh ba-erev* ('they observed the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening') — this is the first Passover in the promised land, and the calendar alignment is precise. They crossed the Jordan on the tenth of Nisan (4:19), were circumcised, healed, and now on the fourteenth — exactly when the Passover lamb was to be slaughtered (Exodus 12:6) — they observe the festival. The bookend with the original Passover in Egypt (Exodus 12) is complete: the first Passover freed them from Egypt, this Passover marks their arrival in Canaan. The exodus story arc, from departure to destination, is now closed.
10. *Be-arvot Yericho* ('on the plains of Jericho') — the Passover is observed within sight of the first Canaanite city that will fall. The juxtaposition of worship and warfare is characteristic of Joshua: Israel worships before it fights, obeys before it conquers.
11. *Me-avur ha-arets* ('from the produce of the land') — for the first time in forty years, Israel eats food grown in Canaan's soil. The word *avur* ('produce, yield, grain') refers to the existing harvest of the land, not food they planted. They eat what others sowed — the gift nature of the land could not be clearer.
11. *Matstsot v'qalui* ('unleavened bread and roasted grain') — the Passover diet of Exodus 12:8 (unleavened bread) combined with parched grain, a staple food. The first meal in the promised land is a Passover meal, connecting their new life to the deliverance that made it possible.
11. *Be-etsem ha-yom ha-zeh* ('on that very day') — the emphasis on the specific day underscores the theological precision of the timing. Everything in this chapter happens on schedule — circumcision, Passover, the first meal from the land. God's calendar is exact.
12. *Vayyishbot ha-man* ('the manna ceased') — the verb *shavat* ('to cease, to stop, to rest,' the same root as *Shabbat*) marks the end of the miraculous daily provision that sustained Israel for forty years (Exodus 16:35). The transition is abrupt and complete: the land's own produce replaces the wilderness miracle. God does not withdraw provision — He changes the mode of provision. The manna was for the wilderness; the land's harvest is for the land.
12. *Mitt'vu'at erets K'na'an* ('from the yield of the land of Canaan') — *t'vu'ah* ('yield, produce, harvest') emphasizes agricultural abundance. Israel shifts from miraculous sustenance to covenantal agriculture — working the land God has given. The promised land is not a land of perpetual miracles but a land of blessed labor.
12. This verse closes a forty-year parenthesis. The manna began at Exodus 16:14-15 and ends here. Between those two points lies the entire wilderness experience. With the manna's cessation, the wilderness era is officially over.
13. *V'hinne ish omed l'negdo v'charbo sh'lufah b'yado* ('and there — a man standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand') — the scene is cinematic. Joshua encounters a solitary warrior figure, weapon ready, facing him. The identity of this figure is revealed in verse 14 but is deliberately withheld here, creating narrative tension. Joshua's first instinct is the soldier's question: friend or foe?
13. *Ha-lanu attah im l'tsareinu* ('are you for us or for our enemies?') — Joshua frames the encounter in binary military terms. The answer he receives (v. 14) will shatter this binary: the figure belongs to neither category because he is above both.
14. *Lo* ('No') — the figure rejects Joshua's binary framing. He is not 'for' Israel in the sense of being their servant or ally under their command. He is the *sar tseva YHWH* ('commander of the LORD's army'), meaning the divine army is not at Israel's disposal — Israel is at the army's disposal. The word *sar* ('commander, prince, captain') designates supreme military authority. This figure outranks Joshua.
14. The identity of the *sar tseva YHWH* is debated. The traditional reading identifies him as a theophany (a divine appearance) or the Angel of the LORD. The response he gives — accepting Joshua's worship (*vayyishtachu*, 'he prostrated himself/worshiped') and commanding him to remove his sandals (v. 15) — parallels God's appearance to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:5). An ordinary angel would typically refuse worship (cf. Revelation 22:8-9). The text does not resolve the question of exact identity but presents the encounter as a divine confrontation.

14. Mah adoni m'dabber el avdo ('what does my lord say to his servant?') — Joshua's response is immediate subordination. He abandons his question (friend or foe?) and assumes the posture of a servant awaiting orders. The commander of Israel has just met his own commander.
15. Shal na'alkha me'al raglekha ki ha-maqom asher attah omed alav qodesh hu ('remove your sandal from your foot, for the place where you stand is holy') — this is an almost verbatim repetition of Exodus 3:5 (shal ne'alekha me'al raglekha ki ha-maqom asher attah omed alav admat qodesh hu). The parallel is too precise to be accidental. Joshua's commissioning scene at the edge of the promised land mirrors Moses's commissioning at the burning bush. Both involve a divine encounter, both require the removal of sandals, both declare the ground holy, and both launch a liberation campaign. The text is claiming that the God who sent Moses now sends Joshua.
15. Na'alkha ('your sandal') is singular — one sandal, not both. Some scholars see this as a merism (one stands for the pair), while others note the ritual significance of removing a single sandal in certain ancient Near Eastern legal customs (cf. Ruth 4:7-8). The text does not explain; Joshua simply obeys.
15. Vayyya'as Yehoshua ken ('and Joshua did so') — the chapter ends abruptly with Joshua's obedience. There is no battle plan, no strategy session, no tactical briefing. The encounter at Jericho's edge ends with a command about sandals and an act of submission. The instructions for Jericho's fall will come in chapter 6 — but first, Joshua must stand barefoot on holy ground and learn who is really in command.

## 6

*Summary: Israel marches around Jericho once daily for six days, then seven times on the seventh day. The priests blow trumpets, the people shout, and the walls collapse. The city is devoted to destruction; only Rahab's household is spared.*

*What Makes This Remarkable: The battle plan is anti-military: no siege engines, no scaling ladders, no strategy except marching in silence with an ark and trumpets. The seven-day structure mirrors creation — six days of action, the seventh bringing completion. The cherem (v. 17, 'devoted to destruction') means everything in the city belongs to God, not to the victors. Jericho is a firstfruits offering of the conquest — the first city, like the firstborn, belongs entirely to God.*

*Translation Friction: The verb hacharim (v. 17, 'devote to destruction') is Deuteronomy's most difficult command applied to a specific city. We rendered it without softening because the Hebrew does not soften it. The silence of the army during six days of marching (v. 10, 'do not shout... do not let your voice be heard') creates unbearable dramatic tension — the shout, when it comes, is the release of days of obedient restraint.*

*Connections: Rahab's rescue fulfills the spies' oath in 2:12-14 — the scarlet cord and the Passover blood are both marks of protection during divine judgment. The seven-day march echoes the seven days of Jericho's siege in reverse: instead of attacking walls, Israel worships. Achan's violation of the cherem in chapter 7 proves the seriousness of the ban. Rahab enters David's lineage (Ruth 4:21, Matthew 1:5).*

<sup>1</sup>Now Jericho was tightly shut up because of the Israelites — no one going out and no one coming in. <sup>2</sup>The LORD said to Joshua, "See — I have handed Jericho over to you, along with its king and its fighting men. <sup>3</sup>March around the city — all the fighting men circling the city once. Do this for six days. <sup>4</sup>Seven priests will carry seven ram's horn trumpets before the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. <sup>5</sup>When they sound a long blast on the ram's horn — when you hear the trumpet — all the people will raise a mighty shout, and the wall of the city will collapse in place. Then the people will charge straight ahead, each man forward." <sup>6</sup>Joshua son of Nun summoned the priests and said to them, "Lift the ark of the covenant, and have seven priests carry seven ram's horn trumpets before the ark of the LORD." <sup>7</sup>He said to the people, "Move forward and march around the city, with the armed vanguard going ahead of the ark of the LORD." <sup>8</sup>When Joshua had spoken to the people, the seven priests carrying the seven ram's horn trumpets advanced before the LORD and blew the trumpets, with the ark of the covenant of the LORD following behind them. <sup>9</sup>The armed vanguard marched ahead of the priests blowing the trumpets, and the rear guard followed the ark, with the trumpets sounding continually. <sup>10</sup>Joshua had commanded the people, "Do not shout, do not let your voice be heard, and do not let a word come from your mouth until the day I tell you to shout. Then you will shout!" <sup>11</sup>So the ark of the LORD circled the city, going around it once. Then they returned to the camp and spent the night there. <sup>12</sup>Joshua rose early the next morning, and the priests lifted the ark of the LORD. <sup>13</sup>The seven priests carrying the seven ram's horn trumpets before the ark of the LORD

marched continually, blowing the trumpets. The armed vanguard went ahead of them, and the rear guard followed the ark of the LORD, with the trumpets sounding continually. <sup>14</sup>On the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They did this for six days. <sup>15</sup>On the seventh day they rose at dawn and marched around the city in the same way — but seven times. Only on that day did they circle the city seven times. <sup>16</sup>At the seventh circuit, when the priests blew the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, "Shout! For the LORD has given you the city! <sup>17</sup>The city and everything in it are to be devoted to destruction — set apart for the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute will be spared, she and everyone with her in the house, because she hid the scouts we sent. <sup>18</sup>But as for you, keep away from what is devoted to destruction, or else when you take anything that is under the ban, you will bring the ban upon the camp of Israel itself and bring disaster on it. <sup>19</sup>But all the silver, gold, and articles of bronze and iron are holy — they belong to the LORD. They must go into the treasury of the LORD." <sup>20</sup>The people shouted and the trumpets sounded. When the people heard the trumpet blast, they raised a mighty shout, and the wall collapsed in place. The people charged straight ahead into the city and captured it. <sup>21</sup>They devoted to destruction everything in the city — man and woman, young and old, ox, sheep, and donkey — with the edge of the sword. <sup>22</sup>To the two men who had scouted the land, Joshua said, "Go into the prostitute's house and bring out the woman and everyone belonging to her, as you swore to her." <sup>23</sup>So the young scouts went in and brought out Rahab, her father, her mother, her brothers, and everyone belonging to her — they brought out her entire extended family — and settled them outside the camp of Israel. <sup>24</sup>They burned the city and everything in it with fire — except the silver, gold, and articles of bronze and iron, which they placed in the treasury of the house of the LORD. <sup>25</sup>But Rahab the prostitute, along with her father's household and everyone belonging to her — Joshua let them live. She has lived among the Israelites to this day, because she hid the scouts that Joshua sent to reconnoiter Jericho. <sup>26</sup>At that time Joshua pronounced this oath: "Cursed before the LORD is the man who rises up and rebuilds this city — this Jericho. At the cost of his firstborn he will lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest he will set up its gates." <sup>27</sup>The LORD was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the entire land.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Sogeret um'suggeret ('shut up and bolted shut') — the double participle intensifies the image: Jericho is not merely closed but sealed, barred, locked down. The city is in full siege posture, but the irony is that Israel has not laid siege. Jericho has imprisoned itself out of terror, confirming Rahab's testimony (2:9-11) and the report of verse 5:1.
1. Ein yotse v'ein ba ('none going out, none coming in') — a merism describing total isolation. No trade, no escape, no reinforcement. Jericho is cut off and waiting.
2. Re'eh natatti b'yadkha ('See, I have given into your hand') — the perfect tense natatti ('I have given') declares the victory accomplished before a single march around the walls. As with the land promise in 1:3, God speaks of the outcome as already completed. The conquest of Jericho is divine fait accompli — Israel's role is obedience to the ritual instructions that follow, not military strategy.
2. Gibborei he-chayil ('mighty men of valor') — the same phrase used for Israel's own warriors (1:14). Jericho's defenders are formidable, but their strength is irrelevant because the battle belongs to God.
3. V'sabbotem et ha-ir ('march around the city') — the verb savav ('to go around, to encircle') is processional, not military. This is not a siege tactic but a ritual act. The instruction to circle the city once per day for six days, then seven times on the seventh day (v. 4), follows a liturgical pattern saturated with the number seven — the number of completion and divine action throughout the Hebrew Bible.
3. Kol anshei ha-milchamah ('all the fighting men') — warriors participate, but they do not fight. They march. The army is present not for its combat function but as participants in a worship procession. This redefines military power: Israel's greatest victory will come through obedience to a ritual, not through tactics.
4. Shiv'ah kohanim ... shiv'ah shofarot ha-yov'lim ... ha-yom ha-shevi'i ... sheva pe'amim — the sevenfold pattern saturates the passage: seven priests, seven trumpets, the seventh day, seven circuits. The number seven (sheva) is the number of completion, oath (the root sh-v-a relates to both 'seven' and 'to swear'), and divine rest (the seventh day of creation). Jericho falls not by force but by sacred numerology — by the completion of a divine cycle.
4. Shofarot ha-yov'lim ('ram's horn trumpets' or 'jubilee trumpets') — the yovel is the ram's horn associated with the Jubilee year (Leviticus 25:9-10) and with theophanic events (Exodus 19:13, 16 at Sinai). These are not military signals but liturgical instruments. The sound of the shofar announces God's presence and action, not a charge into battle.
5. V'nafl'ah chomat ha-ir tachteha ('the wall of the city will fall beneath itself,' or 'collapse in place') — the wall does not fall outward or inward but drops straight down (tachteha, 'beneath it'). Archaeological excavations at Tell es-Sultan (ancient Jericho) have found collapsed walls, though the dating and

interpretation remain debated among archaeologists. The text presents the collapse as immediate, total, and supernatural — the walls fall at the sound, not from battering.

5. T'ru'ah g'dolah ('a great shout') — the t'ru'ah is a war cry and a worship shout. It is the same term used for the shout at God's enthronement (Psalm 47:5; Numbers 23:21) and for the alarm signal on the trumpets (Numbers 10:5-6). The shout at Jericho is simultaneously a battle cry and an act of worship — the two are indistinguishable in this narrative.
5. V'alu ha-am ish negdo ('the people will go up, each man straight before him') — there is no flanking, no concentration of force, no tactical approach. Every soldier advances straight forward from wherever he stands in the circle. The city is penetrated from every direction simultaneously — because the walls are gone. Military strategy is irrelevant when God removes the obstacle.
6. Joshua transmits God's instructions from verses 2-5 to the priests without modification. The command chain operates flawlessly: God Joshua priests. The ark of the covenant leads, with the seven trumpet-bearing priests creating a sonic procession before it. The order of march will be specified further in verses 7-9: armed vanguard, trumpet priests, ark, rear guard.
7. Ha-chaluts ya'avor lifnei aron YHWH ('the armed vanguard will pass before the ark of the LORD') — chaluts ('armed, equipped, stripped for action') designates the military advance guard. The marching order emerges: armed troops first, then the seven trumpet-priests, then the ark, then presumably a rear guard (v. 9). The army frames the ark — warriors before and behind — but the ark is the center. The formation is a moving sanctuary, not a military column.
8. The procession begins. The narrative emphasizes the sound — v'taq'u ba-shofarot ('and they blew the trumpets'). The shofar blast accompanies the march and continues throughout the circuits. The sound of ram's horns around a walled city is psychologically powerful but militarily useless — it serves to announce God's presence and to unnerve the defenders, who are already terrified (5:1; 2:9-11).
9. Ha-m'assef ('the rear guard,' literally 'the gatherer') — from the root asaf ('to gather'). The rear guard gathers up stragglers and protects the column's back. The full marching order is now clear: armed vanguard seven trumpet-priests ark of the covenant rear guard. This is a military formation repurposed for liturgical procession — or perhaps a liturgical procession that happens to be militarily organized.
9. Halokh v'taqo'a ba-shofarot ('going and blowing the trumpets') — the infinitive absolute construction indicates continuous action. The trumpets never stop sounding throughout the march. The ceaseless blowing creates an unbroken wall of sound — the auditory counterpart to the physical wall they are circling.
10. Lo tari'u v'lo tashmi'u et qolkhem v'lo yetse mippikhem davar ('do not shout, do not make your voice heard, do not let a word leave your mouth') — the triple prohibition creates absolute silence from the people. The only sounds during the six days of marching are the priests' trumpets and the rhythm of footsteps. The effect is eerie and psychologically devastating: a silent army circling the walls, day after day, with only the mournful blast of ram's horns. The silence also functions theologically — the people's voice is withheld until God's moment. Their shout will not be spontaneous but commanded, not human initiative but divine timing.
11. Vayyashev aron YHWH et ha-ir haqqef pa'am achat ('the ark of the LORD circled the city, going around once') — the narrator says the ark circled the city, not the army or Joshua. The ark (and by extension, God's presence) is the subject of the action. The first day's circuit is completed in a single understated sentence — the narrative saves its dramatic energy for the seventh day.
12. Vayyashkem Yehoshua ba-boqer ('Joshua rose early in the morning') — the same formula as 3:1. Joshua's early rising signals discipline and urgency. The daily repetition of the ritual requires the same obedience and the same early start each morning — faithfulness expressed as routine.
13. The verse repeats the marching order from verses 8-9 almost verbatim, reinforcing the ritualized nature of the procession. The repetition is not narrative redundancy — it mirrors the repetitive nature of the act itself. Each day's march follows the identical pattern: same formation, same sounds, same silence. The ritual's power lies in its exact repetition over seven days. Halokh v'taqo'a ('going and blowing') — the continuous trumpeting creates a liturgical drone that defines the entire event.
14. Koh asu sheshet yamim ('thus they did for six days') — six days of identical processions, one circuit per day, then return to camp. The narrative compresses six days of obedient marching into a single verse. The compression emphasizes the monotony and the discipline: nothing visible happens for six days. No walls crack, no defenders flee, no progress is apparent. The obedience is tested by six days of apparent futility.
15. Ba-yom ha-shevi'i vayyashkimu ka'alot ha-shachar ('on the seventh day they rose at the going up of the dawn') — the early start is even earlier than usual, because seven circuits require the full day. The dawn of the seventh day marks the climactic moment the entire ritual has been building toward.
15. Sheva pe'amim ('seven times') — the escalation from one circuit to seven on the seventh day brings the total number of circuits to thirteen (6 + 7), though the text emphasizes the seven on the final day. The accumulation of sevens reaches its peak: seven priests, seven trumpets, seven days, seven circuits. The divine number saturates the event.
15. Raq ba-yom ha-hu savvu et ha-ir sheva pe'amim ('only on that day did they circle the city seven times') — the word raq ('only') marks the seventh day as unique. The pattern breaks: what was once (days 1-6) becomes seven (day 7). The break in pattern signals the climax.
16. Hari'u ki natan YHWH lakhem et ha-ir ('Shout, for the LORD has given you the city') — again the perfect tense: natan ('has given'). The city is already given before the shout goes up and the walls come down. Joshua speaks with prophetic certainty, declaring accomplished what is about to become visible. The shout is not a weapon — it is the response to a gift already given.

17. V'hay'tah ha-ir cherem hi v'khol asher bah la-YHWH ('the city will be cherem — it and everything in it — to the LORD') — the entire city is placed under the sacred ban. Cherem here functions as a predicate adjective: the city is cherem, meaning it belongs entirely and irrevocably to God. Nothing within it may be taken for human use. The phrase la-YHWH ('to the LORD') specifies the recipient — everything destroyed is 'given' to God.
17. Raq Rachav ha-zonah tichyeh ('only Rahab the prostitute will live') — the sole exception to the cherem is the woman and household protected by the covenant agreement of chapter 2. The oath the spies swore to Rahab overrides the ban — or rather, Rahab's household was already exempted by the spies' divinely sanctioned oath before the cherem was announced. Her zonah identity is repeated, not to stigmatize but to underscore the extraordinary nature of her inclusion.
17. Ki hechb'atah et ha-mal'akhim asher shalachnu ('because she hid the messengers we sent') — the reason for Rahab's exemption is her active choice to align with Israel's God. The word mal'akhim ('messengers') is the same word translated 'angels' in other contexts — here it means human envoys, but the lexical overlap connects Rahab's act of hiding human scouts to the broader theme of divine agency.
18. Shimru min ha-cherem pen tacharaimu ('guard yourselves from the cherem lest you become cherem') — the warning is terrifyingly logical: cherem is contagious. If anyone takes devoted property for themselves, they transfer the ban to the entire camp. The cherem would spread from Jericho to Israel — the very army of God would become a devoted-to-destruction object. This warning foreshadows the Achan crisis of chapter 7, where exactly this happens.
18. Va'akhartem oto ('and bring trouble/disaster upon it') — the verb akhar ('to trouble, to bring disaster') contains a wordplay that will become explicit in 7:25, where Achan (whose name sounds like akhar) is told 'Why did you bring trouble (akhartanu) on us? The LORD will bring trouble (ya'akhor'kha) on you today.' The wordplay is embedded in the narrative structure from this warning forward.
19. Qodesh hu la-YHWH ('it is holy to the LORD') — metals cannot be destroyed by fire, so they are consecrated rather than annihilated. The principle of cherem is maintained: nothing from Jericho enriches any individual. What survives destruction enters the otsar YHWH ('treasury of the LORD'), the sacred storehouse associated with the tabernacle/sanctuary. The metals belong to God, not to Israel's soldiers.
20. Vattipol ha-chomah tachteiha ('the wall fell beneath itself') — the climactic moment is described in seven Hebrew words. After seven days of elaborate ritual preparation, the actual fall of Jericho's wall is narrated with stark brevity. The understatement matches the theology: this is God's act, and divine acts do not require elaborate description. The wall simply falls.
20. Vayya'al ha-am ha-irah ish negdo ('the people went up into the city, each man straight before him') — as God instructed (v. 5), every soldier advances directly forward from wherever he stands in the circle. The city is penetrated simultaneously from every direction. There is no battle narrative — no clash of arms, no defenders rallying, no commanders shouting orders. The battle is over before it starts because the wall, the city's only defense, is gone.
21. Vayyacharimu et kol asher ba-ir ('they devoted to destruction everything in the city') — the cherem is executed in full. The list me-ish v'ad isah minna'ar v'ad zaqen ('from man to woman, from young to old') is a merism encompassing every human being. The inclusion of domestic animals (shor va-seh va-chamor, 'ox, sheep, and donkey') confirms total destruction — nothing of Jericho survives for human use.
21. The text presents this without editorial commentary. The narrator does not justify, explain, or soften the account. The theological framework (cherem as sacred devotion to God) is the only interpretive lens the text provides. Modern readers must reckon with the moral difficulty honestly — and the translator notes should acknowledge that difficulty without resolving it. This is what the Hebrew text says; this is what it claims God commanded. The Covenant Rendering translates the text faithfully and lets the reader engage the theological and moral questions.
22. Ka'asher nishba'tem lah ('as you swore to her') — Joshua upholds the spies' oath. The covenant with Rahab, negotiated by two scouts on their own authority, is honored by the national commander in the midst of a divinely mandated destruction. An oath sworn in YHWH's name (2:12) cannot be broken, even by the demands of cherem. This establishes a hierarchy: oath cherem. The sworn word outranks the sacred ban.
23. The list — Rahab, her father, her mother, her brothers, and everyone belonging to her — matches her original request in 2:13 precisely. The oath is honored to the letter. The addition v'et kol mishp'choteha ('and all her clans/extended family') expands the circle beyond the nuclear family, suggesting Rahab's influence brought a wider group under the protection of the scarlet cord.
23. Vayyanikhmu michutz l'machaneh Yisrael ('they settled them outside the camp of Israel') — Rahab's family is placed outside the camp initially, likely for ritual purity reasons (as Canaanites, they would need to undergo some process of incorporation). The note 'outside the camp' is transitional — verse 25 will clarify that Rahab ultimately dwelt 'in the midst of Israel.'
24. V'ha-ir sar'fu va-esh v'khol asher bah ('they burned the city with fire and everything in it') — the burning completes the cherem. Fire is the ultimate agent of destruction, leaving nothing usable. Archaeological evidence at Tell es-Sultan shows a destruction layer with evidence of intense burning, though the dating of this layer remains one of the most debated questions in biblical archaeology.
24. Otsar beit YHWH ('the treasury of the house of the LORD') — the metals are consecrated to the sanctuary. The 'house of the LORD' at this period would be the tabernacle. Jericho's wealth goes to God's house — the firstfruits principle applied to conquest.
25. Vatteshv b'qerev Yisrael ad ha-yom ha-zeh ('she has lived in the midst of Israel to this day') — the transition from 'outside the camp' (v. 23) to 'in the midst of Israel' is complete. Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute, is fully incorporated into Israelite society. The formula 'to this day' indicates the narrator writes from a later period when Rahab's descendants are a known presence in Israel. According to Matthew 1:5, Rahab married Salmon and became an ancestor of David — and of Jesus. A gentile woman from a condemned city enters the covenant people and ultimately the messianic lineage.

25. The narrator repeats the reason for her survival: *ki hechbi'ah et ha-mal'akhim* ('because she hid the messengers'). Her act of faith — choosing YHWH's side at personal risk — saved her and her family. The New Testament draws on this in Hebrews 11:31 ('by faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient') and James 2:25 ('was not Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers?'). Her story serves as evidence that covenant membership is based on faith and action, not ethnicity.
26. *Arur ha-ish lifnei YHWH* ('cursed is the man before the LORD') — Joshua places a solemn imprecation on anyone who rebuilds Jericho. The curse operates on a devastating principle: rebuilding will cost the builder his firstborn at the foundation and his youngest at the gate-setting — his entire family line will be consumed by the project. This curse is fulfilled in 1 Kings 16:34, when Hiel of Bethel rebuilds Jericho under King Ahab: 'He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD spoken through Joshua son of Nun.'
26. *Biv'khoru y'yass'dennah u-vitse'iro yatsiv d'lataha* ('at his firstborn he will found it, and at his youngest he will set up its gates') — the preposition *be-* ('at, in, with, at the cost of') is ambiguous: it could mean the deaths coincide with the construction stages, or that the sons are sacrificed as foundation offerings (a practice attested in ancient Near Eastern archaeology). The text does not specify the mechanism — only the cost.
27. *Vayhi YHWH et Yehoshua* ('the LORD was with Joshua') — the fulfillment of 1:5 ('as I was with Moses, I will be with you') and 3:7 ('today I will begin to exalt you'). The three promises are now realized: God is present, Joshua is exalted, and no one can stand against him. The summary statement closes the Jericho narrative with a theological conclusion: Joshua's fame is not self-made but a consequence of the divine presence that accompanies him.
27. *Vayhi shom'o b'khol ha-arets* ('his fame was in all the land') — *shom'o* ('his fame, his report, what is heard about him') spreads throughout Canaan. The Canaanite terror that Rahab reported (2:9-11) and that 5:1 confirmed now intensifies. Every subsequent city in Canaan knows what happened to Jericho.

## 7

*Summary: Achan takes devoted items from Jericho, and Israel is defeated at Ai. God reveals the violation through lots, Achan confesses, and he and his household are executed in the Valley of Achor.*

*What Makes This Remarkable: The chapter's first word is devastating: vayyim'alu ('they acted unfaithfully') — the plural indicts all Israel for one man's sin. The corporate nature of covenant means individual violation contaminates the community. Achan's confession (v. 21) is psychologically precise: 'I saw... I coveted... I took' — the same sequence as Eve in Genesis 3:6 (saw, desired, took). Sin follows the same pattern across the entire biblical narrative.*

*Translation Friction: The phrase ma'al ma'al (v. 1, 'acted treacherously with treachery') uses the cognate accusative for emphasis — the doubling conveys the gravity of covenant breach. We preserved 'acted unfaithfully' without the doubling because English lacks a natural equivalent. The Valley of Achor (v. 26, 'Valley of Trouble') becomes a place name from a wordplay — Achan brings achar ('trouble'), and the valley is named for it.*

*Connections: Achan's sin-pattern (saw, coveted, took) echoes Genesis 3:6 and anticipates David in 2 Samuel 11. The Valley of Achor is promised as 'a door of hope' in Hosea 2:15 — the site of judgment becomes a site of restoration. The lots-casting process (vv. 14-18) parallels the Urim and Thummim tradition and is echoed in Jonah 1:7. Joshua's prayer (vv. 7-9) echoes Moses's intercessions.*

1But the Israelites acted unfaithfully regarding the devoted things. Achan son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of what was under the ban, and the LORD's anger burned against the Israelites. 2Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel, and told them, "Go up and scout the land." So the men went up and scouted Ai. 3They returned to Joshua and said to him, "There is no need for the whole army to go up. Send about two or three thousand men to attack Ai — do not trouble the entire force with the march, because they are few." 4About three thousand men from the army went up, but they fled before the men of Ai. 5The men of Ai struck down about thirty-six of them and chased them from the city gate as far as Shebarim, cutting them down on the slope. The hearts of the people melted and turned to water. 6Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown before the ark of the LORD until evening — he and the elders of Israel — and they put dust on their heads. 7Joshua said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Why did you bring this people across the Jordan at all, only to hand us over to the Amorites to be destroyed? If only we had been willing to settle on the other side

of the Jordan! <sup>8</sup>Please, Lord — what can I say, now that Israel has turned its back before its enemies? <sup>9</sup>The Canaanites and all who live in the land will hear about this, surround us, and wipe our name from the earth. And what will you do for your great name?" <sup>10</sup>The LORD said to Joshua, "Stand up! Why are you lying facedown? <sup>11</sup>Israel has sinned. They have violated my covenant that I commanded them. They have taken from what is under the ban. They have stolen. They have deceived. They have put the devoted things among their own belongings. <sup>12</sup>The Israelites cannot stand before their enemies. They turn their backs before their enemies because they themselves have become subject to the ban. I will not be with you anymore unless you remove the devoted things from your midst. <sup>13</sup>Get up! Consecrate the people and say, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: There is a devoted thing in your midst, Israel. You will not be able to stand before your enemies until you remove what is under the ban from among you.' <sup>14</sup>In the morning you will come forward tribe by tribe. The tribe that the LORD selects will come forward by clans. The clan that the LORD selects will come forward by households. The household that the LORD selects will come forward man by man. <sup>15</sup>The one caught with the devoted things will be burned with fire — he and everything he has — because he has violated the covenant of the LORD and has committed an outrage in Israel." <sup>16</sup>Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel forward tribe by tribe. The tribe of Judah was selected. <sup>17</sup>He brought forward the clans of Judah, and the clan of the Zerahites was selected. He brought the clan of the Zerahites forward by households, and Zabdi was selected. <sup>18</sup>He brought Zabdi's household forward man by man, and Achan son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was selected. <sup>19</sup>Joshua said to Achan, "My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and make confession to him. Tell me what you have done — do not hide it from me." <sup>20</sup>Achan answered Joshua, "It is true — I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I did: <sup>21</sup>I saw among the plunder a beautiful robe from Shinar, two hundred shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels. I coveted them and I took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath." <sup>22</sup>Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent. There it was — hidden in his tent, with the silver underneath. <sup>23</sup>They took them from inside the tent, brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites, and spread them out before the LORD. <sup>24</sup>Then Joshua, along with all Israel, took Achan son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the bar of gold, his sons and daughters, his ox, his donkey, his flock, his tent, and everything he owned, and brought them up to the Valley of Achor. <sup>25</sup>Joshua said, "Why have you brought disaster on us? The LORD will bring disaster on you today!" Then all Israel stoned him, burned them with fire, and piled stones over them. <sup>26</sup>They raised a great pile of stones over him that remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his fierce anger. That is why that place is called the Valley of Achor to this day.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Vayyim'alu v'nei Yisrael ma'al ba-cherem ('the Israelites acted unfaithfully/treacherously regarding the cherem') — the verb ma'al means to act treacherously, to commit a breach of trust, to be unfaithful. It is covenant-violation language, not merely legal infraction. The crucial theological point: the text says 'the Israelites' committed the breach, though only Achan acted. One man's sin implicates the entire nation. Corporate identity is fundamental to Israelite theology — the community bears responsibility for the actions of its members.
1. Achan's genealogy (ben Karmi, ben Zavdi, ben Zerach, l'matth Yehudah) is given in full — four generations and tribal identification — establishing his place within Israel. He is not a marginal figure but a fully identified member of Judah, the leading tribe. The unfaithfulness comes from inside Israel's heart, not its periphery.
1. Vayyichar af YHWH biv'nei Yisrael ('the anger of the LORD burned against the Israelites') — note that God's anger is directed at Israel collectively, not at Achan individually. The narrative presents the problem as communal before it is personal. Israel will discover Achan's identity only through a process of divine revelation (vv. 14-18).
2. Ha-Ai ('the Ai') — the name means 'the ruin' or 'the heap,' which may indicate the site was already in ruins before Israel arrived, or it may be a name applied retrospectively after its destruction (8:28). The city is located near Beth-aven ('house of wickedness/emptiness') east of Bethel ('house of God') — the geographic names create an ironic cluster for a narrative about unfaithfulness.
2. Joshua acts with the confidence earned at Jericho, sending scouts to the next target. He does not know that the covenant has been breached. The narrative creates dramatic irony: the reader knows (from v. 1) what Joshua does not — Israel is under divine anger.
3. Al ya'al kol ha-am ('not all the people need go up') — the scouts' report is militarily reasonable: Ai is small, and a fraction of the force should suffice. But the assessment is spiritually blind. After Jericho, Israel's scouts evaluate Ai purely in military terms (ki me'at hemmah, 'because they are few') without considering whether God is with them. The contrast with the Jericho campaign is stark: at Jericho, success depended entirely on divine instruction; at Ai, the scouts assume conventional military assessment is sufficient.

3. Al t'yagga shammah et kol ha-am ('do not wear out the whole army going there') — the verb yaga ('to toil, to weary') implies that sending the full force would be wasteful overkill. The overconfidence is palpable — and will be punished.
4. Vayyanusu lifnei anshei ha-Ai ('they fled before the men of Ai') — the verb nus ('to flee') is devastating after 1:5 ('no one will be able to stand before you'). For the first time in Joshua, Israelites run from the enemy. The promise of invincibility was conditional on covenant faithfulness — and the covenant has been breached. The defeat is not large in scale (v. 5 reports 36 casualties) but enormous in theological significance: God's presence has been withdrawn.
5. Kishloashim v'shishah ish ('about thirty-six men') — the casualties are relatively small, but the psychological impact is catastrophic. Vayyimmas l'vav ha-am vayhi l'mayim ('the hearts of the people melted and became like water') — the same verb masas ('to melt') that described Canaanite terror in 2:11 and 5:1 now describes Israel's own reaction. The roles have reversed: the conquerors now experience the same dissolving fear that their enemies felt. The reversal is a direct consequence of the cherem violation.
5. Ha-Sh'varim ('Shebarim') — the name means 'the broken places' or 'the quarries,' likely a rocky area on the descent from Ai. The pursuit ran from the city gate downhill through rough terrain — the Israelites were fleeing downslope, the worst tactical position.
5. The irony is layered: at Jericho, walls fell and Israel charged forward; at Ai, Israel flees and hearts collapse. Same army, same commander, different covenant status.
6. Vayyiqra Yehoshua simlotav ('Joshua tore his garments') — the standard gesture of grief and distress in the ancient Near East. Combined with falling prostrate before the ark and casting dust on the head, the full repertoire of lamentation is deployed. Joshua and the elders mourn not just the thirty-six dead but the apparent failure of the divine promise.
6. Lifnei aron YHWH ad ha-erev ('before the ark of the LORD until evening') — Joshua prostrates himself before the ark for hours. The ark that led the Jordan crossing and the Jericho procession now witnesses Israel's leader face down in the dust. The contrast between this scene and the triumph of chapters 3-6 is total.
7. Ahahh Adonai YHWH ('Ah, Lord GOD!') — the exclamation ahahh is a cry of anguish, not a formal address. Joshua's prayer is raw, unfiltered distress. The address 'Lord GOD' (Adonai YHWH) combines the two divine titles, intensifying the appeal.
7. Lamah he'evarta ha'avir et ha-am ha-zeh et ha-yarden ('why did you bring this people across the Jordan') — Joshua's complaint echoes the wilderness murmuring of the exodus generation (cf. Exodus 14:11-12; Numbers 14:2-3). The same generation that pledged total obedience in 1:16-18 now sounds like the parents who wanted to go back to Egypt. Joshua is momentarily reduced to the posture of the defeated, questioning God's purpose. The parallel to Moses's own moments of frustration (Numbers 11:11-15) is unmistakable — leadership under pressure produces the same raw prayers.
7. V'lu ho'alnu vanneshev b'ever ha-yarden ('if only we had been willing to stay on the other side of the Jordan') — this is theologically dangerous. Joshua is questioning whether the crossing itself was a mistake — which would mean God's most explicit command (1:2) was wrong. God's response (vv. 10-15) will be sharp.
8. Hafakh Yisrael oref lifnei oy'vav ('Israel has turned its neck/back before its enemies') — the idiom 'to turn the back of the neck' (oref) means to flee. The word oref ('back of the neck, nape') is associated with stubbornness when applied to Israel's character ('stiff-necked,' q'sheh oref) — here it takes on a different shame: the neck that should have been stiffened in resolve against enemies is instead turned away in flight.
9. U-mah ta'aseh l'shimkha ha-gadol ('and what will you do for your great name?') — Joshua's final argument shifts from Israel's survival to God's reputation. If Israel is destroyed, God's name — His fame, His renown among the nations — will be diminished. This argument echoes Moses's intercessory logic in Exodus 32:11-14 and Numbers 14:13-16, where Moses persuaded God not to destroy Israel precisely because it would undermine His reputation among the nations. Joshua instinctively reaches for the same theological leverage: God's honor is at stake.
9. V'hikhreitu et sh'menu min ha-arets ('and cut off our name from the earth') — the destruction of a 'name' (shem) in the ancient world means extinction of memory, lineage, and identity. Joshua envisions total annihilation — not merely military defeat but civilizational erasure.
10. Qum lakh ('stand up,' literally 'rise for yourself') — God's response to Joshua's lament is blunt and impatient. There is no comforting word, no reassurance, no pastoral sympathy. God issues a command: get up. The prostration and anguish are misplaced because Joshua is grieving a military defeat when he should be addressing a covenant violation. The problem is not that God has abandoned Israel — the problem is that Israel has abandoned God's command.
11. Chata Yisrael ('Israel has sinned') — again the corporate formulation. God does not say 'Achan has sinned' but 'Israel has sinned.' The five-fold indictment escalates with repeated v'gam ('and also, and moreover'): (1) avru et b'rity ('they violated my covenant'), (2) laqchu min ha-cherem ('they took from the devoted things'), (3) ganvu ('they stole'), (4) kichash'u ('they deceived/acted falsely'), (5) samu vi-khleihem ('they put it among their own belongings'). Each 'also' adds a new dimension of guilt — covenant violation, theft, deception, and appropriation. One man's act is described as the nation's sin because covenant solidarity means shared responsibility.
11. Avru et b'rity ('they have transgressed my covenant') — the verb avar ('to cross over, to transgress') here means to cross a boundary that should not be crossed. The irony is sharp: Israel 'crossed' the Jordan by divine power (chapters 3-4) but has now 'crossed' God's covenant boundary by human greed. The same verb for liberation becomes the verb for violation.
12. Ki hayu l'cherem ('because they have become cherem') — the warning of 6:18 has come true. By taking cherem objects into their camp, Israel itself has become cherem — devoted to destruction. The contagion that Joshua warned about has infected the entire nation. Israel is now in the same category as Jericho: marked for divine destruction.

12. Lo osif lihyot immakhem ('I will not continue to be with you') — the most terrifying statement in the chapter. God's presence — the foundation of every promise (1:5, 9; 3:7) — is conditionally withdrawn. The 'I will be with you' that grounded Joshua's courage is now suspended. Without divine presence, Israel is just another small people in Canaan, and the Deuteronomic logic kicks in: no presence no victory no land.
12. Im lo tashmeidu ha-cherem miqirb'khem ('unless you destroy the devoted things from your midst') — the remedy is surgical: the cherem must be removed from the community. The verb hashmid ('to destroy, to annihilate') is severe — whatever is cherem within Israel must be eliminated entirely.
13. Qum qaddesh et ha-am ('Get up, consecrate the people') — the same consecration command as 3:5, but with opposite emotional valence. There, consecration prepared for a miracle of salvation; here, it prepares for a process of judgment. The holiness required to approach God works in both directions — it enables blessing and it exposes sin.
13. Cherem b'qirb'kha Yisrael ('a devoted thing is in your midst, Israel') — God reveals the nature of the problem but not the identity of the offender. Israel knows what has happened (the cherem has been violated) but not who did it. The identification process (vv. 14-18) will narrow from tribe to clan to household to individual — a dramatic winnowing that forces the entire community to stand before God and be examined.
14. The process of identification narrows through four levels: shevet (tribe) mishpachah (clan) bayit (household) g'varim (individual men). The verb yilk'dennu ('will take/select/catch') uses lakad, which means to capture or seize — the language of hunting or trapping. God is closing in on the guilty individual through a systematic elimination process. The method (likely involving sacred lots, the Urim and Thummim) is not specified, but the text presents each selection as God's direct act — YHWH identifies the guilty party at each level.
15. Yissaref ba-esh oto v'et kol asher lo ('he will be burned with fire, he and everything he has') — the punishment mirrors the cherem itself: just as Jericho was burned (6:24), so the covenant violator and all his possessions will be burned. He has made himself cherem by taking cherem, and the treatment of cherem is fire.
15. Ki avar et berit YHWH ('because he has violated the covenant of the LORD') — the violation is framed as covenant breach, not mere theft. This is the language of Deuteronomy 17:2 (the penalty for covenant violation through idolatry). The punishment is proportional to the offense: betraying the covenant that gives Israel the land jeopardizes Israel's hold on the land.
15. Asah n'valah b'Yisrael ('committed an outrage/folly in Israel') — n'valah is a strong term for an act so disgraceful that it shames the entire community. It is used for Shechem's rape of Dinah (Genesis 34:7), the Gibeah atrocity (Judges 19:23-24; 20:6, 10), and Amnon's assault on Tamar (2 Samuel 13:12). The word places Achan's theft alongside the worst acts in Israel's history — not because theft is equivalent to assault, but because covenant treachery against God is an outrage of the highest order.
16. Vayyillakhed shevet Yehudah ('the tribe of Judah was taken/selected') — the lot falls on Judah, the leading tribe, the tribe of Caleb, and later the tribe of David. The violation comes not from a marginal or minor tribe but from Israel's most prominent. The narrative makes no attempt to protect Judah's reputation — faithfulness and unfaithfulness cross all tribal boundaries.
17. The narrowing process moves from tribe (Judah) clan (Zerahites, descended from Zerah son of Judah, Genesis 38:30) household head (Zabdi). Each step tightens the circle around Achan. The public nature of the process means the entire nation watches as the guilt is systematically located — the shame and tension mount with each selection.
18. Vayyillakhed Akhan — the four-generation genealogy from verse 1 is repeated in full, creating a formal identification. The man whose individual act was described as the sin of 'Israel' (v. 1) is now personally identified by name, parentage, and tribe. The process has moved from national guilt to individual accountability — but the text holds both dimensions simultaneously. Achan sinned and Israel sinned; Achan will be punished and Israel will be restored.
19. B'ni ('my son') — Joshua addresses Achan with paternal tenderness, not judicial coldness. The address acknowledges the familial bond within Israel even in the moment of judgment. Joshua is the father-figure of the nation, and the guilty man is still 'my son.'
19. Sim na kavod la-YHWH ... v'ten lo todah ('give glory to the LORD and make confession to him') — the phrase 'give glory' (sim kavod) here means to honor God by telling the truth. Todah can mean both 'thanksgiving' and 'confession' — here it is confession, an acknowledgment of what really happened. Joshua asks Achan to confirm by his own mouth what the divine lot has already revealed. The confession is not for God's benefit (He already knows) but for the community's — truth must be spoken aloud.
20. Omnah anokhi chatati la-YHWH Elohei Yisrael ('truly, I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel') — Achan's confession uses the formal first person anokhi ('I') rather than the common ani, giving the confession a gravity and deliberateness. The sin is acknowledged as being against YHWH specifically — not against Israel, not against Joshua, but against God. The confession echoes David's later acknowledgment in Psalm 51:4 ('against you, you alone, have I sinned').
20. V'khazot v'khazot asiti ('and thus and thus I did') — the phrase introduces the detailed confession that follows. Achan hides nothing.
21. Va'ereh ... va'echm'dem ... va'eqqachem ('I saw ... I coveted ... I took') — Achan's confession traces the three-step progression of sin: seeing, desiring, taking. The sequence echoes Eve's temptation in Genesis 3:6 (she saw that the tree was good, she desired it, she took). The narrative pattern is deliberate — coveting leads to taking in both Eden and Jericho, and both acts rupture the covenant relationship.
21. Adderet Shin'ar ('a robe from Shinar') — Shinar is the biblical name for Babylon (Genesis 10:10; 11:2; Daniel 1:2). A Babylonian garment would have been a luxury item of extraordinary value and craftsmanship. The irony: Achan covets a product of the very civilization that will eventually destroy Israel and carry Judah into exile.

- 21.** Matayim sh'qalim kesef ('two hundred shekels of silver') — approximately 5 pounds (2.3 kg) of silver. U-l'shon zahav echad chamishim sh'qalim mishqalo ('one bar/tongue of gold weighing fifty shekels') — about 1.25 pounds (0.6 kg) of gold. The total value was enormous — a lifetime's wages for a common laborer. The temptation was real.
- 21.** T'munim ba-arets b'tokh ha-oholi ('hidden in the ground inside my tent') — Achan buried the items underground inside his tent, concealing the cherem from human eyes but not from God's.
- 22.** Vayyarutsu ha-ohelah ('they ran to the tent') — the urgency is palpable. The messengers run — they do not walk — to verify the confession. V'hinneh t'munah b'oholo ('and there it was, hidden in his tent') — the evidence matches Achan's confession exactly. The narrative confirms his honesty in confession, even though it came too late to prevent the consequences.
- 23.** Vayyatsiqum lifnei YHWH ('they poured/spread them out before the LORD') — the verb yatsaq ('to pour out') may describe laying the items out on the ground or literally pouring the silver coins/pieces out in a display. The presentation is before YHWH — not merely before Joshua or the people. The stolen goods are returned to their rightful owner: God. The public display forces the entire community to see what coveting and stealing from God looks like.
- 24.** The list is comprehensive and devastating: Achan, the stolen items, his sons and daughters, his livestock, his tent, and everything he possesses. The punishment extends beyond Achan to his household — the corporate nature of guilt in ancient Israelite theology means the household shares in the consequences. This is deeply troubling to modern readers, and the text does not soften or explain the extension of punishment to Achan's children. The Covenant Rendering records what the text says without editorial justification or condemnation.
- 24.** Emeq Akhor ('the Valley of Achor') — the name means 'Valley of Trouble/Disaster,' derived from the root akhar ('to trouble'), which is the verb Joshua uses in verse 25. The place is named from the event, as with Gilgal (5:9) and Gibeath-haaraloth (5:3). The valley is referenced later in Hosea 2:15, where God promises to make the Valley of Achor 'a door of hope' — transforming the site of judgment into a symbol of restoration.
- 25.** Meh akhartanu ya'akhorkha YHWH ba-yom ha-zeh ('Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you today') — the wordplay on akhar ('to trouble, to bring disaster') is central to the passage. Achan's name itself sounds like akhar, and the valley is named from the same root. The punishment matches the crime linguistically: the one who troubled Israel is troubled by God. The play on words is untranslatable without losing either the name or the concept, so the notes must make it explicit.
- 25.** Vayyirgemu oto kol Yisrael even vayyisr'fu otam ba-esh vayyisq'lu otam ba-avanim ('all Israel stoned him with stones and burned them with fire and covered them with stones') — the execution is communal (kol Yisrael, 'all Israel') — the entire community participates in removing the cherem from its midst. The shift from singular 'him' (oto) to plural 'them' (otam) in burning and stoning is ambiguous: it may refer to the stolen objects being burned and Achan being stoned, or it may include his family members. The text does not clarify, and the translator notes should acknowledge this ambiguity honestly.
- 26.** Vayyashov YHWH mecharon appo ('the LORD turned from his fierce anger') — the removal of the cherem violation restores the covenant relationship. God's anger, which was the cause of the defeat at Ai (vv. 1, 12), is now spent. The passage from 7:1 to 7:26 traces a complete arc: sin divine anger defeat discovery confession punishment restoration. The next chapter will demonstrate the restoration through a successful attack on Ai.
- 26.** Gal avanim gadol ('a great pile of stones') — this cairn is the dark counterpart to the memorial stones at Gilgal (4:20). Both are stone memorials that provoke questions; both tell a story. But where the Gilgal stones tell a story of divine faithfulness, the Achor stones tell a story of human unfaithfulness and its cost. The two memorials, set early in the book of Joshua, establish the Deuteronomic pattern: obedience leads to blessing (Gilgal), disobedience to destruction (Achor).

## 8

**Summary:** *God reassures Joshua and gives the strategy for Ai's capture through ambush. Israel destroys Ai, and Joshua builds an altar on Mount Ebal, writing a copy of Moses's Law on plastered stones and reading it before all Israel.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The Ai narrative reverses chapter 7: with the cherem violation purged, God fights for Israel again. The ambush strategy (vv. 3-8) is the first use of conventional military tactics in Joshua — after Jericho's miraculous walls, Ai requires human planning within divine authorization. The Ebal ceremony (vv. 30-35) fulfills Deuteronomy 27:2-8 exactly: altar, plastered stones, Torah written, blessings and curses read with all Israel — including women, children, and foreigners — present.*

**Translation Friction:** *The troop numbers for the ambush vary between verses 3 and 12 (thirty thousand vs. five thousand), a textual difficulty present in all manuscripts. We rendered both numbers as the Hebrew gives them and noted the discrepancy. The phrase mishneh torat Mosheh (v. 32, 'a copy of the Law of Moses') uses the same mishneh as Deuteronomy 17:18, connecting the king's Torah-copy to this public inscription.*

*Connections: The Ebal ceremony fulfills Deuteronomy 11:29-30 and 27:1-8. The burning of Ai ('the ruin,' from the Hebrew root meaning 'heap') may be etiological — the city was named for what it became. Joshua's outstretched javelin (v. 18) mirrors Moses's outstretched staff at the Red Sea (Exodus 17:11-12). The inclusion of foreigners in the Torah reading (v. 35) anticipates the Gentile inclusion theme.*

<sup>1</sup>The LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid and do not lose heart. Take the entire fighting force with you, and move out to attack Ai. See — I have handed over to you the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land. <sup>2</sup>Do to Ai and its king what you did to Jericho and its king — except that you may keep the plunder and livestock for yourselves. Set an ambush behind the city." <sup>3</sup>Joshua and the entire fighting force set out to attack Ai. Joshua selected thirty thousand of the best warriors and sent them out at night. <sup>4</sup>He gave them these orders: "You are to lie in ambush behind the city. Do not go too far from it — all of you stay ready. <sup>5</sup>I and all the troops with me will advance toward the city. When they come out against us as they did before, we will retreat before them. <sup>6</sup>They will come out after us until we have drawn them away from the city, because they will think, 'They are fleeing from us just like last time.' So we will flee from them. <sup>7</sup>Then you will rise from the ambush and take the city. The LORD your God will hand it over to you. <sup>8</sup>When you have taken the city, set it on fire. Do this according to the word of the LORD. See — I have given you your orders." <sup>9</sup>Joshua sent them out, and they went to the ambush position and took up their place between Bethel and Ai, west of Ai. Joshua spent that night among the people. <sup>10</sup>Joshua rose early in the morning, mustered the troops, and marched at the head of the army with the elders of Israel toward Ai. <sup>11</sup>The entire fighting force with him advanced, approached, and arrived opposite the city. They camped north of Ai, with a valley between them and the city. <sup>12</sup>He selected roughly five thousand soldiers and stationed them as an ambush force between Bethel and Ai, to the west of the city. <sup>13</sup>So the people positioned the entire camp north of the city, with its rear guard west of the city. That night Joshua went into the middle of the valley. <sup>14</sup>When the king of Ai saw the Israelites, he and all his men hurried out early to engage Israel in battle at the designated place facing the Arabah. He did not know there was an ambush set against him behind the city. <sup>15</sup>Joshua and all Israel let themselves be driven back before them and fled toward the wilderness. <sup>16</sup>Every man in Ai was called out to pursue them. As they chased Joshua, they were drawn away from the city. <sup>17</sup>Not a man was left in Ai or Bethel who had not gone out after Israel. They left the city wide open and pursued Israel. <sup>18</sup>The LORD said to Joshua, "Hold out the javelin in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand." So Joshua held out the javelin in his hand toward the city. <sup>19</sup>The ambush force rose quickly from its position and rushed forward the moment he stretched out his hand. They entered the city, captured it, and immediately set it on fire. <sup>20</sup>When the men of Ai looked back, they saw the smoke of the city rising to the sky, and they had no strength to flee in any direction — for the force that had been fleeing toward the wilderness now turned on the pursuers. <sup>21</sup>When Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush force had captured the city and that smoke was rising from it, they turned and struck down the men of Ai. <sup>22</sup>The ambush force came out of the city to meet them, so the men of Ai were caught in the middle — Israelites on both sides. They struck them down until no survivor or fugitive remained. <sup>23</sup>The king of Ai they captured alive and brought him to Joshua. <sup>24</sup>When Israel had finished killing all the inhabitants of Ai in the open field and in the wilderness where they had chased them, and every last one had fallen by the sword, all of Israel returned to Ai and put it to the sword. <sup>25</sup>The total who fell that day, both men and women, was twelve thousand — all the people of Ai. <sup>26</sup>Joshua did not lower the hand holding the javelin until he had devoted all the inhabitants of Ai to destruction. <sup>27</sup>Only the livestock and the plunder of the city did Israel take as spoil for themselves, according to the word of the LORD that he had commanded Joshua. <sup>28</sup>Joshua burned Ai and made it a permanent ruin — a desolation to this day. <sup>29</sup>He hung the king of Ai on a tree until evening. At sunset, Joshua ordered them to take his body down from the tree and throw it at the entrance of the city gate. They raised a great pile of stones over it that remains to this day. <sup>30</sup>Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal, <sup>31</sup>just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the Israelites — as it is written in the book of the law of Moses: an altar of uncut stones, on which no iron tool had been used. On it they offered burnt offerings to the LORD and sacrificed fellowship offerings. <sup>32</sup>There, on the stones, he inscribed a copy of the law of Moses, which Moses had written, in the presence of the Israelites. <sup>33</sup>All Israel — their elders, officers, and judges — stood on both sides of the ark, facing the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD. Resident foreigners and native-born alike were there, half facing Mount Gerizim and half facing Mount Ebal, just as

Moses the servant of the LORD had earlier commanded for the blessing of the people of Israel. <sup>34</sup>After that, he read aloud all the words of the law — the blessings and the curses — exactly as written in the book of the law. <sup>35</sup>There was not a single word of everything Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read aloud before the entire assembly of Israel — including the women, the children, and the foreigners living among them.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Al tira v'al techat ('do not be afraid and do not lose heart') — the same pair of fear words from 1:9, now repeated after the Ai defeat. God reassures Joshua that the Achan crisis is resolved and the divine presence has been restored. The encouragement is needed: Joshua's last experience at Ai was humiliating flight.
1. Qach imm'kha et kol am ha-milchamah ('take the entire fighting force with you') — a deliberate correction of the first attempt, where scouts recommended sending only two or three thousand (7:3). This time the full army goes. The earlier overconfidence is replaced by proper mobilization under divine instruction.
1. Re'eh natatti b'yadkha ('see, I have given into your hand') — the identical perfect-tense formula from 6:2 (Jericho). The pattern reasserts itself: God declares the victory accomplished before the battle begins. The divine grant that was suspended during the Achan crisis is now restored.
2. Raq sh'lalah uv'hemtah tavozu lakhem ('only its plunder and livestock you may take for yourselves') — the critical difference from Jericho: Ai is not under full cherem. The spoils may be kept. This makes Achan's sin in chapter 7 even more bitter — had he simply waited for the next city, the plunder would have been legitimately his. His impatience cost him everything.
2. Sim l'kha orev la-ir me'achareha ('set an ambush behind the city') — unlike Jericho's liturgical warfare, Ai will fall by conventional military tactics: an ambush. God prescribes different methods for different situations. The theological point is not that Israel must always fight by miracle but that Israel must always fight under divine direction. Obedience is the constant; the tactics vary.
3. Sh'loshim elef ish gibborei ha-chayil ('thirty thousand men, mighty warriors') — this is the ambush force. The number is far larger than the first Ai expedition (three thousand, 7:3-4). Some scholars note a tension between this figure and the five thousand of verse 12, suggesting either two ambush groups or a textual variant. The narrative may describe a large main force with a smaller specialized ambush detachment.
4. Al tarcheiqu min ha-ir me'od ('do not go too far from the city') — the ambush force must remain close enough to strike quickly when the signal comes. Vihyitem kulkhem n'khonim ('all of you be ready/prepared') — the participle nakkon conveys a state of constant readiness. There will be no second chance to spring the trap.
5. V'nasnu lifneihem ('we will flee before them') — Joshua plans a feigned retreat, deliberately mimicking the genuine rout of the first battle (7:4-5). The defenders of Ai will see what they expect to see: Israelites fleeing again. The tactical deception works because it exploits the enemy's confidence built on their previous victory. What was Israel's genuine shame in chapter 7 becomes a strategic tool in chapter 8.
6. Ad hatiqenu otam min ha-ir ('until we have pulled them away from the city') — the verb nataq ('to pull away, to draw out') describes the lure. The tactical objective is clear: empty the city of defenders by exploiting their overconfidence. Ki yomru nasim l'faneinu ka'asher ba-rishonah ('because they will say, they are fleeing before us as at first') — Joshua reads the enemy's psychology perfectly. The Ai defenders' greatest strength (their previous victory) becomes their fatal vulnerability.
7. V'horisitem et ha-ir ('you will take possession of the city') — the verb yarash ('to take possession, to dispossess') reappears — the key conquest verb from chapter 1. Un'tanah YHWH Eloheikhem b'yedkhem ('the LORD your God will give it into your hand') — even within conventional military tactics, the victory is attributed to divine action. The ambush succeeds because God gives the city, not because the tactic is clever.
8. Tatsivu et ha-ir ba-esh ('set the city on fire') — the burning of Ai parallels the burning of Jericho (6:24). Fire serves as the instrument of divine judgment. Kidvar YHWH ta'asu ('according to the word of the LORD you will do') — Joshua frames his tactical orders as divine command. Military action and covenant obedience remain fused: even the ambush is 'according to the word of the LORD.'
9. Vayyalen Yehoshua ba-lailah ha-hu b'tokh ha-am ('Joshua spent that night among the troops') — the commander sleeps with his soldiers in the field. The detail humanizes Joshua and demonstrates his solidarity with the army on the eve of battle.
10. Vayyifqod et ha-am ('he mustered/reviewed the troops') — the verb paqad ('to visit, to attend to, to muster, to count') here describes a military review before deployment. Joshua personally inspects and organizes the force before the advance.
11. V'ha-gay beino u-vein ha-Ai ('with the valley between him and Ai') — the valley separates the main force from the city, creating a visible gap. The defenders of Ai will see the Israelite camp across the valley and come out to engage — not realizing the ambush force is hidden behind them to the west (v. 9). The geography sets the trap.
12. Ka-chameshet alafim ish ('about five thousand men') — this second ambush group (or a more specific number for the same ambush) has prompted scholarly discussion about the relationship to the thirty thousand of verse 3. The most common explanations: (1) two separate ambush forces at different positions, (2) a textual variant where the numbers reflect different source traditions, or (3) verse 12 specifies a specialized strike team within the larger force. The narrative does not resolve the tension, and the rendering follows the text as it stands.

13. Et aqev miyyam la-ir ('its rear/heel west of the city') — the word aqev ('heel, rear') describes the trailing element — the ambush force positioned behind (west of) the city. The main camp is visible to the north; the ambush is hidden to the west. The trap is set.
13. Vayyalekh Yehoshua ba-lailah ha-hu b'tokh ha-emeq ('Joshua went that night into the middle of the valley') — Joshua positions himself in the valley between his camp and Ai, making himself visible and vulnerable. He is the bait.
14. V'hu lo yada ki orev lo me'acharei ha-ir ('he did not know there was an ambush behind the city') — the narrator highlights the king's fatal ignorance. His previous victory (7:4-5) has made him overconfident. La-mo'ed lifnei ha-aravah ('at the appointed place/time, facing the Arabah') — the phrase la-mo'ed may mean 'at the appointed time' (a prearranged battle position) or 'at the designated place.' Either way, the king deploys to the expected battle zone — and walks into the trap.
15. Vayyinnag'u ('they allowed themselves to be struck/driven back') — the niph'al form suggests the retreat is permitted rather than forced. The feigned rout toward the wilderness (derekh ha-midbar, the eastward road) draws the defenders away from the city and deeper into the trap. The discipline required to execute a convincing fake retreat — running as if genuinely terrified while maintaining unit cohesion — is one of the most difficult maneuvers in ancient warfare.
16. Vayyinnat'qu min ha-ir ('they were drawn/pulled away from the city') — the verb nataq ('to be pulled, to be torn away') is the same verb Joshua used in verse 6 (hatiqenu, 'we will pull them away'). The plan unfolds exactly as designed. The key detail: kol ha-am asher ba-Ai ('all the people who were in Ai') — every defender leaves the city. No one remains to guard it.
17. Vayyaazvu et ha-ir p'tuchah ('they left the city open') — the gates stand open, the walls undefended, the city empty. The mention of Bethel (beit El) suggests Bethel's forces had joined Ai's pursuit, leaving both cities undefended. The folly is complete: the entire defensive force has abandoned its fortification to chase a retreating enemy into open ground.
18. N'teh ba-kidon asher b'yadkha el ha-Ai ('stretch out the javelin that is in your hand toward Ai') — the gesture deliberately echoes Moses stretching out his staff over the Red Sea (Exodus 14:16, 26) and during the battle with Amalek (Exodus 17:8-13). Joshua's extended weapon is not a military signal but a symbolic act of divine power channeled through the leader's hand. The kidon ('javelin' or 'curved sword/scimitar') becomes a ritual instrument, like Moses's staff.
18. Ki v'yadkha ettenannah ('for I will give it into your hand') — the javelin in Joshua's hand becomes a pun: God will give the city 'into his hand' while Joshua extends the weapon in his hand. Physical gesture and divine action converge.
19. Kin'tot yado ('when he stretched out his hand') — Joshua's extended javelin serves as both the divine signal and the tactical signal. The ambush springs the moment his hand goes up. The synchronization is perfect: the feigned retreat draws the enemy out, Joshua raises the javelin, and the ambush force storms the empty city.
19. Vaymaharu vayyatsivu et ha-ir ba-esh ('they hurried and set the city on fire') — speed is essential. The smoke will serve as the signal to the pursuing Ai defenders that their city is lost (v. 20).
20. V'lo hayah vahem yadayim lanus hannah va-hannah ('they had no power/hands to flee this way or that') — the idiom 'no hands' (yadayim) means no capacity, no means of escape. The Ai forces are caught in the open between the main Israelite force (now turning to fight) and the ambush force emerging from the burning city behind them. The trap is complete.
20. V'ha-am ha-nas ha-midbar nehpkh el ha-rodef ('the people fleeing toward the wilderness turned on the pursuers') — the verb hafakh ('to turn, to reverse') captures the sudden reversal: hunters become prey, pursuers become the pursued. The fake retreat becomes a real attack.
21. The smoke serves as the signal that closes the trap. Joshua sees the smoke, confirms the ambush has succeeded, and orders the main force to turn and fight. The Ai defenders now face combat on two fronts with no city to retreat to.
22. Vayyihyu l'Yisrael ba-tavekh ('they were in the midst of Israel') — the Ai fighters are completely surrounded, Israelites on every side. Ad bilti hish'ir lo sarid u-falit ('until there was no survivor or fugitive left') — the destruction is total. The double term sarid u-falit ('survivor and fugitive') is a merism meaning absolutely no one escaped.
23. Taf'su chai ('they captured alive') — the king is taken alive for judgment, not killed in battle. His fate will be described in verse 29. The capture of the king personally represents the complete overthrow of Ai's political and military authority.
24. The narrative describes two phases of killing: first the defenders caught in the open field during the pursuit, then the remaining population in the city itself. L'fi cherev ('by the mouth of the sword') — the standard idiom for death in combat. The phrase ad tummam ('until they were finished/consumed') from the root tamam ('to be complete') indicates total destruction.
25. Sh'neim asar elef ('twelve thousand') — the total population of Ai. As with other large numbers in Joshua, elef may function as a military unit term ('contingent') rather than the numeral 'thousand,' which would yield a smaller but still significant figure. Kol anshei ha-Ai ('all the people of Ai') — the city's entire population. The text does not flinch from recording total destruction.
26. Lo heshiv yado asher natah ba-kidon ('he did not withdraw his hand that he had stretched out with the javelin') — the parallel to Moses holding up his hands during the battle with Amalek (Exodus 17:11-12) is now explicit. As long as Moses's hands were raised, Israel prevailed; when they dropped, Amalek prevailed. Joshua holds his javelin aloft throughout the entire battle. The raised weapon is an act of sustained faith and divine channeling, not a military command signal.

26. Ad asher hecherim et kol yosh'vei ha-Ai ('until he had devoted all the inhabitants of Ai to destruction') — the verb hecherim (hiphil of charam) applies the sacred ban. Despite the permission to take plunder (v. 2), the people themselves are placed under cherem.
27. Kidvar YHWH asher tsivvah et Yehoshua ('according to the word of the LORD that he commanded Joshua') — Israel obeys the plunder permission of verse 2 precisely. The contrast with Achan's violation is pointed: when God permits plunder, Israel takes it lawfully; when God prohibits it (Jericho), one man's disobedience brought disaster. The lesson is not 'never take spoils' but 'take only what God permits.'
28. Tel olam sh'mamah ('a permanent mound/ruin, a desolation') — a tel is an artificial mound formed by accumulated layers of destruction and rebuilding. Here the tel will not be rebuilt — it remains a sh'mamah ('desolation, wasteland') olam ('permanently'). The name ha-Ai ('the ruin') proves prophetically fitting: the city whose name means 'ruin' becomes a permanent ruin. Ad ha-yom ha-zeh ('to this day') again signals the narrator's temporal distance and the enduring visibility of the site.
29. Talah al ha-ets ('hung on a tree/pole') — public exposure of an executed enemy as a display of total victory. The practice is regulated in Deuteronomy 21:22-23, which commands that a hanged body must be removed before nightfall: 'you must not leave his body on the tree overnight, for a hanged person is cursed by God, and you must not defile the land.' Joshua obeys this law precisely — ukh'vo ha-shemesh ('at sunset') the body is taken down.
29. Vayyaqimu alav gal avanim gadol ('they raised a great pile of stones over him') — the third stone cairn in Joshua, after the memorial at Gilgal (4:20) and the cairn over Achan (7:26). Each cairn tells a different story: divine faithfulness (Gilgal), Israelite unfaithfulness (Achor), and enemy defeat (Ai). The landscape fills with stone witnesses.
30. The narrative abruptly shifts from battlefield to sanctuary. Joshua builds an altar on Mount Ebal, fulfilling Moses's command in Deuteronomy 27:4-8. The location is significant: Ebal and Gerizim flank the valley of Shechem, roughly in the center of Canaan. Israel has marched approximately twenty miles north from Ai without reported opposition — either the Canaanite collapse of nerve (5:1) kept them from resisting, or the narrative condenses the journey. The covenant renewal ceremony (vv. 30-35) is the theological climax of the conquest's first phase.
31. Mizbach avanim sh'lemot asher lo henif aleihem barzel ('an altar of whole/uncut stones on which no iron was lifted') — the altar is built from undressed stones, following the regulation of Exodus 20:25 and Deuteronomy 27:5-6. The prohibition against using iron tools preserves the stones' natural state — human craftsmanship must not alter what will serve as a point of contact between God and Israel.
31. Olot ('burnt offerings') and sh'lamim ('fellowship/peace offerings') — the two primary categories of voluntary sacrifice. The olah is entirely consumed by fire (total dedication to God); the sh'lamim involves a shared meal (communion between God and worshipers). Together they represent complete worship: total devotion and covenant fellowship.
31. Ka'asher tsivvah Mosheh ... ka-katuv b'sefer torat Mosheh ('as Moses commanded ... as written in the book of the law of Moses') — the altar is built not by Joshua's design but by Moses's prior instruction. Every detail of the covenant renewal traces back to Mosaic authority, reinforcing the continuity of the Sinai covenant into the promised land.
32. Mishneh torat Mosheh ('a copy of the law of Moses') — the word mishneh means 'copy, duplicate, second version.' This fulfills Deuteronomy 27:3, 8, which commanded the law to be written on plastered stones at the site. The inscription creates a permanent, public, visible record of the covenant terms in the promised land. What was spoken at Sinai and repeated on the plains of Moab is now inscribed in stone at the heart of Canaan.
32. Lifnei b'nei Yisrael ('in the presence of the Israelites') — the writing is a public act, witnessed by the entire assembly. The covenant is not a secret agreement between God and the leaders but a public commitment of the whole nation.
33. Ka-ger ka-ezrach ('foreigner and native-born alike') — the covenant assembly includes non-Israelites who live among them. The ger ('resident alien, sojourner') stands alongside the ezrach ('native-born citizen') in the covenant ceremony. This inclusivity is theologically significant: covenant membership extends beyond ethnic boundaries. Rahab and her household (6:25) would be among these gerim.
33. Chetsyo el mul har Gerizim v'ha-chetsyo el mul har Ebal ('half facing Mount Gerizim and half facing Mount Ebal') — the two mountains flank the valley of Shechem like a natural amphitheater. Gerizim is the mountain of blessing, Ebal the mountain of curse (Deuteronomy 11:29; 27:12-13). Israel stands between blessing and curse, surrounded by the physical landscape of covenant consequence. The arrangement fulfills Deuteronomy 27:11-13 precisely.
34. Et kol divrei ha-torah ha-b'rakhah v'ha-q'lalah ('all the words of the instruction, the blessing and the curse') — the content read aloud is the Deuteronomic covenant: the blessings for obedience (Deuteronomy 28:1-14) and the curses for disobedience (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). The Ebal/Gerizim ceremony makes the Deuteronomic theology physically and audibly real: Israel hears the blessings from one mountain and the curses from the other, surrounded by the consequences of their covenant choice.
34. K'khol ha-katuv b'sefer ha-torah ('according to everything written in the book of the law') — nothing is omitted. The entire covenant document is read publicly. This is the torah meditation of 1:8 enacted communally — the book of the law on the lips of the whole nation.
35. Lo hayah davar mikkol asher tsivvah Mosheh asher lo qara Yehoshua ('there was not a word of everything Moses commanded that Joshua did not read') — the double negative creates an emphatic positive: Joshua read absolutely everything. Not a single word of the Mosaic instruction was skipped. This verse serves as the certification that Joshua fulfilled the torah charge of 1:7-8 completely.
35. V'ha-nashim v'ha-taf v'ha-ger ha-holekh b'qirbam ('the women, the children, and the foreigners living among them') — the audience is comprehensive. Covenant responsibility and covenant knowledge belong to every member of the community: men, women, children, and resident foreigners. No one is excluded from hearing the terms. The chapter closes with the fullest possible picture of covenant Israel: an army that has

conquered through obedience, standing between the mountains of blessing and curse, listening to every word of the law that defines their relationship with God.

## 9

**Summary:** *The Gibeonites deceive Israel with worn-out clothes and stale bread, claiming to be from a distant land. Israel makes a peace treaty without consulting God. When the deception is discovered, the Gibeonites are spared but made permanent servants.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The phrase 'they did not ask counsel from the mouth of the LORD' (v. 14, et-pi YHWH lo sha'alu) is the chapter's verdict — the failure is not military but prayerful. Israel's leaders relied on their own investigation (they inspected the evidence) rather than inquiring of God. The Gibeonites' strategy exploits Deuteronomy 20:10-15, which allows peace treaties with distant cities — they pretend to be far away to qualify for the exception.*

**Translation Friction:** *The phrase berit shalom (v. 15, 'covenant of peace') uses the covenant vocabulary for what is essentially a treaty obtained by fraud. We rendered it as 'treaty' to distinguish it from divine covenant. The Gibeonites' punishment — 'woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God' (v. 23) — transforms them from free deceivers into temple servants, a judgment that is also a kind of inclusion.*

**Connections:** *The Gibeonite treaty has consequences in 2 Samuel 21:1-9, where Saul's violation of it brings famine. Gibeon becomes a significant site: the tabernacle is located there (1 Chronicles 21:29, 2 Chronicles 1:3), and Solomon receives his wisdom vision at Gibeon (1 Kings 3:4-5). The failure to inquire of God echoes the Ai disaster (ch. 7) and anticipates Saul's failures in 1 Samuel.*

<sup>1</sup>When all the kings west of the Jordan heard what had happened — those in the hill country, the lowlands, and all along the coast of the Great Sea toward Lebanon — the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites — <sup>2</sup>they gathered together as one to fight against Joshua and Israel. <sup>3</sup>But when the people of Gibeon learned how Joshua had dealt with Jericho and Ai, <sup>4</sup>and they too acted — but with cunning. They set out disguised as envoys, loading their donkeys with worn-out sacks and old wineskins that were cracked and patched. <sup>5</sup>They wore old, patched sandals on their feet and threadbare clothes on their backs. All the bread in their provisions was dry and crumbling. <sup>6</sup>They went to Joshua at the camp at Gilgal and said to him and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a distant land. Make a covenant with us." <sup>7</sup>The men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you actually live among us — how then could we make a covenant with you?" <sup>8</sup>They said to Joshua, "We are your servants." Joshua asked them, "Who are you, and where do you come from?" <sup>9</sup>They said to him, "Your servants have come from a very distant land because of the reputation of the LORD your God. For we have heard the report of him — all that he did in Egypt, <sup>10</sup>and everything he did to the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan — Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan, who ruled from Ashtaroth. <sup>11</sup>So our elders and all who live in our land told us, 'Take provisions for the journey, go to meet them, and say to them: We are your servants — now make a covenant with us.' <sup>12</sup>This bread of ours — we packed it hot from our homes the day we set out to come to you. But look at it now: dry and crumbling. <sup>13</sup>These wineskins that we filled were new — and look, they are cracked. And these clothes and sandals of ours are worn out from the very long journey." <sup>14</sup>The men examined their provisions but did not seek the counsel of the LORD. <sup>15</sup>Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them to let them live, and the leaders of the community swore an oath to them. <sup>16</sup>Three days after they had made the covenant with them, the Israelites learned that the Gibeonites were actually their neighbors — living right among them. <sup>17</sup>The Israelites set out and arrived at their cities on the third day. Their cities were Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kiriath-jearim. <sup>18</sup>The Israelites did not attack them, because the leaders of the community had sworn an oath to them by the LORD, the God of Israel. But the entire community grumbled against the leaders. <sup>19</sup>But all the leaders said to the entire community, "We have sworn an oath to them by the LORD, the God of Israel, and now we cannot touch them. <sup>20</sup>This is what we will do with them: we will let them live, so that wrath does not come upon us because of the oath we swore to them." <sup>21</sup>The leaders said regarding them, "Let them live" — and they became woodcutters and water

carriers for the entire community, as the leaders had decreed. <sup>22</sup>Joshua summoned them and said, "Why did you deceive us by saying, 'We are very far from you,' when you actually live among us? <sup>23</sup>Now you are under a curse: none of you will ever be freed from servitude — from being woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God." <sup>24</sup>They answered Joshua, "It was clearly reported to your servants that the LORD your God commanded his servant Moses to give you the entire land and to destroy all its inhabitants before you. We were terrified for our lives because of you, and that is why we did this. <sup>25</sup>Now we are in your hands. Do to us whatever seems good and right to you." <sup>26</sup>Joshua did so — he rescued them from the Israelites, and they were not killed. <sup>27</sup>That day Joshua assigned them as woodcutters and water carriers for the community and for the altar of the LORD — a role they hold to this day — at the place he would choose.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The geographic sweep covers the entire land: ba-har ('in the hill country,' the central highlands), ba-sh'felah ('in the lowlands,' the western foothills), and b'khol chof ha-yam ha-gadol ('along the entire coast of the Great Sea,' the Mediterranean coast). Six nations are listed — one less than the standard seven of Deuteronomy 7:1, with the Girgashites absent. The news of Jericho, Ai, and the Ebal covenant ceremony has reached every corner of Canaan.
2. Vayyitqab'tsu yachdav ... peh echad ('they gathered together ... with one mouth') — the Canaanite kings form a coalition, speaking 'with one voice.' This is the opposite of the individual paralysis described in 2:9-11 and 5:1. Fear has given way to desperation: united resistance is their last option. The coalition will be tested in chapter 10 (the southern campaign) and chapter 11 (the northern campaign).
2. The Gibeonites (introduced in verse 3) chose a different strategy from the coalition. While the other cities unite for war, Gibeon chooses deception for survival. The contrast frames chapter 9: two Canaanite responses to the Israelite threat — fight or fake.
3. V'yosh'vei Giv'on ('the inhabitants of Gibeon') — Gibeon was a significant Hivite city (v. 7; 11:19) approximately six miles northwest of Jerusalem, controlling strategic territory in the central highlands. Rather than join the coalition or fight alone, they choose a third path: negotiation through deception. Their strategy is driven by the same intelligence Rahab acted on — YHWH has given Israel the land — but their method is fraud rather than faith.
4. Vayya'asu gam hemmah b'ormah ('they too acted, but with cunning') — the word ormah ('cunning, craftiness, shrewdness') is the same word used to describe the serpent in Genesis 3:1 (arum, 'crafty'). The Gibeonites' deception echoes the primal deception of Eden. Vayyitstayaru ('they disguised themselves as envoys/provisioners') — the verb is debated; it may derive from tsir ('envoy, ambassador') or tseidah ('provisions'), suggesting either that they posed as diplomatic envoys or that they prepared fake travel provisions. The evidence supports both: they come as supposed ambassadors from a distant land, carrying provisions staged to look road-worn.
5. The staging is meticulous: ne'alot balot um'tulla'ot ('worn-out, patched sandals'), s'lamot balot ('worn-out garments'), lechem tseidam yavesh nikuddim ('dry, crumbling bread'). Every visible detail tells the same story: these people have traveled an immense distance. The deception works because it appeals to the evidence of the senses — what can be seen, touched, and examined. The Gibeonites understand that Israel's leaders will evaluate the physical evidence rather than consulting God (v. 14).
6. Me-erets r'choqah banu ('from a distant land we have come') — the claim of distant origin is the key deception. Deuteronomy 20:10-15 distinguishes between distant cities (which may be offered peace terms) and cities within the promised land (which must be placed under cherem). The Gibeonites know this distinction and exploit it: by pretending to come from far away, they make themselves eligible for a covenant that cities within Canaan cannot receive.
6. Kirtu lanu v'rit ('cut a covenant with us') — the Gibeonites ask for a berit, a binding covenant agreement. The verb karat ('to cut') refers to the ancient practice of cutting sacrificial animals when making a covenant (cf. Genesis 15:10, 17-18). They are asking for the most solemn, irrevocable form of agreement Israel can offer.
7. The Israelites' initial suspicion is exactly right: ulai b'qirbi attah yoshev ('perhaps you dwell in my midst'). They know the Deuteronomic prohibition against covenants with local populations (Deuteronomy 7:2). The narrator identifies the Gibeonites as ha-Chivvi ('the Hivites') — information the Israelites do not yet possess. The dramatic irony builds: the reader knows what the characters do not.
7. V'eikh ekhrat l'kha berit ('how could I cut a covenant with you?') — the question demonstrates Israel's awareness of the legal restriction. They recognize the danger but will ultimately fail to verify the Gibeonites' claim.
8. Avadekha anachnu ('we are your servants') — the Gibeonites offer submission before revealing their identity. The term avadim ('servants') in a diplomatic context signals willingness to accept vassal status — a subordinate position in exchange for protection. Joshua's question mi attem u-me'ayin tavo'u ('who are you and where do you come from?') is the right question. The tragedy is that he will accept a false answer.
9. L'shem YHWH Elohekha ('because of the name of the LORD your God') — the Gibeonites frame their approach in theological terms, mirroring Rahab's confession (2:9-11). They claim to have come because of YHWH's fame — His shem ('name, reputation'). This is partially true: they genuinely fear YHWH's power. But unlike Rahab, who acted in transparent faith, the Gibeonites wrap truth in deception.

9. The Gibeonites carefully mention only events from the distant past (Egypt, the Transjordan kings) and omit any reference to Jericho or Ai (vv. 9-10). This calculated omission supports their claim of distant origin — they would not yet have heard of recent local events.
10. The Gibeonites cite the same two victories Rahab cited (2:10) — Sihon and Og — but strategically omit Jericho and Ai. Rahab mentioned all the evidence, including the recent Jordan crossing; the Gibeonites edit the evidence to fit their cover story. The parallel shows how the same information can serve different purposes: Rahab used it for honest confession, the Gibeonites for calculated deception.
11. The Gibeonites construct a plausible diplomatic backstory: their elders (z'qeneinu) and populace sent them as official envoys with provisions for a long journey. The fabricated narrative is coherent and detailed — exactly the kind of story that is difficult to disprove without independent verification.
12. Zeh lachmenu cham hitstayadnu oto mibatteinu b'yom tsetenu ('this bread of ours was hot when we packed it from our houses on the day we left') — the Gibeonites use their staged props as evidence. They invite Joshua to examine the bread, the wineskins, and the clothing (vv. 12-13) — all of which appear to confirm a long journey. The appeal is to sensory evidence: see, touch, examine. The deception succeeds precisely because the evidence is tangible.
13. The three categories of staged evidence — bread, wineskins, clothing — create a cumulative case. Each item independently supports the same conclusion: a long journey from a distant land. The deception is a masterpiece of material fabrication. Me-rov ha-derekh me'od ('from the very long road') — they emphasize distance one final time.
14. V'et pi YHWH lo sha'alu ('and the mouth/counsel of the LORD they did not ask') — this is the pivotal failure of the entire chapter, stated with devastating brevity. Israel's leaders examined the physical evidence (vayyiqchu me-tseidam, 'they took from their provisions' — tasting or inspecting the bread), and it checked out. But they never consulted God. The contrast with Joshua's earlier obedience is sharp: the same leader who stood barefoot on holy ground (5:15) and held his javelin aloft at God's command (8:18) now makes a binding covenant without asking God's opinion.
14. The lesson is pointed: sensory evidence can deceive; only divine counsel is reliable. This is the chapter's theological center — not that deception exists (it always will) but that Israel had the means to detect it (consulting God through the Urim and Thummim or the high priest) and chose not to use it.
15. Vayya'as lahem Yehoshua shalom vayyikhrot lahem berit l'chayotam ('Joshua made peace with them and cut a covenant with them to let them live') — three binding commitments in rapid succession: peace (shalom), covenant (berit), and an oath (vayyishav'u). The leaders (n'si'ei ha-edah, 'the chiefs/princes of the assembly') participate in the oath, making it a communal commitment, not just Joshua's personal decision. The oath, sworn in YHWH's name (v. 18), will prove irrevocable — just as the oath to Rahab was irrevocable (6:22-25).
16. Miqtseh sh'loshet yamim ('at the end of three days') — the same three-day formula that marks transitions throughout Joshua (1:11; 2:16, 22; 3:2). Ki q'rovim hem elav u-v'qirbo hem yosh'vim ('they are near to him and in his midst they are dwelling') — the revelation that the Gibeonites are local, not distant, arrives after the covenant is sealed. The oath has been sworn; it cannot be undone. The deception has succeeded.
17. The Gibeonite territory encompasses four cities — a significant confederation, not a single small town. These cities controlled strategic routes in the central highlands, making the Gibeonite alliance militarily valuable even if it was obtained by fraud. Kiriath-jearim will later become the resting place of the ark of the covenant (1 Samuel 7:1-2; 2 Samuel 6:2).
18. Ki nishb'u lahem n'si'ei ha-edah ba-YHWH Elohei Yisrael ('because the leaders had sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel') — the oath, even though obtained by fraud, is binding because it was sworn in YHWH's name. An oath by God cannot be broken without bringing guilt on the oath-taker. This principle will be confirmed centuries later when Saul violates the Gibeonite covenant and God sends a famine as punishment (2 Samuel 21:1-9).
18. Vayyillonu kol ha-edah al ha-n'si'im ('the entire community grumbled against the leaders') — the verb lun ('to grumble, to murmur') is the same word used for Israel's wilderness complaints against Moses (Exodus 15:24; 16:2; 17:3; Numbers 14:2). The people's anger is understandable but misdirected — the leaders made the oath, but the failure to consult God was a communal responsibility.
19. Lo nukhal lingo'a bahem ('we cannot touch them') — the leaders acknowledge the binding nature of the oath. Even a fraudulently obtained oath in YHWH's name creates an inviolable obligation. The theology of oath-keeping is absolute: God's name, once invoked, commits the speaker regardless of the circumstances under which the oath was made.
20. V'lo yihyeh aleinu qetsef al ha-sh'vu'ah ('so that wrath does not come upon us because of the oath') — the leaders fear divine qetsef ('wrath') if they break the oath. The oath creates a protective boundary around the Gibeonites: to harm them would bring God's anger upon Israel. This is not mere superstition — the narrative of 2 Samuel 21 will confirm that God does indeed punish covenant violations against the Gibeonites.
21. Chot'vei etsim v'sho'vei mayim ('woodcutters and water carriers') — the most menial labor in ancient Israelite society. The Gibeonites are given their lives but assigned permanent servitude. This represents a compromise: the oath protects their lives, but their deception costs them their freedom. The specific tasks — cutting wood and drawing water — are associated with sanctuary service in verse 23 and 27, suggesting their labor was specifically directed toward the tabernacle/temple.
22. Lammah rimmitem otanu ('why did you deceive us?') — Joshua confronts the Gibeonites directly. The verb rimmah ('to deceive, to defraud') is strong — this is deliberate fraud. Joshua's anger is evident, but the confrontation does not lead to violence, because the oath holds.

23. Arurim attem ('you are cursed') — Joshua pronounces a curse, but it is a qualified one. The Gibeonites are not sentenced to death (as they would have been under cherem) but to permanent menial service. The curse attaches them to l'veit Elohai ('to the house of my God') — their servitude is specifically directed toward the sanctuary. Their deception saves their lives but binds their descendants to permanent temple service.
23. The Gibeonites' ultimate fate is not without dignity: serving at the house of God places them in proximity to the divine presence. The Nethinim ('temple servants') mentioned in Ezra and Nehemiah are often identified with the descendants of these Gibeonite servants — a permanent place in Israel's worship, however menial its origin.
24. Ki hugged huggad la-avadekha ('it was certainly told to your servants') — the infinitive absolute construction intensifies: they received definitive, unambiguous intelligence about God's command. The Gibeonites' explanation is honest: they knew about the cherem command (l'hashmid et kol yosh'vei ha-arets, 'to destroy all the inhabitants of the land') and feared for their lives (vanira me'od l'nafshoteinu, 'we were terrified for our lives'). Their deception was a survival strategy driven by accurate theological intelligence. They are not ignorant of YHWH — they know His commands and act accordingly, even if dishonestly.
25. Hinn'nu v'yadekha ('here we are, in your hand') — complete surrender. Ka-tov v'kha-yashar b'einekha la'asot lanu aseh ('what is good and right in your eyes to do to us, do') — the Gibeonites place themselves entirely at Joshua's mercy, asking only for what is 'good and right' (tov v'yashar). The phrase yashar ('right, upright') appeals to justice: they trust that Joshua's character will prevent gratuitous cruelty even against those who deceived him.
26. Vayyatsel otam miyyad b'nei Yisrael ('he rescued them from the hand of the Israelites') — the verb natsal ('to rescue, to deliver') is normally used for God rescuing Israel. Here Joshua rescues Canaanites from his own people. The irony is layered: Israel's general protects Hivites from Israelite anger, upholding an oath obtained through fraud, because God's name was invoked and cannot be dishonored.
27. L'mizbach YHWH ('for the altar of the LORD') — the Gibeonites' servitude is specifically tied to the sacrificial worship of Israel. Their labor supports the altar — cutting the wood that fuels the burnt offerings and carrying the water needed for ritual cleansing. El ha-maqom asher yivchar ('at the place he would choose') — a direct Deuteronomic phrase referring to the future central sanctuary (Deuteronomy 12:5, 11, 14, 18). The narrator anticipates the eventual temple site in Jerusalem.
27. Ad ha-yom ha-zeh ('to this day') — the Gibeonites' status as temple servants persisted into the narrator's own time. The Nethinim ('given ones') mentioned in Ezra 2:43-58 and Nehemiah 7:46-60 among the returnees from Babylonian exile are likely their descendants — still serving at God's house centuries later. The deception that saved their lives also defined their vocation for generations.

# 10

**Summary:** *Five Amorite kings attack Gibeon for allying with Israel. Joshua marches all night to defend them. God hurls hailstones from heaven, and Joshua commands the sun and moon to stand still. The five kings are executed, and southern Canaan is conquered.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The sun standing still (vv. 12-13) is the most extraordinary event in Joshua. The poem — 'Sun, stand still at Gibeon; Moon, at the Valley of Aijalon' — is quoted from the Book of Jashar, a lost collection of ancient Hebrew poetry. The narrator adds: 'there has been no day like it before or since, when the LORD listened to the voice of a man' (v. 14). The reversal is striking: throughout the Torah, humans listen to God's voice; here God listens to a human's.*

**Translation Friction:** *The verb dom (v. 12, 'be still/silent') applied to the sun could mean it stopped moving, stopped shining, or was silenced — the Hebrew is ambiguous between cessation of motion and cessation of light. We rendered it 'stand still' following the traditional understanding and noted the alternatives. The phrase hacharim (v. 40, 'devoted to destruction') applies the cherem to the entire southern campaign.*

**Connections:** *The Book of Jashar is also cited in 2 Samuel 1:18 (David's lament). The hailstone victory echoes the plague tradition (Exodus 9:18-26) and anticipates Ezekiel 38:22 and Revelation 16:21. The five-king execution in the cave (vv. 22-27) establishes a pattern repeated in Judges. The command 'do not be afraid' (v. 8) echoes 1:9 and Deuteronomy 31:6.*

<sup>1</sup>When Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem learned that Joshua had captured Ai and devoted it to destruction — doing to Ai and its king exactly as he had done to Jericho and its king — and that the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel and were now living among them, <sup>2</sup>he was terrified, because Gibeon was a major city — like one of the royal capitals — and larger than Ai, with all its men being seasoned warriors. <sup>3</sup>So Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem sent word to Hoham king of Hebron, Piram king of Jarmuth, Japhia king of Lachish, and Debir king of Eglon: <sup>4</sup>"Come up and help me. Let us attack Gibeon,

because it has made peace with Joshua and the Israelites." <sup>5</sup>The five Amorite kings — the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon — gathered their forces, marched up, and besieged Gibeon, attacking it. <sup>6</sup>The men of Gibeon sent an urgent message to Joshua at the camp at Gilgal: "Do not abandon your servants! Come up to us quickly — rescue us and help us! All the Amorite kings of the hill country have joined forces against us." <sup>7</sup>Joshua marched up from Gilgal with his entire fighting force and all his best warriors. <sup>8</sup>The LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them, for I have handed them over to you. Not one of them will stand against you." <sup>9</sup>Joshua fell upon them suddenly, having marched up all night from Gilgal. <sup>10</sup>The LORD threw them into panic before Israel. He struck them with a devastating blow at Gibeon, then pursued them along the ascent of Beth-horon and struck them all the way to Azekah and Makkedah. <sup>11</sup>As they fled down from Beth-horon before Israel, the LORD hurled massive stones from the sky upon them all the way to Azekah, and they died. More were killed by the hailstones than the Israelites killed with the sword. <sup>12</sup>Then Joshua spoke to the LORD on the day the LORD gave the Amorites over to Israel, and he declared in the presence of all Israel: "Sun — stand still over Gibeon! Moon — hold your place over the Valley of Aijalon!" <sup>13</sup>The sun stood still and the moon held its place until the nation had taken vengeance on its enemies. Is this not recorded in the Book of Jashar? The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and did not hurry to set for an entire day. <sup>14</sup>There has never been a day like it, before or since — a day when the LORD responded to the voice of a human being. For the LORD was fighting for Israel. <sup>15</sup>Then Joshua returned with all Israel to the camp at Gilgal. <sup>16</sup>The five kings fled and hid in a cave at Makkedah. <sup>17</sup>Joshua was told, "The five kings have been found hiding in a cave at Makkedah." <sup>18</sup>Joshua said, "Roll large stones against the mouth of the cave and post guards over it. <sup>19</sup>But you — do not stop! Pursue your enemies and cut off their rear guard. Do not let them reach their cities, for the LORD your God has given them into your hands." <sup>20</sup>When Joshua and the Israelites had finished inflicting a massive defeat on them — nearly wiping them out — the survivors managed to reach the fortified cities. <sup>21</sup>The entire army returned safely to Joshua at the camp at Makkedah. No one dared to speak a word against the Israelites. <sup>22</sup>Then Joshua said, "Open the mouth of the cave and bring those five kings out to me." <sup>23</sup>They did so, bringing the five kings out of the cave to him: the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon. <sup>24</sup>When they had brought the kings out to Joshua, he summoned all the men of Israel and said to the commanders of the warriors who had marched with him, "Come forward and put your feet on the necks of these kings." They came forward and placed their feet on their necks. <sup>25</sup>Joshua said to them, "Do not be afraid or lose heart. Be strong and courageous, for this is what the LORD will do to every enemy you fight." <sup>26</sup>After this, Joshua struck them down and put them to death, then hung them on five trees. They remained hanging on the trees until evening. <sup>27</sup>At sunset, Joshua ordered them taken down from the trees and thrown into the cave where they had hidden. Large stones were placed at the mouth of the cave — and they are there to this very day. <sup>28</sup>Joshua captured Makkedah that same day and put it to the sword. He devoted its king and every person in it to destruction, leaving no survivor. He dealt with the king of Makkedah as he had dealt with the king of Jericho. <sup>29</sup>From Makkedah, Joshua and all Israel advanced to Libnah and attacked it. <sup>30</sup>The LORD gave it too, along with its king, into Israel's hand. He put it and every person in it to the sword, leaving no survivor. He dealt with its king as he had dealt with the king of Jericho. <sup>31</sup>From Libnah, Joshua and all Israel advanced to Lachish. He besieged it and attacked it. <sup>32</sup>The LORD gave Lachish into Israel's hand, and Joshua captured it on the second day. He put it and every person in it to the sword, just as he had done to Libnah. <sup>33</sup>At that time, Horam king of Gezer came up to help Lachish, but Joshua struck him and his forces down until no survivor remained. <sup>34</sup>From Lachish, Joshua and all Israel advanced to Eglon. They besieged it and attacked it. <sup>35</sup>They captured it that same day and put it to the sword. He devoted every person in it to destruction that day, just as he had done to Lachish. <sup>36</sup>From Eglon, Joshua and all Israel went up to Hebron and attacked it. <sup>37</sup>They captured it and put it to the sword — its king, all its surrounding towns, and every person in it. He left no survivor, just as he had done to Eglon. He devoted it and every person in it to destruction. <sup>38</sup>Then Joshua and all Israel turned toward Debir and attacked it. <sup>39</sup>He captured it along with its king and all its surrounding towns. They put them to the sword and devoted every person in it to destruction, leaving no survivor. As he had done to Hebron and to Libnah and their kings, so he did to Debir and its king. <sup>40</sup>Joshua conquered the entire region — the hill country, the Negev, the Shephelah, and the mountain slopes — along with all their kings. He left no survivor. He devoted everything that breathed to destruction, just as the LORD, the God of Israel, had commanded. <sup>41</sup>Joshua

conquered them from Kadesh-barnea to Gaza, and the entire region of Goshen as far as Gibeon. <sup>42</sup>Joshua captured all these kings and their territory in a single campaign, because the LORD, the God of Israel, was fighting for Israel. <sup>43</sup>Then Joshua returned with all Israel to the camp at Gilgal.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Adoni-Tsedeq ('my lord is righteousness') — an ironic royal name. The king of Jerusalem claims righteousness as his title, yet he will oppose the God who defines righteousness. The name parallels Melchizedek ('king of righteousness,' Genesis 14:18), the earlier king-priest of Salem/Jerusalem who blessed Abraham. The same city that once produced a priestly ally now produces an adversary.
1. V'khi hishleimu yosh'vei Giv'on et Yisrael ('the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel') — the verb hishlim (hiphil of shalam, 'to make peace, to submit') describes the Gibeonite treaty. This alarms Adoni-zedek not because he lost a battle but because he lost an ally: Gibeon's defection breaks the Canaanite coalition.
2. Vayyir'u me'od ('they feared greatly') — the subject shifts between singular and plural in the Hebrew. The fear is both personal (Adoni-zedek) and collective (Jerusalem and its allies). K'achat arei ha-mamlakhah ('like one of the royal cities') — Gibeon held the status of a city-state with its own ruling class. Its defection to Israel was a strategic catastrophe for the Canaanite coalition, removing a powerful military force from their side and placing it in Israel's camp.
2. V'khol anasheha gibborim ('all its men were warriors') — Gibeon's fighting force was formidable. The Canaanite kings must now consider that Gibeon's warriors might fight alongside Israel against them.
3. Five Amorite city-state kings form a southern coalition. The cities represent a strategic arc across the southern hill country and Shephelah: Jerusalem (central highlands), Hebron (southern highlands), Jarmuth (Shephelah), Lachish (major fortified city in the Shephelah), and Eglon (western Shephelah). Together they control the main routes through southern Canaan. Hebron is particularly significant: it is where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are buried at Machpelah (Genesis 23; 49:29-32), and it will become Caleb's inheritance (14:13-14).
4. The coalition's first target is not Israel but Gibeon — the traitor to the Canaanite cause. Ki hishlimah et Yehoshua ('because it made peace with Joshua') — Gibeon's treaty with Israel is treated as betrayal by the other Canaanite kings. The attack on Gibeon will force Israel's hand: they must either honor the treaty and defend Gibeon or break their oath.
5. Chameshet malkei ha-Emori ('the five Amorite kings') — the coalition is identified specifically as Amorite. The Amorites were the dominant power in the southern highlands. The five-fold listing creates a sense of overwhelming military force converging on one city. Gibeon's survival depends entirely on whether Israel will honor the treaty of chapter 9.
6. Al teref yadekha me-avadekha ('do not let your hands go slack from your servants') — the idiom 'slack hands' means to withhold help, to abandon. The Gibeonites now invoke the very treaty they obtained by deception: 'your servants' (avadekha) — the same term they used in 9:8, 11. The test is clear: will Israel honor an oath made under false pretenses? Hoshi'ah lanu v'ozrenu ('save us and help us') — the verbs yasha ('to save') and azar ('to help') are normally addressed to God. The Gibeonites appeal to Joshua in language usually reserved for divine petition.
7. Joshua responds immediately. There is no hesitation, no debate about whether the fraudulently obtained treaty deserves honoring. The oath was sworn in YHWH's name, and that settles it. V'khol gibborei he-chayil ('and all the mighty warriors') — the elite troops accompany the main force. Joshua commits everything to defending the Gibeonites, treating the oath obligation with the same seriousness as a divine command.
8. Al tira mehem ki v'yadkha n'tattim ('do not fear them, for I have given them into your hand') — God confirms that Joshua's decision to honor the Gibeonite treaty is correct by promising military victory. The divine oracle transforms a treaty obligation into a conquest opportunity. Lo ya'amod ish mehem b'fanekha ('not a man of them will stand before you') — the same promise from 1:5, now applied specifically to the five-king coalition. God's endorsement signals that defending Gibeon — even though the treaty was obtained by deception — aligns with His purposes.
9. Pit'om ('suddenly') — Joshua's overnight forced march from Gilgal, roughly twenty miles uphill through the wilderness, achieves complete tactical surprise. The Amorite coalition expected to deal with Gibeon at leisure; instead they face Israel's full army at dawn. Kol ha-lailah alah min ha-Gilgal ('all night he went up from Gilgal') — the march ascends about 3,300 feet in elevation through difficult terrain, a remarkable feat of endurance and urgency.
10. Vayyehumem YHWH lifnei Yisrael ('the LORD threw them into panic before Israel') — the verb hamam ('to confuse, to throw into panic, to rout') is the same word used for God's action at the Red Sea (Exodus 14:24) and in other divine-warrior contexts (Judges 4:15; 1 Samuel 7:10). God is the primary agent of the rout; Israel participates but God drives the panic.
10. Derekh ma'aleh Beit Choron ('along the ascent of Beth-horon') — the Beth-horon pass is the main route from the central highlands down to the coastal plain, a steep descent through a narrow valley. The fleeing coalition is funneled into this natural chokepoint. The pursuit covers roughly twenty-five miles, from Gibeon through Beth-horon down to Azekah and Makkedah in the Shephelah.
11. YHWH hishlikh aleihem avanim g'dolot min ha-shamayim ('the LORD threw great stones from the sky upon them') — divine intervention through the heavens. The avanim g'dolot ('great stones') are identified as avnei ha-barad ('hailstones') — massive hail raining down on the fleeing army. The image echoes the seventh plague on Egypt (Exodus 9:18-26), where the LORD sent barad ('hail') against Pharaoh. The same divine weapon used against Egypt is now used against the Amorites.

11. Rabbim asher metu b'avnei ha-barad me-asher hargu b'nei Yisrael be-charev ('more died from the hailstones than the Israelites killed with the sword') — the narrator makes explicit that God's direct intervention killed more of the enemy than Israel's army. The divine warrior does more than Israel's best soldiers. This theological claim undergirds the entire conquest: the land is won by God's power, not human might.
12. Shemesh b'Giv'on dom v'yareach b'Emeq Ayyalon ('sun, be still over Gibeon; moon, over the Valley of Aijalon') — Joshua's command to the celestial bodies is presented as poetry (possibly an excerpt from the Book of Jashar, v. 13). The verb dom ('be still, be silent, cease') is not the usual word for stopping motion but for ceasing activity or falling silent. Some interpreters understand this as a command for the sun to stop shining (providing relief from heat and cloud cover for the march) rather than to stop moving.
12. The geography is precise: Gibeon is to the east (where Joshua's army is), Aijalon is to the west (where the enemy flees). The sun over Gibeon and the moon over Aijalon places the scene in early morning, with the sun rising in the east and the moon still visible in the western sky. Joshua asks the heavenly bodies to freeze in this configuration — extending the morning light for continued pursuit.
13. Vayyiddom ha-shemesh v'yareach amad ('the sun was still and the moon stood') — two different verbs are used: dom ('to be still/silent') for the sun and amad ('to stand, to stop') for the moon. The effect described is an extended period of daylight enabling Israel to complete the rout.
13. Halo hi k'tuvah al Sefer ha-Yashar ('is this not written in the Book of Jashar?') — the Book of Jashar (or 'Book of the Upright') is a lost Israelite literary collection, cited also in 2 Samuel 1:18 (David's lament for Saul and Jonathan). The narrator cites a written source, inviting verification — an early form of source documentation.
13. V'lo ats lavo k'yom tamim ('it did not hurry to set for an entire day') — the phrase yom tamim ('a complete/whole day') indicates the phenomenon lasted approximately a full day-cycle. Whether understood as a literal astronomical event, an extended period of hailstorm darkness followed by clearing, or a poetic hyperbole celebrating divine intervention, the theological point is clear: creation itself serves the purposes of the Creator and His covenant people.
14. V'lo hayah ka-yom ha-hu l'fanav v'acharav lishmo'a YHWH b'qol ish ('there was no day like it before or after, for the LORD to listen to the voice of a man') — the narrator's commentary identifies the uniqueness not in the astronomical phenomenon but in the relational dynamic: God listened to a human command as though Joshua's word directed the cosmos. The Creator subordinated the sun and moon to the prayer of His servant.
14. Ki YHWH nilcham l'Yisrael ('for the LORD was fighting for Israel') — the chapter's theological refrain. The divine warrior fights through hailstones (v. 11), through cosmic obedience (vv. 12-13), and through human armies (v. 10). The methods vary; the agent is constant.
15. This verse appears to interrupt the narrative, as the pursuit continues in verse 16. Some scholars consider it a displaced summary that originally concluded the chapter, while others see it as a brief return to base before the cave discovery at Makkedah. The Septuagint omits this verse, supporting the view that it may be a later editorial insertion or a variant placement.
16. Vayyechav'u bam'arah b'Maqqedah ('they hid in the cave at Makkedah') — the kings who led the coalition are now fugitives hiding in a limestone cave. The irony is severe: the kings who gathered their forces to crush Gibeon (v. 5) are now cowering underground while their armies are destroyed by hail and sword.
17. Nimts'u chameshet ha-m'lakhim nechba'im bam'arah ('the five kings were found hiding in the cave') — the discovery sets up the dramatic execution scene of verses 22-27. Joshua will deal with the kings after completing the rout of their armies.
18. Gollu avanim g'dolot el pi ha-m'arah ('roll large stones to the mouth of the cave') — the kings are sealed in, trapped but alive, while Joshua finishes the pursuit. The cave becomes a temporary prison. The detail creates dramatic tension: the kings wait in darkness while their kingdoms fall.
19. V'zinnavtem otam ('cut off their tail/rear guard') — the verb zanav ('to strike the tail, to attack the rear') appears also in Deuteronomy 25:18, where Amalek attacked Israel's rear. Now Israel strikes the enemy's rear. Al titt'num lavo el areihem ('do not let them enter their cities') — once the enemy reaches fortified cities, the advantage of the open-field rout is lost. Joshua's tactical priority is to prevent regrouping behind city walls.
20. Ad tummam ('until they were consumed/finished') — the same root tamam from 8:24, indicating near-total destruction. V'has'ridim sar'du mehem vayyavo'u el arei ha-mivtsar ('the survivors who survived from them entered the fortified cities') — despite Joshua's order (v. 19), some fugitives reached walled cities. The fortified cities will be taken individually in verses 28-39.
21. Lo charats livnei Yisrael l'ish et l'shono ('no man sharpened his tongue against the Israelites') — the idiom 'sharpening the tongue' means to speak hostility or challenge. The parallel is Exodus 11:7: 'not a dog shall sharpen its tongue against the Israelites' — spoken of Israel's departure from Egypt. The exodus language reappears: Israel's conquest mirrors Israel's deliverance. The Canaanite world is too terrified to even speak against them.
22. The scene now shifts to the execution of the captured kings. The narrative has built suspense: the kings were sealed in the cave (v. 18) while the battle raged, and now Joshua returns to deal with them. Hotsi'u elai et chameshet ham'lakhim ('bring the five kings out to me') — the kings are summoned from darkness into judgment.
23. The fivefold repetition of 'the king of...' creates a ceremonial rhythm. Each king is named individually, stripping them of their royal dignity and authority. They entered the cave as rulers; they emerge as prisoners.
24. Simu et ragleikhem al tsav'rei ham'lakhim ha-elleh ('put your feet on the necks of these kings') — the act of placing one's foot on a conquered enemy's neck is well-attested in ancient Near Eastern iconography (cf. Egyptian and Assyrian reliefs). It symbolizes total subjugation. Joshua makes this a public act witnessed by 'all the men of Israel' — the humiliation of the kings is a communal lesson, not a private act of revenge. Psalm 110:1 uses the same imagery: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'

25. Al tir'u v'al techatu chizqu v'imtsu ('do not be afraid, do not lose heart, be strong and courageous') — Joshua now passes on the fourfold encouragement he received from God in 1:6-9 and again in 10:8. The five conquered kings at his feet serve as the visual proof: God does what He promises. Ki khakhah ya'aseh YHWH l'khol oy'veikhem ('for thus the LORD will do to all your enemies') — the five kings become a prophetic object lesson for every future battle. What God did here, He will do again.
26. Vayyitlem al chamishah etsim ('he hung them on five trees') — public display of executed enemies, as with the king of Ai (8:29). The five trees echo the five kings — each receives his own tree of display. Ad ha-arev ('until evening') — Joshua again observes the Deuteronomic law of removing hanged bodies before nightfall (Deuteronomy 21:22-23), as he did at Ai.
27. Vayyashlikhum el ha-m'arah asher nechb'u sham ('they threw them into the cave where they had hidden') — the cave that served as the kings' hiding place becomes their tomb. The stones that sealed them in as prisoners (v. 18) now seal them in permanently as corpses. Ad etsem ha-yom ha-zeh ('to this very day') — the narrator's attestation formula. Another stone marker joins the growing collection of memorial cairns across the landscape of Joshua.
28. Hecherim otam v'et kol ha-nefesh asher bah lo hish'ir sarid ('he devoted them to destruction, every living person in it, leaving no survivor') — the cherem formula begins the southern campaign summary (vv. 28-39). Each city receives a formulaic account: capture, sword, cherem, no survivors, comparison to previous conquests. The repetitive structure creates a relentless, catalog-like record of systematic conquest.
29. The southern campaign proceeds geographically: Makkedah to Libnah (south-southwest in the Shephelah). Each conquest builds momentum. Libnah will later be assigned to the Levites as a priestly city (21:13) and will rebel against Judah in the time of Jehoram (2 Kings 8:22).
30. Vayyitten YHWH gam otah b'iyad Yisrael ('the LORD gave it also into the hand of Israel') — the divine-agent formula continues. Each city falls because God gives it — the victories are theological events, not merely military achievements.
31. Lachish was one of the most heavily fortified cities in the southern Shephelah, known from archaeological excavation (Tell ed-Duweir) as a major Bronze Age center with massive walls and gate complex. Its capture required a siege (vayyichan aleha, 'he encamped against it'), unlike some of the other cities that fell more quickly.
32. Ba-yom ha-sheni ('on the second day') — Lachish required two days to take, reflecting its superior fortifications. The other cities in the summary fall without this notation, suggesting quicker capitulation. Despite the delay, the outcome is the same: God gives, Israel takes.
33. Horam melekh Gezer ('Horam king of Gezer') — Gezer was a major fortified city guarding the Aijalon Valley (the same valley where the moon stood still, v. 12). Gezer's king intervenes to aid Lachish but is destroyed in the field. Notably, Gezer itself is not captured at this time — it will remain unconquered until Solomon's era (1 Kings 9:16), when Pharaoh takes it and gives it to Solomon as a dowry.
34. The campaign continues southward through the Shephelah. Eglon's king was one of the original five coalition leaders (v. 3). Joshua is now dismantling the coalition city by city.
35. Ba-yom ha-hu ('that day') — unlike Lachish, Eglon fell in a single day. The formula continues: capture, sword, cherem, comparison. The catalog's repetition conveys the inevitability of conquest: city after city falls to the same pattern.
36. Chevronah ('to Hebron') — the campaign moves from the lowland Shephelah up into the southern highlands. Hebron is the most theologically significant city in the southern conquest: it is the burial place of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah at the cave of Machpelah (Genesis 23:19; 25:9; 49:29-31; 50:13). The patriarchal promise of land finds its most personal fulfillment here. Hebron will be given to Caleb as his personal inheritance (14:13-14; 15:13-14).
37. V'et kol areha ('and all its towns/cities') — Hebron's surrounding satellite settlements are included in the conquest. The comprehensive formula extends the cherem to the entire district, not just the central city. Vayyacharem otah v'et kol ha-nefesh asher bah ('he devoted it and every person in it to destruction') — the cherem is applied to Hebron, the city of the patriarchs. The promised land is being reclaimed through the very judgment God decreed.
38. D'virah ('to Debir') — also known as Kiriath-sepher ('city of the book/scribe'), located south of Hebron in the hill country. Debir will be reconquered by Othniel son of Kenaz (Caleb's nephew) in 15:15-17 and Judges 1:11-13, suggesting the initial conquest described here was not permanently secured.
39. Ka'asher asah l'Chevron ... v'kha'asher asah l'Libnah ('as he had done to Hebron ... as he had done to Libnah') — the cross-references chain the conquests together: Debir falls like Hebron, Hebron like Eglon, Eglon like Lachish, Lachish like Libnah, Libnah like Makkedah, Makkedah like Jericho. The chain traces back to the first conquest city — every subsequent victory echoes and confirms the first.
40. Ha-har v'ha-Negev v'ha-Sh'felah v'ha-ashedot ('the hill country, the Negev, the lowlands, the slopes') — four geographic zones summarize the entire southern theater: the central highlands, the arid south, the western foothills, and the transitional slopes between them. V'et kol ha-n'shamah hecherim ('he devoted everything that breathed to destruction') — the language of total cherem. Ka'asher tsivvah YHWH Elohei Yisrael ('as the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded') — the narrator roots the conquest in divine command, not human initiative. The destruction is presented as covenant execution, not ethnic violence.
40. Register departure: cherem rendered as 'devotion to destruction' rather than default 'devoted to destruction' — nominal variant reflecting the Hebrew construct form in this summary statement.

41. Mi-Qadesh Barnea v'ad Azzah ('from Kadesh-barnea to Gaza') — the geographic sweep defines the southern conquest's boundaries: Kadesh-barnea (in the southern Negev, where Israel spent most of its wilderness years) to Gaza (on the Mediterranean coast, the southwestern corner of Canaan). V'et kol erets Goshen ('the entire land of Goshen') — not the Egyptian Goshen but a region in the southern Judean hills. The total territory described covers the entire southern half of the promised land, from the wilderness border to the coast, from the Negev to the central highlands at Gibeon.
42. Pa'am echat ('at one time / in a single campaign') — the entire southern conquest is presented as one continuous military operation, driven by momentum from the initial Gibeonite crisis through the final city. Ki YHWH Elohei Yisrael nilcham l'Yisrael ('because the LORD, the God of Israel, was fighting for Israel') — the chapter's theological summary, matching verse 14. The refrain frames the entire campaign: it begins with God fighting through hailstones and cosmic phenomena and ends with God fighting through Israel's sustained campaign. Divine warfare encompasses both the miraculous and the military.
43. The campaign ends where it began — at the base camp of Gilgal, near Jericho. The circular movement (Gilgal Gibeon Beth-horon Makkedah Libnah Lachish Eglon Hebron Debir Gilgal) traces a vast loop through the entire southern territory. Israel returns to its starting point having secured the south, ready for the northern campaign of chapter 11.

# 11

**Summary:** *A northern Canaanite coalition under Jabin of Hazor gathers at the Waters of Merom. Joshua attacks suddenly, defeats them, burns Hazor, and completes the conquest of the land. The narrator summarizes: Joshua took the whole land.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The summary statement (vv. 16-23) claims total conquest: 'Joshua took the whole land... and the land had rest from war.' Yet the text itself acknowledges exceptions — the Anakites survived in Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod (v. 22), and chapter 13 will list unconquered territories. The tension is deliberate: the conquest is complete in theological terms (God fulfilled His promise) while remaining incomplete on the ground. This dual reality defines the rest of Israel's history.*

**Translation Friction:** *The phrase 'the LORD hardened their hearts' (v. 20, chizzaq et libbam) uses the same language as the Pharaoh hardening in Exodus. We rendered it consistently. The purpose clause — 'so that they would come against Israel in battle, in order to devote them to destruction' — presents the hardening as serving the chereem. This is one of the hardest theological statements in Joshua, and we let it stand without softening.*

**Connections:** *Hazor's destruction is confirmed archaeologically. Jabin of Hazor reappears (or a successor does) in Judges 4. The Anakite remnant in Gath connects to Goliath of Gath (1 Samuel 17:4). The conquest summary parallels Deuteronomy's promise and anticipates the 'rest' theology of Hebrews 4. The reference to Moses's commands (v. 15) closes the loop opened in 1:7.*

1When Jabin king of Hazor heard of these events, he sent word to Jobab king of Madon, the king of Shimron, and the king of Achshaph, 2as well as to the kings in the northern hill country, in the Arabah south of Chinnereth, in the Shephelah, and in the heights of Dor to the west — 3the Canaanites to the east and west, the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, and Jebusites in the hill country, and the Hivites below Hermon in the region of Mizpah. 4They marched out with all their forces — a vast army, as numerous as the sand on the seashore — with a great many horses and chariots. 5All these kings joined forces and came together, encamping at the waters of Merom to fight against Israel. 6The LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them. By this time tomorrow, I will hand all of them over to Israel as casualties. You are to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots." 7Joshua and his entire fighting force fell upon them suddenly at the waters of Merom and attacked. 8The LORD gave them into Israel's hand. They struck them down and pursued them to Great Sidon, to Misrephoth-maim, and eastward to the Valley of Mizpeh. They struck them until no survivor remained. 9Joshua dealt with them exactly as the LORD had told him: he hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots. 10At that time Joshua turned back and captured Hazor. He struck its king with the sword, because Hazor had been the head of all those kingdoms. 11They struck down every person in it with the sword, devoting them to destruction. Not a single breathing creature was left. Then he burned Hazor. 12Joshua captured all the cities of those kings along with their kings. He put them to the sword and devoted them to destruction, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded. 13As for the cities still standing on their mounds, Israel did not burn any of them — only Hazor did Joshua burn. 14The Israelites took all the plunder from these cities and the livestock as spoil for

themselves, but every person they struck down with the sword until they had annihilated them. They did not leave a single breathing creature. <sup>15</sup>What the LORD commanded his servant Moses, Moses commanded Joshua, and Joshua carried out. He did not neglect a single thing of all that the LORD had commanded Moses. <sup>16</sup>Joshua took the entire land: the hill country, the whole Negev, the entire region of Goshen, the Shephelah, the Arabah, and the hill country of Israel with its lowlands — <sup>17</sup>from Mount Halak, which rises toward Seir, to Baal-gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon. He captured all their kings, struck them down, and put them to death. <sup>18</sup>Joshua waged war against all those kings for a long time. <sup>19</sup>No city made peace with the Israelites except the Hivites who lived in Gibeon. All the rest they took in battle. <sup>20</sup>For it was the LORD's doing that they hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel, so that He might devote them to total destruction without mercy — so that He might annihilate them, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. <sup>21</sup>At that time Joshua went and eliminated the Anakim from the hill country — from Hebron, Debir, Anab, and the entire hill country of Judah and Israel. Joshua devoted them and their cities to destruction. <sup>22</sup>No Anakim were left in the land of the Israelites. They survived only in Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod. <sup>23</sup>So Joshua took the entire land, in keeping with everything the LORD had spoken to Moses. Joshua gave it as an inheritance to Israel, apportioned among their tribes. And the land had rest from war.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Yavin melekh Chatsor ('Jabin king of Hazor') — Hazor was the largest city in Canaan, described in verse 10 as rosh kol ha-mamlakhot ('the head of all those kingdoms'). Archaeological excavation at Tel Hazor reveals a city of approximately 200 acres — ten times the size of most Canaanite cities. Jabin organizes a northern coalition just as Adoni-zedek organized the southern one (10:3). The name Jabin ('he understands/discerns') recurs in Judges 4:2, suggesting either a dynastic title or a later king of the same name.
2. The geographic scope encompasses the entire northern territory: ba-har ('the hill country' — the Galilee highlands), ba-Aravah negev Kinnerot ('the Arabah south of Chinnereth' — the Jordan Valley below the Sea of Galilee), ba-Sh'felah ('the lowlands'), and b'nafot Dor miyyam ('the heights/regions of Dor on the coast'). Chinnereth is the early name for the Sea of Galilee (kinnerot, 'harps' — possibly from the lake's harp-like shape).
3. V'ha-Chivvi tachat Chermon b'erets ha-Mitspah ('the Hivites below Hermon in the land of Mizpah') — Mount Hermon marks the northernmost extent of the promised land's traditional boundary. The Hivites settled at its base, in the region called Mizpah ('lookout, watchtower'). The coalition draws from the full diversity of Canaan's peoples and the full extent of its geography — from Hermon in the far north to the coastal plain in the west.
4. Am rav ka-chol asher al s'fat ha-yam la-rov ('a people as numerous as the sand on the seashore') — the simile deliberately echoes the Abrahamic promise (Genesis 22:17), where God promised Abraham's descendants would be 'as the sand on the seashore.' The enemy army is described with the same imagery used for Israel's promised future — a vast horde set against God's people. V'sus va-rekhev rav me'od ('horses and chariots in great number') — chariotry was the dominant military technology of the Bronze Age. Israel had no chariots. The technological disparity makes the upcoming victory all the more clearly divine.
5. El mei Merom ('at the waters of Merom') — the gathering point for the northern coalition. Merom is likely in the upper Galilee, possibly identified with the spring-fed area near modern Meiron. The coalition chooses a staging ground with water for their horses and room for their chariots. The flat, well-watered terrain favors their technological advantage.
6. Al tira mip'neihem ('do not be afraid of them') — the same divine encouragement formula as 8:1 and 10:8. Each new campaign begins with God addressing Joshua's fear. The escalating scale of the enemy (from Ai to the five kings to the sand-on-the-seashore coalition) requires escalating reassurance.
6. Et suseihem t'aqquer v'et mark'voteihem tisrof ba-esh ('hamstring their horses and burn their chariots') — God commands the destruction of the captured military technology. Aqquer ('to hamstring') means to cut the leg tendons, rendering the horses permanently lame. The command prevents Israel from adopting chariot warfare and placing their trust in military technology rather than in God. The same principle appears in Deuteronomy 17:16: the king 'must not acquire many horses.' Israel is to fight as a foot army dependent on God, not as a chariot empire dependent on technology.
7. Pit'om ('suddenly') — the same word used for the surprise attack on the Amorite coalition at Gibeon (10:9). Joshua's tactical pattern is consistent: rapid forced marches ending in sudden assault. The surprise negates the enemy's advantage in numbers and chariots — they have no time to deploy their formations.
8. The pursuit fans out in three directions from the waters of Merom: northwest to Sidon Rabbah ('Great Sidon,' on the Phoenician coast — the furthest point of pursuit), west to Misrephot Mayim ('the burnings/smelters by the waters,' likely on the Mediterranean coast south of Sidon), and east to Biq'at Mitspeh ('the Valley of Mizpeh,' east of the battlefield). The three-directional pursuit indicates the coalition scattered in every direction — total rout, total panic.
9. Ka'asher amar lo YHWH ('as the LORD told him') — Joshua's obedience is exact. The captured horses are hamstrung, the chariots burned. Israel will not build a chariot force. The theological principle is embedded in the military decision: trust in God, not in horses and chariots (cf. Psalm 20:7: 'Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God').

10. Ki Chatsor l'fanim hi rosh kol ha-mamlakhot ha-elleh ('because Hazor was formerly the head of all those kingdoms') — the narrator explains why Hazor receives special treatment: it was the capital of the northern coalition, the dominant city-state in the entire region. Archaeological evidence confirms Hazor's preeminence: it was the largest city in Canaan, with massive fortifications and an extensive lower city. Taking the head city decapitates the coalition.
11. V'et Chatsor saraf ba-esh ('he burned Hazor with fire') — of all the northern cities, only Hazor is burned (v. 13 makes this explicit). The burning of the capital while sparing the other cities as usable infrastructure represents a strategic as well as theological decision: destroy the center of power but preserve the cities for Israelite settlement. Archaeological excavation at Hazor reveals a massive destruction layer from the Late Bronze Age, consistent with this account.
12. Ka'asher tsivvah Mosheh eved YHWH ('as Moses the servant of the LORD commanded') — the chain of authority runs from God to Moses to Joshua. Every act of conquest is traced back through this chain. Joshua acts not on his own authority but as the executor of Mosaic commands, which are themselves the commands of God.
13. Kol he-arim ha-om'dot al tillam ('all the cities standing on their tells/mounds') — the tel ('mound') is the accumulated layers of previous settlement. Cities 'standing on their tells' are intact, fortified cities on established sites. Israel preserves them as infrastructure for their own future use — Deuteronomy 6:10-11 promised 'cities you did not build' and 'houses full of good things you did not fill.' Zulatai et Chatsor l'vaddah ('except Hazor alone') — only the coalition capital is burned, making the archaeological record precise and testable.
14. As at Ai (8:2, 27), the plunder and livestock may be kept but the human population is placed under cherem. The distinction between total cherem (Jericho — everything destroyed) and partial cherem (Ai and the northern cities — people destroyed but goods kept) shows that the sacred ban has different levels of application depending on God's specific command for each situation.
15. Ka'asher tsivvah YHWH et Mosheh avdo ken tsivvah Mosheh et Yehoshua v'khen asah Yehoshua ('as the LORD commanded Moses, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did') — the chain of obedience is complete and unbroken: God Moses Joshua execution. Lo hesir davar mikkol asher tsivvah YHWH et Mosheh ('he did not remove/neglect anything from all that the LORD commanded Moses') — this is Joshua's highest commendation: perfect obedience to the Mosaic command, fulfilling the charge of 1:7 ('do not turn from it to the right or to the left'). This assessment contrasts with the Judges period, where 'everyone did what was right in his own eyes' (Judges 21:25).
16. The geographic summary encompasses the full promised land from south to north. Ha-har ('the hill country' — both Judean and Israelite), ha-Negev ('the southern desert'), erets ha-Goshen ('the Goshen region'), ha-Sh'felah ('the western foothills'), ha-Aravah ('the Jordan rift valley'), and har Yisrael u-sh'felato ('the hill country of Israel and its lowlands' — the northern highlands). The comprehensive list demonstrates that the conquest covered every topographic zone of the promised territory.
17. Min ha-har he-Chalaq ha-oleh Se'ir v'ad Ba'al Gad b'viq'at ha-L'vanon tachat Har Chermon ('from Mount Halak rising toward Seir to Baal-gad in the Lebanon valley below Hermon') — the boundaries define the full north-south extent of the conquest: Mount Halak ('the smooth/bare mountain') in the far south near Edom, to Baal-gad (possibly Baniyas/Caesarea Philippi) at the foot of Mount Hermon in the far north. The distance is approximately 250 miles.
18. Yamim rabbim ('many days / a long time') — the narrator corrects any impression that the conquest was swift. Despite the compressed narrative, the campaigns against the Canaanite kings took years. The Talmud and later tradition estimate the conquest period at approximately seven years (cf. Caleb's age statements in 14:7, 10 that provide a chronological anchor).
19. Bilti ha-Chivvi yosh'vei Giv'on ('except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon') — only Gibeon chose negotiation over combat. Every other city fought and fell. The Gibeonites' deception, despite its moral problems, represents the only successful Canaanite response to Israel's advance: they alone survived because they alone chose to seek peace, however fraudulently.
20. Ki me'et YHWH hay'tah l'chazzeq et libbam ('for it was from the LORD to harden their hearts') — one of the most theologically dense verses in Joshua. The hardening of the Canaanite hearts parallels God hardening Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8). The same theological pattern governs both the exodus and the conquest: God hardens the hearts of those set on opposition, confirming them in their chosen path so that judgment may proceed.
20. L'vilti heyot lahem t'chinnah ('so that they would have no mercy/grace') — t'chinnah ('grace, favor, compassion') is denied to the hardened. The hardening removes the possibility of surrender. If the Canaanites had sought peace, Israel would have been obligated to spare them (as with the Gibeonites). By hardening their hearts to fight, God ensures the cherem proceeds as commanded. The theological tension — divine sovereignty and human responsibility — is stated rather than resolved.
21. Vayyakhret et ha-Anaqim ('he cut off the Anakim') — the Anakim were the giant warrior clan whose presence terrified the original spies forty years earlier (Numbers 13:28, 33: 'we seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes'). The ten faithless spies' report about the Anakim triggered the wilderness wandering (Numbers 14:1-4). Joshua now systematically eliminates the very people who caused the previous generation's failure of faith. The giants who kept Israel out of the land for forty years are no obstacle to the generation that trusts God.
22. Raq b'Azzah b'Gat uv' Ashdod nish'aru ('only in Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod they remained') — the Anakim survive in the three Philistine cities that Israel did not conquer. Gath is particularly significant: it will later produce Goliath, the Philistine champion described as a giant warrior of extraordinary height (1 Samuel 17:4). The surviving Anakim in Gath become the seed of the future Goliath narrative — a thread that connects Joshua to David.

23. Vayyitt'nah Yehoshua l'nachalah l'Yisrael k'machl'qotam l'shivteihem ('Joshua gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions by tribes') — the conquest narrative (chapters 1-12) concludes with the transition to the allocation narrative (chapters 13-21). The word nachalah ('inheritance') is the key term for the second half of Joshua: the land won by conquest must now be distributed as the covenantal inheritance of each tribe.
23. V'ha-arets shaq'tah mil-milchamah ('the land had rest from war') — the verb shaqat ('to be quiet, to rest') describes the cessation of active military campaigns. This 'rest' fulfills the promise of Deuteronomy 12:10 ('when he gives you rest from all your enemies'). However, chapters 13-19 will reveal that significant territory remains unconquered (13:1-6), and the subsequent book of Judges will show that the 'rest' was incomplete and fragile.

# 12

*Summary: A summary of the defeated kings — two east of the Jordan (Sihon and Og, conquered under Moses) and thirty-one west of the Jordan (conquered under Joshua).*

*What Makes This Remarkable: The chapter is a victory catalog — thirty-three kings listed by name and territory. The structure mirrors ancient Near Eastern conquest records, but with a theological difference: every victory is attributed to the LORD, not to Israel's military prowess. The list includes cities that archaeological evidence confirms were occupied during this period. The count of thirty-one western kings (v. 24) gives the conquest a comprehensive scope.*

*Translation Friction: Several city identifications are uncertain — we rendered the names as the Hebrew gives them and noted geographical alternatives where scholarship offers them. The king list format ('the king of X, one') uses a formulaic Hebrew counting pattern that is awkward in English. We preserved the repetitive structure because the accumulation is the rhetorical point.*

*Connections: Sihon and Og's inclusion (vv. 2-6) connects to Numbers 21 and Deuteronomy 2-3. The defeated-king list becomes a praise motif in Psalm 135:10-12 and 136:17-22. Several cities reappear in Judges as unconquered (Judges 1), creating the tension between Joshua's theological completeness and Judges' historical reality.*

<sup>1</sup>These are the kings of the land whom the Israelites defeated and whose territory they took possession of east of the Jordan, from the Arnon Valley to Mount Hermon, including the entire eastern Arabah: <sup>2</sup>Sihon king of the Amorites, who ruled from Heshbon. His territory extended from Aroer on the rim of the Arnon Valley — including the middle of the valley itself — through half of Gilead as far as the Jabbok River, the border of the Ammonites. <sup>3</sup>He also controlled the Arabah eastward to the Sea of Chinnereth, and southward through the Arabah to the Dead Sea, toward Beth-jeshimoth, and on the south below the slopes of Pisgah. <sup>4</sup>And the territory of Og king of Bashan — one of the last of the Rephaim — who ruled from Ashtaroth and Edrei. <sup>5</sup>He ruled over Mount Hermon, Salecah, all of Bashan as far as the border of the Geshurites and Maacathites, and half of Gilead, up to the border of Sihon king of Heshbon. <sup>6</sup>Moses the servant of the LORD and the Israelites defeated them, and Moses the servant of the LORD gave their land as a possession to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. <sup>7</sup>These are the kings of the land whom Joshua and the Israelites defeated west of the Jordan, from Baal-gad in the Valley of Lebanon to Mount Halak, which rises toward Seir. Joshua gave this land to the tribes of Israel as their possession, apportioned among their divisions — <sup>8</sup>in the hill country, the Shephelah, the Arabah, the mountain slopes, the wilderness, and the Negev — the lands of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites: <sup>9</sup>the king of Jericho — one; the king of Ai, near Bethel — one; <sup>10</sup>the ruler of Jerusalem — one; the ruler of Hebron — one; <sup>11</sup>the ruler of Jarmuth — one; the ruler of Lachish — one; <sup>12</sup>the ruler of Eglon — one; the ruler of Gezer — one; <sup>13</sup>the ruler of Debir — one; the ruler of Geder — one; <sup>14</sup>the ruler of Hormah — one; the ruler of Arad — one; <sup>15</sup>the ruler of Libnah — one; the ruler of Adullam — one; <sup>16</sup>the ruler of Makkedah — one; the ruler of Bethel — one; <sup>17</sup>the ruler of Tappuah — one; the ruler of Hopher — one; <sup>18</sup>the ruler of Aphek — one; the ruler of Lasharon — one; <sup>19</sup>the ruler of Madon — one; the ruler of Hazor — one; <sup>20</sup>the ruler of Shimron-meron — one each; the ruler of Achshaph — one each; <sup>21</sup>the ruler of Taanach — one each; the ruler of Megiddo — one each; <sup>22</sup>the king of Kedesh — one; the king of Jokneam in Carmel — one; <sup>23</sup>the king of Dor in the heights of Dor — one; the king of Goyim at Gilgal — one; <sup>24</sup>the king of Tirzah — one. In all, thirty-one kings.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The chapter opens the comprehensive catalog of defeated kings — first the Transjordan conquests under Moses (vv. 1-6), then the Cisjordan conquests under Joshua (vv. 7-24). The verb *yarash* ('to take possession, to dispossess') connects the catalog to the central conquest theme. *Mi-nachal Arnon ad Har Chermon* ('from the Arnon Valley to Mount Hermon') — the full north-south extent of Transjordan territory: the Arnon gorge (modern Wadi Mujib in Jordan, the northern border of Moab) to Hermon in the far north.
2. Sihon's kingdom covered the southern half of the Transjordan: from the Arnon gorge in the south to the Jabbok River in the north, encompassing the southern portion of Gilead. His capital Heshbon sat in the central Transjordan plateau. His defeat is narrated in Numbers 21:21-30 and Deuteronomy 2:24-37.
3. Yam Kinnerot ('Sea of Chinnereth' — Sea of Galilee) to yam ha-Aravah yam ha-Melach ('the Arabah Sea, the Salt Sea' — Dead Sea) — Sihon's domain included the eastern shore of both major bodies of water in the Jordan Rift Valley. Ashdot ha-Pisgah ('the slopes of Pisgah') — the slopes of the mountain range where Moses viewed the promised land before his death (Deuteronomy 34:1).
4. Og melek ha-Bashan mi-yeter ha-Refa'im ('Og king of Bashan, from the remnant of the Rephaim') — Og is identified as a surviving member of the Rephaim, the legendary giant race of the ancient Near East (cf. Deuteronomy 3:11, which describes his enormous iron bedstead). His defeat is narrated in Numbers 21:33-35 and Deuteronomy 3:1-11. Ashtaroth and Edrei were his dual capitals in the rich volcanic plateau of Bashan (modern Golan Heights and Hauran).
5. Og's domain covered the northern half of the Transjordan: from Hermon and Salecah in the far north through all of Bashan and the northern half of Gilead, meeting Sihon's territory at the Jabbok. Together, Sihon and Og controlled the entire Transjordan from Arnon to Hermon — the complete territory now held by Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.
6. *Mosheh eved YHWH* ('Moses the servant of the LORD') — the title appears twice, framing Moses as the divinely authorized agent of the Transjordan conquest and allocation. *Yerushah* ('possession') is used rather than *nachalah* ('inheritance'), though the terms overlap. The Transjordan allocation is presented as fully legitimate — it was given by Moses under divine authority, establishing the same covenant rights as the Cisjordan allotments.
7. The second half of the catalog lists the Cisjordan kings defeated under Joshua. The geographic boundaries repeat 11:17 in reverse order (north to south here, south to north there). *Vayyitt'nah Yehoshua l'shivtei Yisrael yerushah k'machl'qotam* ('Joshua gave it to the tribes of Israel as a possession according to their divisions') — the transition from conquest to allocation.
8. Six geographic zones and six ethnic groups frame the catalog that follows. The comprehensive listing emphasizes totality: every region, every people group. The catalog itself (vv. 9-24) will enumerate thirty-one kings — a formal accounting of the conquest.
9. The catalog begins with the first two conquests. Each entry follows a strict formula: *melek* [city name] *echad* ('king of [city], one'). The number *echad* ('one') functions as a tally mark. The literary form resembles an ancient administrative record — a royal accounting of defeated enemies.
10. The five kings of the southern coalition (10:3-5) are listed: Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon (vv. 10-12). Their defeat at the battle of Gibeon and the subsequent southern campaign is summarized in this tally.
11. Jarmuth and Lachish — both members of the southern coalition defeated in chapter 10.
12. Eglon was the fifth member of the southern coalition. Gezer's king Horam was defeated when he came to aid Lachish (10:33), though Gezer itself was not captured at this time.
13. Debir was conquered in the southern campaign (10:38-39). Geder (or Beth-gader) is otherwise unmentioned in the conquest narratives, suggesting the catalog preserves a more complete record than the narrative accounts.
14. Hormah and Arad are Negev cities. Hormah's name itself means 'destruction/devotion to destruction' — the city's name commemorates an earlier Israelite victory (Numbers 21:3), where the name was given as a wordplay on *cherem*. Arad is in the northern Negev, known from archaeological excavation as a significant fortified site.
15. Libnah was conquered in 10:29-30. Adullam, in the Shephelah, will later become famous as the cave where David hid from Saul (1 Samuel 22:1).
16. Makkedah was the site of the cave where the five kings hid (10:16-27). Bethel's forces joined Ai's pursuit (8:17), and its king's defeat is recorded here though not narrated separately in the campaign accounts.
17. Tappuah ('apple') is a city in the hill country later assigned to Manasseh at the border with Ephraim (17:8). Hopher appears in Manassite territory and is connected to the daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27:1).
18. Aphek controlled a key pass on the Via Maris trade route in the Sharon plain. Lasharon may be an independent city or a descriptive term ('belonging to Sharon'), locating this Aphek in the coastal Sharon region.
19. The northern coalition kings begin here. Madon and Hazor were the first two allies named in 11:1. Hazor's listing is understated — no special marker distinguishes the largest city in Canaan from any other defeated king in this democratic tally.
20. Shimron-meron (combining Shimron from 11:1 with a fuller name) and Achshaph were members of Jabin's northern coalition.

21. Taanach and Megiddo guarded the strategic Jezreel Valley and the pass through the Carmel ridge. Megiddo (Armageddon in Greek, from Har Megiddo, 'Mount of Megiddo') was one of the most strategically important cities in the ancient Near East, controlling the main route between Egypt and Mesopotamia. Despite the king's defeat, Megiddo remained partially unconquered (17:11-12; Judges 1:27).
22. Kedesh (Kedesh-naphtali) was a city in the upper Galilee, later designated as a city of refuge (20:7). Jokneam was at the foot of Mount Carmel, guarding the southwestern approach to the Jezreel Valley.
23. Dor was a coastal city south of Mount Carmel. Melekh Goyim l'Gilgal ('king of nations/peoples at Gilgal') — goyim means 'nations' or 'peoples,' possibly designating a multi-ethnic confederation rather than a single city-state. This Gilgal is likely a different site from Joshua's base camp near Jericho.
24. Kol m'lakhim sh'loshim v'echad ('all the kings: thirty-one') — the total tally. Tirzah, the final entry, was a beautiful city in the northern hill country that later became the first capital of the northern kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 14:17; 15:21, 33). The catalog closes with a grand total: thirty-one kings defeated, their territories taken. The number represents the comprehensive scope of the conquest — every petty kingdom in the promised land has been overthrown.
24. Chapter 12 functions as the accounting ledger of the conquest — a formal record that transitions the narrative from war (chapters 1-11) to land distribution (chapters 13-21). The catalog demonstrates that God's promise has been fulfilled: the land has been taken, the kings have fallen, and the inheritance awaits distribution.

# 13

*Summary: God tells the aging Joshua that much land remains unconquered and commands the distribution of territory. The Transjordan allotments to Reuben, Gad, and half-Manasseh are detailed, and the Levites receive no territorial inheritance.*

*What Makes This Remarkable: The chapter opens with a startling admission after the conquest summary of chapters 11-12: 'You are old, advanced in years, and very much of the land remains to be possessed' (v. 1). The tension between 'Joshua took the whole land' (11:23) and 'very much remains' (13:1) is not contradiction but theology — God's gift is complete, but Israel's occupation is ongoing. The Levites' non-inheritance (v. 33) is stated with theological precision: 'the LORD God of Israel is their inheritance' — not land but God Himself.*

*Translation Friction: The geographical boundaries involve numerous place names whose ancient locations are debated. We rendered each name as the Hebrew gives it and noted identifications where scholarship is reasonably confident. The phrase *ad hayyom hazzeh* ('to this day,' v. 13) is the narrator's voice from a later period, acknowledging that Geshurites and Maacathites remained unconquered through the time of writing.*

*Connections: The unconquered territories become the nations that 'test' Israel in Judges 2:20-3:6. The Transjordan allotment fulfills Numbers 32 and Deuteronomy 3:12-17. The Levitical non-inheritance echoes Numbers 18:20 and Deuteronomy 10:9. Caleb's upcoming request (ch. 14) connects to the spy narrative of Numbers 13-14.*

1Joshua had grown old, advanced in years. The LORD said to him, "You have grown old, advanced in years, and a great deal of land still remains to be taken. 2This is the land that remains: all the regions of the Philistines and all Geshurite territory, 3from the Shihor east of Egypt to the border of Ekron on the north — territory considered Canaanite — the five Philistine rulers: of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron; also the Avvites. 4From the south, all the land of the Canaanites — including Mearah, which belongs to the Sidonians — as far as Aphek, to the Amorite border; 5also the land of the Gebalites and all of Lebanon to the east, from Baal-gad below Mount Hermon to Lebo-hamath. 6All the inhabitants of the hill country from Lebanon to Misrephoth-maim — all the Sidonians — I myself will drive them out before the Israelites. Only allocate the land to Israel as an inheritance, as I have commanded you. 7Now divide this land as an inheritance among the nine tribes and the half-tribe of Manasseh. 8With the other half-tribe, the Reubenites and Gadites had already received the inheritance that Moses gave them east of the Jordan, just as Moses the servant of the LORD assigned it to them: 9from Aroer on the rim of the Arnon Valley, including the city in the middle of the valley, and the entire plateau from Medeba to Dibon; 10all the cities of Sihon king of the Amorites, who ruled from Heshbon, as far as the border of the Ammonites; 11Gilead, the territory of the Geshurites and Maacathites, all of Mount Hermon, and all of Bashan as far as Salecah — 12the entire kingdom of Og in

Bashan, who had ruled from Ashtaroth and Edrei. He was one of the last surviving Rephaim. Moses defeated them and dispossessed them. <sup>13</sup>But the Israelites did not drive out the Geshurites or the Maacathites. Geshur and Maacath live among Israel to this day. <sup>14</sup>Only to the tribe of Levi he gave no territorial inheritance. The fire offerings of the LORD, the God of Israel, are their inheritance, as He promised them. <sup>15</sup>Moses gave territory to the tribe of Reuben, clan by clan. <sup>16</sup>Their territory ran from Aroer on the rim of the Arnon Valley, including the city in the middle of the valley, and the entire plateau near Medeba — <sup>17</sup>Heshbon and all its towns on the plateau: Dibon, Bamoth-baal, Beth-baal-meon, <sup>18</sup>Jahaz, Kedemoth, Mephaath, <sup>19</sup>Kiriathaim, Sibmah, and Zereth-shahar on the hill overlooking the valley, <sup>20</sup>Beth-peor, the slopes of Pisgah, and Beth-jeshimoth, <sup>21</sup>all the plateau cities and the entire kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, who ruled from Heshbon — the one Moses defeated along with the Midianite chieftains Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the vassals of Sihon who lived in the land. <sup>22</sup>The Israelites also killed Balaam son of Beor, the diviner, with the sword, along with the others they slew. <sup>23</sup>The western border of the Reubenites was the Jordan River itself. This was the inheritance of the Reubenites, clan by clan — their cities and surrounding settlements. <sup>24</sup>Moses gave territory to the tribe of Gad, clan by clan. <sup>25</sup>Their territory included Jazer, all the cities of Gilead, and half the Ammonite territory as far as Aroer, east of Rabbah; <sup>26</sup>from Heshbon to Ramath-mizpeh and Betonim, and from Mahanaim to the border of Lo-debar; <sup>27</sup>and in the valley: Beth-haram, Beth-nimrah, Succoth, and Zaphon — the rest of the kingdom of Sihon king of Heshbon — with the Jordan as its western border, extending to the southern end of the Sea of Chinnereth, east of the Jordan. <sup>28</sup>This was the inheritance of the Gadites, clan by clan — their cities and surrounding settlements. <sup>29</sup>Moses gave territory to the half-tribe of Manasseh, and it was allocated to the half-tribe of Manasseh clan by clan. <sup>30</sup>Their territory extended from Mahanaim through all of Bashan — the entire kingdom of Og king of Bashan — including all the settlements of Jair in Bashan: sixty towns. <sup>31</sup>Half of Gilead, along with Ashtaroth and Edrei — the royal cities of Og's kingdom in Bashan — went to the descendants of Machir son of Manasseh, that is, to half the Machirites, clan by clan. <sup>32</sup>These are the territories Moses allocated on the plains of Moab, east of the Jordan across from Jericho. <sup>33</sup>But to the tribe of Levi, Moses gave no inheritance. The LORD, the God of Israel, is their inheritance, as He promised them.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Attah zaqanta bata vayyamim ('you have grown old, you have entered into the days') — God states Joshua's age not as a compliment but as an urgency: much remains to be done and Joshua's time is limited. V'ha-arets nish'arah harbeh me'od l'rishtah ('the land remaining is very great to possess') — the verb yarash ('to possess, to dispossess') reappears. Despite the conquest summary of chapters 10-12, significant territory remains outside Israelite control. The tension between 'Joshua took the whole land' (11:23) and 'very much land remains' (13:1) is deliberate: the initial military campaigns broke Canaanite power, but comprehensive settlement and control were incomplete.
2. Kol g'lilot ha-P'lishtim ('all the districts/regions of the Philistines') — the Philistine territory along the southern coastal plain was never conquered during Joshua's campaigns. The Philistines, a Sea People who arrived in Canaan around the same time as the Israelite settlement, would become Israel's primary adversary through the period of the Judges and into the monarchy. Their five cities (v. 3) remained independent enclaves within the promised land.
3. Chameshet sarnei F'lishtim ('the five lords/rulers of the Philistines') — the word seren (plural sarnim) is a distinctly Philistine title, possibly cognate with Greek tyrannos ('tyrant, ruler'). Each of the five Philistine cities was governed by its own seren, forming a pentapolis confederation. The five cities — Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron — controlled the southern coastal plain and the trade routes connecting Egypt to Mesopotamia.
3. The Shihor (Shichor, 'black waters') is likely the easternmost branch of the Nile delta or the Wadi el-Arish, marking the traditional border with Egypt.
4. The unconquered territory extends northward along the Phoenician coast. M'arah asher la-Tsidonim ('Mearah belonging to the Sidonians') — likely a cave or cave-settlement in the Lebanese coast region. The Sidonians (Phoenicians) controlled the northern coastal territory that Israel never occupied.
5. Ha-Givli ('the Gebalites') — inhabitants of Gebal (Byblos), the ancient Phoenician port city. Kol ha-L'vanon ('all Lebanon') — the Lebanon mountain range and its settlements remained unconquered. Ad l'vo Chamat ('to the entrance of Hamath') — Lebo-hamath (modern Lebweh in the Beqa'a Valley) marks the ideal northern boundary of the promised land (Numbers 34:8). The gap between the ideal boundary and the actual conquest is significant — the territory described in verses 2-6 represents the 'not yet' within God's 'already.'
6. Anokhi orishem mip'nei b'nei Yisrael ('I myself will drive them out before the Israelites') — God takes personal responsibility for completing the conquest of the unconquered territories. The emphatic anokhi ('I myself') signals that the remaining dispossession is God's task, not Joshua's. Raq happilehah l'Yisrael b'nachalah ('only divide it for Israel as an inheritance') — Joshua's remaining assignment is allocation, not conquest. The verb nafal (hiphil, 'to cause to fall' — i.e., to cast lots) connects to the lot-casting method of land distribution.

6. The word *nachalah* ('inheritance') here carries its full covenantal weight: the land — including territory not yet controlled — is already Israel's inheritance by divine grant. Joshua is to distribute what God has promised, even before it is fully possessed.
7. *L'tish'at ha-sh'vatim va-chatsi ha-shevet ha-M'nasheh* ('for the nine tribes and the half-tribe of Manasseh') — the western half of Manasseh receives its allotment west of the Jordan, while the eastern half already received its share in the Transjordan (v. 29-31). The nine-and-a-half tribes awaiting Cisjordan allocation are the focus of chapters 14-19.
8. The narrative pauses to recapitulate the Transjordan allotment (vv. 8-13), confirming that Reuben, Gad, and eastern Manasseh already hold their *nachalah* by Mosaic grant. This establishes the precedent for the upcoming allocations: the same authority (divine command through Moses) governs both the Transjordan and Cisjordan distributions.
9. The Transjordan boundary description begins at the Arnon gorge (the southern boundary) and moves north. *Kol ha-mishor* ('the entire plateau') — the Mishor is the flat, elevated tableland east of the Dead Sea, known today as the Madaba plain. This was prime agricultural and grazing land.
10. *Ad g'vul b'nei Ammon* ('to the border of the Ammonites') — Israel's territory did not extend into Ammonite land, as God had prohibited (Deuteronomy 2:19). The Ammonite border served as the eastern limit of the Transjordan allotment.
11. The description moves north through the Transjordan: Gilead (the central Transjordan highlands), the Geshurite and Maacathite territories (northeast of the Sea of Galilee), Mount Hermon, and Bashan (the volcanic plateau of the modern Golan Heights and Hauran). This represents Og's former kingdom.
12. *Hu nishar mi-yeter ha-Refa'im* ('he remained from the remnant of the Rephaim') — Og's identity as the last Rephaim giant is repeated from 12:4. *Vayyakkhem Mosheh vayyorishem* ('Moses struck them and dispossessed them') — the verb *yarash* in the hiphil ('to dispossess, to drive out') confirms that the Transjordan conquest under Moses achieved genuine dispossession of the former inhabitants.
13. *V'lo horishu b'nei Yisrael et ha-G'shuri v'et ha-Ma'akhati* ('the Israelites did not dispossess the Geshurites or the Maacathites') — the first explicit acknowledgment of incomplete conquest in the allocation section. This failure foreshadows the pattern that will dominate Judges 1. *Ad ha-yom ha-zeh* ('to this day') — the narrator confirms the ongoing presence of these unconquered peoples in the narrator's own time. David will later marry Maacah, a Geshurite princess (2 Samuel 3:3), and Absalom will flee to his grandfather the king of Geshur (2 Samuel 13:37-38).
14. *Raq l'shevet ha-Levi lo natan nachalah* ('only to the tribe of Levi he gave no inheritance') — Levi's exclusion from territorial allocation is stated three times in this chapter (vv. 14, 33) and repeatedly throughout Joshua. *Ishei YHWH Elohei Yisrael hu nachalato* ('the fire offerings of the LORD are his inheritance') — Levi's *nachalah* is not land but liturgical service. The tribe that serves at the altar receives its sustenance from the altar offerings. Their 'inheritance' is proximity to God — a theological statement that the divine presence is worth more than any territory. Levi will receive designated cities within other tribes' territories (chapter 21) but no contiguous tribal homeland.
15. *L'mishp'chotam* ('according to their clans/families') — the allocation is not merely tribal but sub-tribal, organized by extended family groups (*mishpachot*). Each clan receives a specific portion within the tribal territory.
16. Reuben's territory occupies the southern portion of the Transjordan: from the Arnon gorge northward through the Medeba plateau. This is the same area described in verses 9-10 as part of Sihon's former kingdom.
17. Several of these city names contain the element *ba'al* ('lord, master') — *Bamat Ba'al* ('high places of Baal'), *Beit Ba'al M'on* ('house of Baal of the dwelling'). The Canaanite religious names persist in the geography even after Israelite occupation, reflecting the enduring challenge of religious syncretism in the Transjordan.
18. *Yahtsah* ('Jahaz') — the site where Israel defeated Sihon in the original battle (Numbers 21:23; Deuteronomy 2:32). The city where the Transjordan conquest began is now part of Reuben's inheritance.
19. *Tseret ha-Shachar b'har ha-emeq* ('Zereth-shahar on the mount of the valley') — a town perched on a ridge above the Dead Sea valley. *Sibmah* was known for its vineyards (Isaiah 16:8-9; Jeremiah 48:32).
20. *Beit P'or* ('house of Peor') — associated with the Baal-peor apostasy (Numbers 25), where Israelite men engaged in sexual idolatry with Moabite women. The site's inclusion in Reuben's territory places them as guardians of a place of prior disgrace. *Ashdot ha-Pisgah* ('slopes of Pisgah') — the mountain range where Moses viewed the promised land and died (Deuteronomy 34:1-6).
21. *N'sikhei Sichon yosh'vei ha-arets* ('vassals/princes of Sihon, inhabitants of the land') — these five Midianite leaders were client-rulers under Sihon's overlordship. Their defeat is narrated in Numbers 31:8. *Zur* is the father of *Cozbi*, the Midianite woman killed by Phinehas during the Baal-peor incident (Numbers 25:15, 18). The listing connects the territorial allocation to the broader story of Transjordan conflict.
22. *Bil'am ben B'or ha-qosem* ('Balaam son of Beor, the diviner') — Balaam, who could not curse Israel (Numbers 22-24) but who advised Moab to seduce Israel through the Baal-peor strategy (Numbers 31:16), met his end in the Transjordan battles. The term *qosem* ('diviner') is pejorative — contrasting his pagan practice with legitimate prophetic authority. His death is recorded here within Reuben's territorial description because he died in this region.
23. *Ha-Yarden ug'vul* ('the Jordan and its border') — the Jordan River formed Reuben's western boundary, separating them from the tribes in Canaan proper. *He-arim v'chatsreihen* ('the cities and their villages/enclosures') — each city had dependent satellite settlements (*chatserim*, from *chatser*, 'courtyard, enclosure').

24. Gad's allotment follows Reuben's, occupying the central Transjordan — the heart of Gilead.
25. V'kol arei ha-Gil'ad ('all the cities of Gilead') — Gad received the central highlands of the Transjordan, the fertile and well-watered region of Gilead. Va-chatsi erets b'nei Ammon ('half the land of the Ammonites') — this appears to contradict Deuteronomy 2:19, which forbade taking Ammonite land. The territory described was likely land Sihon had previously taken from Ammon (cf. Judges 11:13, 22), making it legitimately Israelite through conquest from Sihon rather than directly from Ammon.
26. Machanayim ('double camp') — the place where Jacob saw the angels of God and exclaimed 'This is God's camp!' (Genesis 32:2). It will later serve as the capital for Ish-bosheth (2 Samuel 2:8) and as David's refuge during Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 17:24). The patriarchal memory is embedded in the tribal geography.
27. Sukkot ('Succoth,' meaning 'shelters/booths') — where Jacob built shelters for his livestock after his reconciliation with Esau (Genesis 33:17). The patriarchal narrative is woven into the tribal geography at every turn. Ad q'tseh yam Kinneret ('to the edge of the Sea of Chinnereth') — Gad's territory extended north along the Jordan Valley to the southern shore of the Sea of Galilee.
28. The formulaic summary closes Gad's allotment as it closed Reuben's (v. 23).
29. The eastern half of Manasseh receives the northernmost Transjordan territory — Bashan and northern Gilead. The split of Manasseh between east and west of the Jordan creates a unique situation: one tribe spanning the river, divided by geography but united by kinship.
30. Kol chavvot Ya'ir asher ba-Bashan shishim ir ('all the tent-villages of Jair in Bashan, sixty cities') — the chavvot ('tent-villages, encampments') of Jair were settlements named after Jair son of Manasseh, who captured them (Numbers 32:41; Deuteronomy 3:14). Sixty towns represents a substantial territory in the rich volcanic region of Bashan.
31. Livnei Makhir ben M'nasheh ('to the descendants of Machir son of Manasseh') — Machir was Manasseh's firstborn son (Genesis 50:23), and his clan was the dominant military force within the tribe. They received the most formidable territory: the former royal cities of Og, the last of the Rephaim giants. The warrior clan receives the giant's kingdom.
32. B'arvot Mo'av ('on the plains of Moab') — Moses made these allocations during Israel's encampment on the Moabite plain, opposite Jericho, in the final days before the Jordan crossing. The Transjordan section closes by returning to the scene of Moses's last acts.
33. YHWH Elohei Yisrael hu nachalatam ('the LORD, the God of Israel, is their inheritance') — the chapter's closing verse escalates from verse 14. There, Levi's inheritance was the fire offerings (the produce of the altar service). Here, the inheritance is God Himself. The LORD is not merely the source of Levi's sustenance but the substance of their portion. This is the highest theological statement about inheritance in Joshua: the ultimate nachalah is not land but the living God.

# 14

**Summary:** *Caleb, at eighty-five years old, claims Hebron as his inheritance — the territory of the Anakite giants — declaring himself as strong as the day Moses sent him as a spy forty-five years earlier.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *Caleb's speech (vv. 6-12) is one of the great moments of biblical courage. He does not ask for easy territory — he asks for the hill country where the giants live, the very region that terrified the other spies in Numbers 13-14. His claim rests on a single fact: 'I wholly followed the LORD my God' (v. 8, male'ti acharei YHWH). The Hebrew male'ti ('I filled after') means he followed completely, with nothing held back — the same verb used for filling a cup to the brim.*

**Translation Friction:** *The phrase kochi az ken kochi attah (v. 11, 'as my strength was then, so is my strength now') is startling for an eighty-five-year-old. We rendered it literally. The word nachalah (v. 13, 'inheritance') is more than property — it is covenant-granted territory, the physical form of God's promise. Hebron's older name Kiriath-arba ('city of four' or 'city of Arba,' v. 15) preserves pre-Israelite tradition.*

**Connections:** *Caleb's faith echoes Numbers 13:30 and 14:24 — God promised him this land forty-five years earlier. Hebron becomes David's first capital (2 Samuel 2:1-4) and the burial site of the patriarchs (Genesis 23). The Anakites Caleb drives out (v. 12) are the same giants who terrified the spies in Numbers 13:28, 33. The phrase 'the land had rest from war' (v. 15) echoes 11:23.*

1These are the territories the Israelites received as their inheritance in the land of Canaan, allocated to them by Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the heads of the ancestral houses of the Israelite tribes. 2Their inheritance was determined by lot, as the LORD had commanded through Moses, for the nine-and-a-half tribes. 3Moses had given the two-and-a-half tribes their inheritance east of the Jordan, but he gave no territorial inheritance to the Levites among them. 4Joseph's descendants

had become two tribes — Manasseh and Ephraim — so the Levites were given no portion of the land, only cities to live in with surrounding pasturelands for their livestock and property. <sup>5</sup>The Israelites did just as the LORD had commanded Moses, and they divided the land. <sup>6</sup>The people of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, "You know what the LORD said to Moses the man of God concerning you and me at Kadesh-barnea. <sup>7</sup>I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh-barnea to scout the land, and I brought back to him an honest report — what was truly in my heart. <sup>8</sup>My fellow scouts who went up with me made the people lose heart, but I remained fully committed to the LORD my God. <sup>9</sup>On that day Moses swore an oath, saying, 'The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance — yours and your descendants' — permanently, because you fully followed the LORD my God.' <sup>10</sup>Now look — the LORD has kept me alive, just as He promised, these forty-five years since the LORD spoke this word to Moses while Israel was wandering in the wilderness. And here I am today, eighty-five years old. <sup>11</sup>I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out. My strength then is my strength now — for war and for whatever needs doing. <sup>12</sup>So now, give me this hill country that the LORD promised that day. You yourself heard on that day that the Anakim are there, with large, fortified cities. If the LORD is with me, I will drive them out, just as the LORD promised." <sup>13</sup>Joshua blessed him and gave Hebron to Caleb son of Jephunneh as his inheritance. <sup>14</sup>For this reason Hebron has belonged to Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite as his inheritance to this day, because he fully followed the LORD, the God of Israel. <sup>15</sup>The former name of Hebron was Kiriath-arba — Arba was the greatest man among the Anakim. And the land had rest from war.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. El'azar ha-kohen viYhoshua bin Nun ('Eleazar the priest and Joshua son of Nun') — the allocation is administered jointly by the religious and military leaders. Eleazar (Aaron's surviving son, Numbers 20:25-28) operates the Urim and Thummim for divine consultation, while Joshua executes the distribution. This dual authority ensures the allocation is both divinely guided and administratively implemented.
2. B'goral nachalatam ('by lot was their inheritance') — the lot (goral) was the primary mechanism for distributing the land. Proverbs 16:33 states: 'The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.' The lot removes human favoritism from the process — no tribe can claim a better portion through political maneuvering. The divine will operates through the apparently random device.
3. The narrator explains the arithmetic: twelve tribes minus two-and-a-half (already allocated in Transjordan) minus Levi (no territorial inheritance) leaves nine-and-a-half tribes for the Cisjordan allocation. Joseph's two sons (Ephraim and Manasseh) maintain the twelve-tribe count despite Levi's exclusion.
4. Ki hayu v'nei Yosef sh'nei mattot ('because the sons of Joseph were two tribes') — Jacob's adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48:5) created a double portion for Joseph, keeping the tribal count at twelve even with Levi set apart for priestly service. Ki im arim lashavet u-migrsheihem ('only cities to dwell in with their pasturelands') — Levi received forty-eight cities scattered throughout all the other tribes' territories (chapter 21), ensuring priestly presence in every region of Israel.
5. Ka'asher tsivvah YHWH et Mosheh ken asu ('as the LORD commanded Moses, so they did') — the obedience formula that runs throughout Joshua. The land division proceeds under the same divine authority as the conquest.
6. Kalev ben Y'funneh ha-Q'nizzi ('Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite') — Caleb's ethnic designation as a Kenizzite is significant. The Kenizzites were a non-Israelite clan (Genesis 15:19) absorbed into the tribe of Judah. Caleb's foreignness makes his faith all the more remarkable: an outsider by blood who became an insider by faithfulness. His story parallels Rahab's — both non-Israelites who aligned themselves with YHWH and received an inheritance in the promised land.
6. Et ha-davar asher dibber YHWH el Mosheh ish ha-Elohim al odotai v'al odotekha b'Qadesh Barnea ('the word the LORD spoke to Moses the man of God concerning me and you at Kadesh-barnea') — Caleb appeals to a specific divine promise made forty-five years earlier, when he and Joshua alone gave a faithful report after spying out the land (Numbers 13-14). Moses is called ish ha-Elohim ('man of God'), a title emphasizing his unique prophetic authority.
7. Va'ashev oto davar ka'asher im l'vavi ('I brought him back a word/report as it was with my heart') — Caleb's self-assessment is not boastful but factual: he reported what he genuinely believed, not what would please the majority. His 'heart' (levav) was aligned with God's promise while ten other spies let fear override faith. The phrase contrasts with the fear that 'melted the hearts' (himsu et lev, Numbers 14:8) of the other spies.
8. Himsiu et lev ha-am ('they melted the heart of the people') — the ten faithless spies caused the national failure of nerve that resulted in the wilderness wandering. V'anokhi mileti acharei YHWH Elohai ('but I wholly followed the LORD my God') — the phrase mileti acharei ('I filled after' = 'I fully followed') is Caleb's signature expression, repeated in Numbers 14:24; 32:11-12; Deuteronomy 1:36. The verb male ('to fill') conveys totality: Caleb's commitment was not partial or conditional but full, complete, overflowing. There was no gap between God's promise and Caleb's trust.

9. Ha-arets asher dar'k'k'ah ragl'k'ha bah l'k'ha tihyeh l'nachalah ('the land your foot has walked on will be your inheritance') — the specific land Caleb scouted will be his personal nachalah. This promise, made at Kadesh-barnea (Numbers 14:24; Deuteronomy 1:36), has waited forty-five years for fulfillment. The land Caleb walked through as a spy he will now own as a settler.
9. Ad olam ('forever/permanently') — Caleb's inheritance carries the same permanence as the tribal allotments. His descendants will hold this territory in perpetuity. Ki mileta acharei YHWH Elohai ('because you fully followed the LORD my God') — the reason for the grant is theological faithfulness, not military prowess. Caleb earns his inheritance through trust, not through conquest.
10. Hinneh hecheyah YHWH oti ka'asher dibber ('the LORD has kept me alive, as he spoke/promised') — Caleb's survival itself is a fulfilled promise. God promised him the land, and God kept him alive to receive it. Zeh arba'im v'chamesh shanah ('these forty-five years') — forty years of wilderness wandering plus approximately five years of conquest campaigning. Ben chamesh ush'monim shanah ('eighty-five years old') — this age marker provides one of the few chronological anchors for the conquest period. If Caleb was forty when sent as a spy, and forty-five years have passed, the allocation is taking place approximately five years after the Jordan crossing.
11. Odeni ha-yom chazaq ka'asher b'yom sh'loach oti Mosheh ('I am still today as strong as the day Moses sent me') — at eighty-five, Caleb claims undiminished vigor. K'kochi az ukh'kochi attah ('my strength then is my strength now') — the claim is not merely physical boasting but theological testimony: God has preserved both his life and his strength for this moment. La-milchamah v'latset v'lavo ('for war and for going out and coming in') — 'going out and coming in' is an idiom for the full range of daily activity, both military and civil. Caleb is ready for everything.
12. T'nah li et ha-har ha-zeh ('give me this hill country') — Caleb does not request easy territory. He asks for the Hebron highlands — the very region where the Anakim giants still live, the same giants whose presence terrified the other ten spies forty-five years earlier (Numbers 13:28, 33). The man who was not afraid of the giants at forty is not afraid of them at eighty-five.
12. Ki Anaqim sham v'arim g'dolot b'tsurot ('for Anakim are there and cities are large and fortified') — Caleb acknowledges every difficulty: giants and fortified cities. He does not minimize the challenge. Ulai YHWH oti v'horashtim ('perhaps the LORD will be with me and I will dispossess them') — the ulai ('perhaps, if') is not doubt but humility. Caleb does not presume upon God's action; he trusts while leaving room for divine sovereignty. Ka'asher dibber YHWH ('as the LORD spoke/promised') — Caleb's faith rests entirely on God's spoken word. The promise made at Kadesh-barnea is the foundation of his confidence.
13. Vay'varkhahu Yehoshua ('Joshua blessed him') — the blessing is both a prayer for success and an official authorization. Vayyitten et Chevron l'Khalev ben Y'funneh l'nachalah ('he gave Hebron to Caleb as an inheritance') — the city of the patriarchs goes to the man of faith. Abraham purchased the cave of Machpelah at Hebron to bury Sarah (Genesis 23). Now Hebron becomes the personal inheritance of Caleb — the Kenizzite outsider whose faith surpassed that of native-born Israelites. The patriarchal burial site and the faithful warrior's inheritance converge at the same location.
14. Ya'an asher mille acharei YHWH Elohei Yisrael ('because he fully followed the LORD, the God of Israel') — the narrator repeats Caleb's signature phrase one final time as the theological explanation for his inheritance. The inheritance is earned not by conquest but by faithfulness. Caleb's story is the individual embodiment of the national principle: obedience to God is the path to possessing the promised land. Ad ha-yom ha-zeh ('to this day') — Caleb's descendants still hold Hebron in the narrator's time.
15. Qiryat Arba ha-adam ha-gadol ba-Anaqim ('Kiriath-arba, the great/greatest man among the Anakim') — Hebron's old name preserves the memory of Arba, the legendary ancestor or champion of the Anakim giants. The city named for the greatest giant is now given to the man who was never afraid of giants. V'ha-arets shaq'tah mil-milchamah ('the land had rest from war') — the same concluding formula as 11:23. The Caleb episode sits between two notices of rest, framing his inheritance claim as part of the transition from war to settlement.
15. Caleb's story is a masterpiece of narrative theology: the outsider who became an insider through faith, who waited forty-five years for a promise, who at eighty-five asked for the hardest assignment, who received the patriarchal city as his reward. His story answers the question: what does it look like to 'fully follow the LORD'?

# 15

*Summary: The territory of Judah is defined by detailed boundary descriptions. Caleb conquers Hebron and Debir, Othniel captures Kiriath-sepher and wins Caleb's daughter Achsah, and the chapter lists Judah's cities by district. The Jebusites in Jerusalem remain unconquered.*

*What Makes This Remarkable: Judah's allotment is the longest and most detailed — reflecting Judah's theological and political significance as the tribe of the future monarchy. Achsah's request for water springs (v. 19) is one of the few moments a woman speaks in the allotment narratives — she negotiates for resources, not merely accepting what is given. The note that Judah 'could not drive out the Jebusites of Jerusalem' (v. 63) creates a tension that persists until David's conquest (2 Samuel 5:6-7).*

*Translation Friction: The boundary descriptions use geographical markers whose locations are often uncertain. We rendered every place name as the Hebrew gives it. The phrase *ad hayyom hazzeh* (v. 63, 'to this day') marks the narrator's time and acknowledges that the allotment ideal did not match the settlement reality — the Jebusites remained in Jerusalem alongside Judah.*

*Connections: Othniel's victory at Kiriath-sepher previews his role as the first judge (Judges 3:9-11). Achsah's story is repeated in Judges 1:12-15. The Jebusite presence in Jerusalem persists until 2 Samuel 5:6-9. Judah's territorial prominence anticipates the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7) and the prophetic focus on Judah.*

<sup>1</sup>The territory allotted to the tribe of Judah, clan by clan, extended to the border of Edom — the wilderness of Zin at the far south. <sup>2</sup>Their southern boundary started from the end of the Dead Sea, from the bay that faces south. <sup>3</sup>It ran south to the Ascent of Akrabbim, crossed to Zin, went up south of Kadesh-barnea, passed Hezron, went up to Addar, and turned toward Karka. <sup>4</sup>It continued to Azmon, went out to the Wadi of Egypt, and ended at the sea. This is your southern boundary. <sup>5</sup>The eastern boundary was the Dead Sea as far as the mouth of the Jordan. The northern boundary began from the bay of the sea at the mouth of the Jordan. <sup>6</sup>The boundary went up to Beth-hoglah, passed north of Beth-arabah, and went up to the Stone of Bohan son of Reuben. <sup>7</sup>The boundary went up to Debir from the Valley of Achor, then turned north toward Gilgal, which faces the Ascent of Adummim south of the valley. The boundary crossed to the waters of En-shemesh and came out at En-rogel. <sup>8</sup>The boundary went up through the Valley of Ben-hinnom to the southern slope of the Jebusite city — that is, Jerusalem — then up to the top of the hill west of the Hinnom Valley, at the northern end of the Valley of Rephaim. <sup>9</sup>From the hilltop the boundary curved to the spring of the waters of Nephtoah, extended to the cities of Mount Ephron, and curved to Baalah — that is, Kiriath-jearim. <sup>10</sup>From Baalah the boundary turned westward to Mount Seir, passed along the northern slope of Mount Jearim — that is, Chesalon — descended to Beth-shemesh, and crossed to Timnah. <sup>11</sup>The boundary extended to the northern slope of Ekron, curved to Shikkeron, crossed Mount Baalah, went out to Jabneel, and ended at the sea. <sup>12</sup>The western boundary was the Great Sea and its coastline. These were the boundaries of the tribe of Judah on all sides, clan by clan. <sup>13</sup>To Caleb son of Jephunneh he gave a portion among the people of Judah, as the LORD had directed Joshua — Kiriath-arba (Arba being the father of Anak), that is, Hebron. <sup>14</sup>Caleb drove out from there the three sons of Anak: Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai — descendants of Anak. <sup>15</sup>From there he marched against the inhabitants of Debir — Debir was formerly called Kiriath-sepher. <sup>16</sup>Caleb said, "Whoever attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it — I will give him my daughter Achsah as a wife." <sup>17</sup>Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's brother, captured it, and Caleb gave him his daughter Achsah in marriage. <sup>18</sup>When she arrived, she urged him to ask her father for a field. She dismounted from her donkey, and Caleb asked her, "What do you want?" <sup>19</sup>She said, "Give me a blessing. Since you have given me land in the Negev, give me springs of water as well." So he gave her the upper springs and the lower springs. <sup>20</sup>This is the inheritance of the tribe of Judah, clan by clan. <sup>21</sup>The southernmost cities of the tribe of Judah toward the border of Edom in the Negev were: Kabzeel, Eder, Jagur, <sup>22</sup>Kinah, Dimonah, Adadah, <sup>23</sup>Kedesh, Hazor, Ithnan, <sup>24</sup>Ziph, Telem, Bealoth, <sup>25</sup>Hazor-hadattah, Kerioth-hezron (that is, Hazor), <sup>26</sup>A mam, Shema, Moladah, <sup>27</sup>Hazar-gaddah, Heshmon, Beth-pelet, <sup>28</sup>Hazar-shual, Beersheba, Biziothiah, <sup>29</sup>Baalath, Iim, Ezem, <sup>30</sup>Eltolad, Chesil, Hormah, <sup>31</sup>Ziklag, Madmannah, Sansannah, <sup>32</sup>Lebaoth, Shilhim, Ain, and Rimmon — twenty-nine cities in all, with their surrounding settlements. <sup>33</sup>In the Shephelah: Eshtaol, Zorah, Ashnah, <sup>34</sup>Zanoah, En-gannim, Tappuah, Enam, <sup>35</sup>Jarmuth, Adullam, Socoh, Azekah, <sup>36</sup>Shaaraim, Adithaim, Gederah, and Gederothaim — fourteen cities with their surrounding settlements. <sup>37</sup>Zenan, Hadashah, Migdal-gad, <sup>38</sup>Dilean, Mizpeh, Joktheel, <sup>39</sup>Lachish, Bozkath, Eglon, <sup>40</sup>Cabbon, Lahmas, Kithlish, <sup>41</sup>Gederoth, Beth-dagon, Naamah, and Makkedah — sixteen cities with their surrounding settlements. <sup>42</sup>Libnah, Ether, Ashan, <sup>43</sup>Iphtah, Ashnah, Nezib, <sup>44</sup>Keilah, Achzib, and Mareshah — nine cities with their surrounding settlements. <sup>45</sup>Ekron, with its dependent towns and settlements; <sup>46</sup>from Ekron to the sea, everything alongside Ashdod, with its settlements; <sup>47</sup>Ashdod with its towns and settlements; Gaza with its towns and settlements — as far as the Wadi of Egypt, with the Great Sea as the boundary. <sup>48</sup>In the hill country: Shamir, Jattir, Socoh, <sup>49</sup>Dannah, Kiriath-sannah (that is, Debir), <sup>50</sup>Anab, Eshtemoa, Anim, <sup>51</sup>Goshen, Holon, and Giloh — eleven cities with their surrounding settlements. <sup>52</sup>Arab, Dumah, Eshan, <sup>53</sup>Janum, Beth-tappuah, Apekah, <sup>54</sup>Humtah, Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), and Zior — nine cities with their surrounding settlements. <sup>55</sup>Maon, Carmel, Ziph, Juttah, <sup>56</sup>Jezreel, Jokdeam, Zanoah, <sup>57</sup>Kain, Gibeah, and Timnah — ten

cities with their surrounding settlements. <sup>58</sup>Halhul, Beth-zur, Gedor, <sup>59</sup>Maarath, Beth-anoth, and Eltekon — six cities with their surrounding settlements. <sup>60</sup>Kiriath-baal (that is, Kiriath-jearim) and Rabbah — two cities with their surrounding settlements. <sup>61</sup>In the wilderness: Beth-arabah; Middin, Secacah, <sup>62</sup>Nibshan, the City of Salt, and En-gedi — six cities with their surrounding settlements. <sup>63</sup>As for the Jebusites living in Jerusalem, the people of Judah could not drive them out. So the Jebusites live alongside the people of Judah in Jerusalem to this day.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Vayyehi ha-goral l'matteh b'nei Yehudah ('the lot fell to the tribe of Judah') — Judah is the first tribe to receive its Cisjordan allocation, reflecting its preeminence among the tribes. El g'vul Edom midbar Tsin negbah ('to the border of Edom, the wilderness of Zin, to the south') — Judah's southern boundary touches Edom and the wilderness of Zin, where Israel spent most of the wilderness years. The tribal territory begins at the edge of the desert.
2. Min ha-lashon ha-poneh negbah ('from the tongue/bay facing southward') — the lashon ('tongue') describes a bay or peninsula at the southern tip of the Dead Sea. The boundary description follows a precise geographic course from east to west, typical of ancient Near Eastern border treaties and land grants.
3. Ma'aleh Aqrabbim ('Ascent of Scorpions') — a steep pass in the southern Negev, marking the boundary between the Arabah and the highlands. The boundary runs through the very landscape Israel traversed during the wilderness years: Kadesh-barnea, where the spies were sent (Numbers 13), sits along Judah's southern border. The tribe's territory is defined by the sites of Israel's earlier history.
4. Nachal Mitsrayim ('the Wadi of Egypt') — not the Nile but the Wadi el-Arish, the traditional boundary between Canaan and Egypt. V'hayu tots'ot ha-g'vul yammah ('the outlets of the boundary were at the sea') — the Mediterranean is the western terminus. Judah's southern border runs from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean, encompassing the entire Negev.
5. Yam ha-Melach ('the Salt Sea' — Dead Sea) forms Judah's entire eastern border. The northern boundary begins where the Jordan empties into the Dead Sea and runs westward — this border separates Judah from Benjamin.
6. Even Bohan ben R'uven ('the Stone of Bohan son of Reuben') — a named boundary marker, apparently a standing stone associated with a member of the tribe of Reuben. Named stones as boundary markers were common in the ancient Near East and provided permanent, publicly recognized reference points for territorial borders.
7. Me-Emeq Akhor ('from the Valley of Achor') — the same valley where Achan was executed (7:24-26). The site of Israel's darkest moment during the conquest now serves as a boundary marker for Judah's territory. Geography bears the scars of history. Ein Shemesh ('spring of the sun') and Ein Rogel ('spring of the fuller') — the boundary follows natural water sources, as was typical in the ancient Near East.
8. Gei ven Hinnom ('Valley of the son of Hinnom') — this valley south and west of Jerusalem will become infamous as the site of child sacrifice under later Judean kings (2 Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 7:31-32; 32:35). Its name, Ge-Hinnom, eventually became Gehenna — the New Testament term for the place of final judgment. Its mention here as a boundary marker carries no hint of its dark future.
8. El ketef ha-Y'vusi min-negev hi Yerushalayim ('to the shoulder of the Jebusite on the south — that is, Jerusalem') — the narrator identifies the Jebusite city as Jerusalem, though it will not be captured until David's time (2 Samuel 5:6-9). The boundary runs along its southern edge, making Jerusalem technically within Judah's allotment but practically unconquered (v. 63).
9. Ba'alah hi Qiryat Y'arim ('Baalath, that is Kiriath-jearim') — one of the Gibeonite cities (9:17), now on the border between Judah and Benjamin. Kiriath-jearim will later be the resting place of the ark of the covenant for twenty years (1 Samuel 7:1-2), connecting this boundary description to the larger narrative of God's presence among His people.
10. Beit Shemesh ('house of the sun') — a border city between Judah and Dan in the Sorek Valley. It will become the site where the ark returns from Philistine captivity (1 Samuel 6:12-19). Timnah — the town where Samson will find his Philistine wife (Judges 14:1). The boundary passes through sites that will feature prominently in the Judges narratives.
11. The northern boundary reaches Ekron, one of the five Philistine cities (13:3). Judah's border touches Philistine territory without encompassing it — the Philistine pentapolis remains unconquered. Tots'ot ha-g'vul yammah ('the outlets of the boundary were at the sea') — the Mediterranean coast is the western terminus, completing the circuit of Judah's borders.
12. Ha-Yam ha-Gadol ('the Great Sea') — the Mediterranean. Judah's territory is now fully defined: Dead Sea to the east, Negev desert to the south, Mediterranean to the west, and the Benjamin/Dan border to the north. It is the largest tribal allotment, befitting Judah's preeminent role (Genesis 49:8-12).
13. El pi YHWH liYhoshua ('according to the mouth/command of the LORD to Joshua') — Caleb's allocation is explicitly attributed to divine command, not to Joshua's personal decision. Qiryat Arba avi ha-Anaq ('Kiriath-arba, father of Anak') — Arba is identified as the ancestor of the Anakim giants. The city named after the father of the giants goes to the man who was never afraid of them.
14. Vayyoresh misham Kalev et sh'loshah b'nei ha-Anaq ('Caleb drove out from there the three sons of Anak') — the eighty-five-year-old warrior fulfills his promise. The same three Anakim clans the spies saw at Hebron forty-five years earlier (Numbers 13:22) are now expelled by the one spy who was

not afraid of them. The verb *yarash* ('to dispossess') closes the circle: Caleb takes possession by driving out the giants whose presence once terrified a nation.

15. *Qiryat Sefer* ('city of the book/scribe') — Debir's earlier name suggests it may have been a scribal center or archive city. The name is fitting for a place that will feature in a narrative about learning and legacy (vv. 16-19). The parallel account appears in Judges 1:11-15.
16. *V'natatti lo et Achsah vitti l'ishah* ('I will give him Achsah my daughter as a wife') — Caleb offers his daughter as the reward for military valor. This practice was common in the ancient Near East (cf. 1 Samuel 17:25; 18:17-19, where Saul promises his daughter to whoever kills Goliath). The scene introduces Achsah, who will prove to be as bold and resourceful as her father.
17. *Othniel ben Q'naz achi Khalev* ('Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's brother/relative') — Othniel is either Caleb's younger brother or his nephew (the Hebrew *achi* can mean 'brother' or 'kinsman'). He will later become the first judge of Israel (Judges 3:9-11), the model deliverer against whom all subsequent judges are measured. His introduction here as a young warrior earning his bride foreshadows his later role as Israel's first post-Joshua leader.
18. *Vatt'siteihu lish'ol me-et avihah sadeh* ('she urged him to ask her father for a field') — Achsah takes initiative, persuading her husband to request productive land. *Vattitsnach me-al ha-chamor* ('she dismounted from the donkey') — the act of dismounting may signal a formal petition or simply practical movement toward her father. Caleb's question *mah lakh* ('what is it to you? / what do you want?') shows his openness to her request.
19. *T'nah li v'rakah* ('give me a blessing/gift') — Achsah asks boldly, as her father asked boldly of Joshua (14:12). *Ki erets ha-Negev n'tattani* ('since you have given me Negev land') — the Negev is arid; land without water is barely usable. *V'natattah li gullot mayim* ('give me also springs of water') — Achsah recognizes that the land gift is incomplete without water. She asks for the essential resource that transforms dry land into productive territory.
19. *Vayyitten lah et gullot illiyot v'et gullot tachtiyot* ('he gave her the upper springs and the lower springs') — Caleb gives generously, exceeding her request. The double gift (upper and lower springs) ensures abundant water supply. Achsah's boldness mirrors her father's: Caleb asked for the hardest territory (14:12), and Achsah asks for the resources to make it thrive. Both father and daughter know that receiving an inheritance is not enough — you must also possess the means to develop it.
20. The summary formula introduces the city list that follows (vv. 21-62). The cities are organized by geographic region: Negev cities (vv. 21-32), Shephelah cities (vv. 33-47), hill country cities (vv. 48-60), and wilderness cities (vv. 61-62).
21. The Negev city list begins. *Kabzeel* is the hometown of Benaiah son of Jehoiada, one of David's mighty warriors (2 Samuel 23:20). These are frontier settlements on the edge of the Edomite border.
22. The Negev city list continues. These small settlements mark the southern extent of permanent Judahite habitation.
23. This *Hazor* is not the great northern city (11:1, 10) but a smaller Negev settlement sharing the same name.
24. This *Ziph* is a Negev settlement distinct from the more famous *Ziph* in the hill country (v. 55), where David will hide from Saul (1 Samuel 23:14-15; 26:1-3).
25. *Chatsor Chadattah* ('New Hazor') — distinguished from the other *Hazor* by the adjective *chadattah* ('new'). *Qeriyot Chetsron* ('Kerioth-hezron') — possibly the hometown of Judas Iscariot, if 'Iscariot' derives from *ish Qeriyot* ('man of Kerioth').
26. *Moladah* — later assigned to Simeon (19:2), reflecting the overlap between Judah's and Simeon's territories in the Negev.
27. Negev settlements continue. These small towns dot the arid landscape between Beersheba and the Edomite border.
28. *B'er Sheva* ('Beersheba,' meaning 'well of the oath' or 'well of seven') — the most important city in the Negev, associated with Abraham (Genesis 21:31-33), Isaac (Genesis 26:23-25, 33), and Jacob (Genesis 46:1-4). 'From Dan to Beersheba' will become the standard idiom for the full extent of Israel (Judges 20:1; 1 Samuel 3:20). The patriarchal well-city is now formally within Judah's inheritance.
29. The Negev city list continues toward the western Negev.
30. *Chormah* ('Hormah,' meaning 'destruction/ban') — the city whose name commemorates an early Israelite victory and the *cherem* applied there (Numbers 21:3). The name itself is a permanent memorial of divine judgment.
31. *Tsiqlag* ('Ziklag') — this city will be given to David by Achish king of Gath during David's fugitive years (1 Samuel 27:6) and will serve as his base of operations. The narrator notes that 'Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day' (1 Samuel 27:6).
32. *Kol arim esrim va-tesha v'chatsreihen* ('all cities twenty-nine with their villages') — the total for the Negev district. The actual names listed number more than twenty-nine, suggesting either that some pairs are compound names (e.g., 'Ain and Rimmon' may be a single city, En-rimmon) or that the number reflects a different counting method.
33. The Shephelah (western foothills) city list begins. *Esh'ta'ol* and *Tsor'ah* — these two cities in the Sorek Valley will feature prominently in the Samson narrative (Judges 13:2, 25; 16:31). They are later assigned to Dan (19:41), reflecting the territorial adjustments between Judah and Dan.
34. *Ein Gannim* ('spring of gardens') — the name evokes agricultural fertility. *Tappuach* ('apple') — likely the same *Tappuah* of 12:17.
35. *Jarmuth* was one of the five coalition kings' cities (10:3). *Adullam* will become David's cave refuge (1 Samuel 22:1). *Socoh* and *Azekah* flank the Valley of Elah, where David will defeat Goliath (1 Samuel 17:1). The Shephelah landscape is saturated with future narrative significance.

36. Sha'arayim ('two gates') — mentioned in the pursuit after David's victory over Goliath (1 Samuel 17:52). The first Shephelah sub-district totals fourteen cities.
37. The second Shephelah sub-district begins. These cities are in the central and southern Shephelah.
38. Ha-Mitspeh ('the lookout/watchtower') — a strategic observation point in the Shephelah, one of several sites bearing this name throughout the land.
39. Lachish and Eglon — two of the five coalition cities defeated in chapter 10, now listed as Judahite cities. Lachish was one of the most heavily fortified cities in Judah, second in importance only to Jerusalem. Its destruction by Sennacherib in 701 BC is depicted in famous Assyrian reliefs.
40. Smaller Shephelah settlements in the Lachish district.
41. Beit Dagon ('house of Dagon') — named after the Philistine grain deity, indicating pre-Israelite Philistine or Canaanite influence. Makkedah — the site of the cave where the five kings hid (10:16-27). The second Shephelah sub-district totals sixteen cities.
42. Libnah — conquered during the southern campaign (10:29-30), later a Levitical city (21:13).
43. A second Ashnah appears here (distinct from v. 33), illustrating how common names recur across different districts.
44. Q'ilah ('Keilah') — the city David will later defend against Philistine raiders (1 Samuel 23:1-13). Mareshah — a significant Shephelah city that will become important in the Chronicler's narrative (2 Chronicles 11:8; 14:9-10; 20:37). The third Shephelah sub-district totals nine cities.
45. Ekron — one of the five Philistine cities. Its inclusion in Judah's allotment indicates the ideal boundary, not the actual extent of occupation. The Philistine cities are assigned to Judah by divine grant but remain unconquered in practice.
46. The territory between Ekron and the coast, alongside the Philistine city of Ashdod, is claimed for Judah. This coastal strip was never effectively controlled by Judah — it remained Philistine territory throughout the pre-monarchic and much of the monarchic period.
47. Ashdod and Gaza — two of the five Philistine cities — are listed as part of Judah's allotment. The gap between divine grant and actual possession is at its widest here: these major Philistine strongholds will resist Israelite control for centuries. The allocation represents God's declared intention for Judah's territory, not a description of current occupation.
48. The hill country city list begins — the heartland of Judah. Jattir — later assigned as a Levitical city (21:14) and one of the cities to which David sent spoil from his Amalekite raid (1 Samuel 30:27).
49. Qiryat Sannah — a third name for the city also called Kiriath-sepher (v. 15) and Debir. The city that Othniel captured for Caleb.
50. Anab — one of the cities from which Joshua expelled the Anakim (11:21). Eshtemoa — a Levitical city (21:14) and a recipient of David's gifts (1 Samuel 30:28).
51. Giloh — the hometown of Ahithophel, David's counselor who defected to Absalom (2 Samuel 15:12). The first hill country sub-district totals eleven cities.
52. The second hill country sub-district begins, centered on the southern hill country.
53. Beit Tappuah ('house of the apple') — a hill country settlement distinguished from the Tappuah of the Shephelah (v. 34).
54. Qiryat Arba hi Chevron ('Kiriath-arba, that is Hebron') — the patriarchal city appears in the city list as part of Caleb's inheritance within Judah. The second hill country sub-district totals nine cities.
55. Ma'on and Karmel — the region where David will encounter Nabal and Abigail (1 Samuel 25:2-3). Ziph — where the Ziphites will betray David's hiding place to Saul twice (1 Samuel 23:19; 26:1). The hill country of Judah is the stage for much of the David narrative.
56. This Jezreel is a Judahite hill country town, distinct from the more famous Jezreel in the northern valley (the Valley of Jezreel).
57. The third hill country sub-district totals ten cities.
58. Beit Tsur ('Beth-zur') — a strategic fortress in the hill country between Hebron and Jerusalem. It will feature prominently in the Maccabean wars (1 Maccabees 4:29, 61; 6:26, 31, 49-50).
59. The fourth hill country sub-district totals six cities. The Septuagint adds an additional sub-district here (including Tekoa, Bethlehem, and other cities between Jerusalem and Hebron) that is missing from the Masoretic Hebrew text. The omission is likely due to an ancient copying error (homoioteleuton).
60. Qiryat Ba'al hi Qiryat Y'arim ('Kiriath-baal, that is Kiriath-jearim') — the Canaanite name preserves the ba'al element; the Israelite renaming to 'City of Forests' replaces the pagan association. This city will host the ark of the covenant for twenty years (1 Samuel 7:1-2). The fifth and final hill country sub-district contains just two cities.
61. Ba-midbar ('in the wilderness') — the final geographic district: the Judean wilderness, the barren terrain descending from the hill country to the Dead Sea. This is the wilderness where David will hide from Saul and where the Qumran community will later produce the Dead Sea Scrolls.
62. Ir ha-Melach ('City of Salt') — possibly associated with the salt deposits near the Dead Sea. Ein Gedi ('spring of the young goat') — the famous oasis on the western shore of the Dead Sea, where David will spare Saul's life in a cave (1 Samuel 24:1-22). The wilderness district totals six cities. Ein Gedi's lush springs in the midst of barren wilderness make it one of the most dramatic landscapes in Israel — a place where life emerges from desolation.

63. V'et ha-Y'vusi yosh'vei Yerushalayim lo yakhlu v'nei Yehudah l'horisham ('the Jebusites inhabiting Jerusalem — the people of Judah could not dispossess them') — the chapter's final verse delivers a jarring admission: Judah, the preeminent tribe, could not take Jerusalem. The verb yakhal ('to be able') indicates inability, not unwillingness. The Jebusite fortress was too strong for Judah to conquer. Jerusalem will remain in Jebusite hands until David captures it by sending his men through the water shaft (2 Samuel 5:6-9).
63. Ad ha-yom ha-zeh ('to this day') — the narrator writes before David's conquest, placing the composition (or at least this note) in the pre-Davidic period. The verse is a confession of incomplete conquest that foreshadows the pattern of Judges 1: tribe after tribe failing to fully dispossess the Canaanite inhabitants.

# 16

*Summary: The territory allotted to the descendants of Joseph — specifically Ephraim — is described. The Canaanites of Gezer remain among them as forced laborers.*

*What Makes This Remarkable: Ephraim's allotment is brief compared to Judah's, but the tribe's significance is enormous — Ephraim will become synonymous with the northern kingdom. The note that the Canaanites of Gezer were not driven out but subjected to forced labor (v. 10) marks a pattern of incomplete obedience that defines the settlement period. The compromise — coexistence through subjugation rather than separation — is precisely what Deuteronomy warned against.*

*Translation Friction: The boundary descriptions are compressed and some geographical references are uncertain. The phrase mas-oved (v. 10, 'forced labor') is the same term used for Solomon's labor force in 1 Kings 9:21 — we rendered it consistently. The partial obedience — subjugating rather than driving out — represents a middle path the Torah did not authorize.*

*Connections: Gezer's Canaanite population persists until Pharaoh's daughter receives it as a wedding gift from Egypt's king (1 Kings 9:16). The forced-labor arrangement anticipates the system that will become the northern kingdom's grievance against Solomon (1 Kings 12:4). Ephraim's complaint about insufficient territory (17:14-18) reveals growing tribal friction.*

1The allotment for the descendants of Joseph began at the Jordan near Jericho, east of the waters of Jericho, going up through the wilderness from Jericho into the hill country of Bethel. 2From Bethel it went on to Luz and crossed to the territory of the Archites at Ataroth. 3It descended westward to the territory of the Japhletites, down to Lower Beth-horon and on to Gezer, ending at the sea. 4So the descendants of Joseph — Manasseh and Ephraim — received their inheritance. 5The boundary of the Ephraimites, clan by clan, was as follows: the eastern border of their inheritance ran from Ataroth-addar to Upper Beth-horon. 6The boundary went toward the sea at Michmethath on the north, then turned eastward to Taanath-shiloh, and passed east of it to Janoah. 7From Janoah it descended to Ataroth and Naarah, reached Jericho, and ended at the Jordan. 8From Tappuah the boundary ran westward to the Kanah Valley and ended at the sea. This was the inheritance of the tribe of Ephraim, clan by clan. 9In addition, certain cities within Manasseh's territory were set apart for the Ephraimites — all those cities with their surrounding settlements. 10They did not drive out the Canaanites living in Gezer, so the Canaanites have lived among the Ephraimites to this day — though they were put to forced labor.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Vayyetsa ha-goral livnei Yosef ('the lot came out for the descendants of Joseph') — Ephraim and Manasseh are treated together as 'the house of Joseph' before receiving individual allotments. Their combined territory forms the central hill country of Canaan — the heartland that will later become the northern kingdom of Israel.
2. Mi-Beit El Luzah ('from Bethel to Luz') — Bethel and Luz are sometimes treated as the same city (Genesis 28:19) and sometimes as adjacent sites. Ha-Arkhi ('the Archite') — a clan whose territory lay near Bethel. David's friend and advisor Hushai is called 'the Archite' (2 Samuel 15:32; 16:16).
3. Beit Choron Tachton ('Lower Beth-horon') — the lower of the two Beth-horon settlements that guarded the strategic pass from the central highlands to the coastal plain (the same pass where the Amorite coalition was routed in 10:10-11). Gezer — the city whose king was defeated (10:33; 12:12) but whose territory was never fully conquered until Solomon's time (1 Kings 9:16).

4. The general Joseph boundary (vv. 1-3) is now subdivided: Ephraim's allotment follows in verses 5-9, and Manasseh's in chapter 17. Joseph's double portion (through Ephraim and Manasseh) fulfills Jacob's blessing of Genesis 48-49.
5. Beit Choron Elyon ('Upper Beth-horon') — the upper settlement of the twin Beth-horon towns. Together with Lower Beth-horon (v. 3), these cities controlled the most important pass between the coastal plain and the central highlands. Ephraim's border runs through this strategic corridor.
6. Ta'anat Shiloh ('approach to Shiloh') — the name references Shiloh, which will become the central sanctuary site where the tabernacle is established (18:1). The boundary passes near this important future religious center.
7. U-faga bi-Yricho v'yatsa ha-Yarden ('it touched Jericho and went out at the Jordan') — Ephraim's eastern boundary reaches the Jordan River at Jericho, making Ephraim's territory a cross-section of the central highlands from the Jordan to the Mediterranean approaches.
8. Nachal Qanah ('the Kanah River/Valley') — this wadi formed the boundary between Ephraim and Manasseh on the western side of the territory. The Kanah runs through the Shephelah to the Mediterranean.
9. He-arim ha-mavdalot livnei Efrayim b'tokh nachalat b'nei M'nasheh ('the cities set apart for Ephraim within the inheritance of Manasseh') — tribal boundaries were not absolute. Ephraim held designated enclaves within Manasseh's territory, reflecting the close kinship between the two Joseph tribes and the practical difficulties of drawing clean borders in a landscape of interspersed settlements.
10. V'lo horishu et ha-K'na'ani ha-yoshev b'Gazer ('they did not dispossess the Canaanites dwelling in Gezer') — the same failure noted for Judah and Jerusalem (15:63), now repeated for Ephraim and Gezer. Vay'hi l'mas oved ('they became forced labor') — rather than expelling the Canaanites, Ephraim enslaved them. This compromise — subjugation rather than dispossession — violates Deuteronomy 7:1-2 and sets the pattern for the Judges period. Forced labor controls the population without removing the religious threat that cohabitation poses.

# 17

*Summary: The allotment to the half-tribe of Manasseh west of the Jordan is described. The daughters of Zelophehad claim their father's inheritance. Joseph's descendants complain they need more territory; Joshua tells them to clear the forested hill country.*

*What Makes This Remarkable: The daughters of Zelophehad (v. 3-6) invoke Moses's ruling from Numbers 27:1-11 — and it holds. Their father died without sons, and the inheritance passes to the daughters as God commanded. This is the legal system working: a precedent established in the wilderness is honored in the land. Joshua's response to the Joseph tribes' complaint (vv. 14-18) is bracing: 'If you are a numerous people, go up to the forest and clear it for yourselves' — stop complaining and start working.*

*Translation Friction: The phrase erets haPerizzi vohaRepha'im (v. 15, 'the land of the Perizzites and the Rephaim') places the Joseph tribes in territory associated with legendary pre-Israelite peoples. The word ya'ar (v. 15, 'forest') reveals that much of the hill country was densely wooded — the settlement required deforestation, a detail often lost in modern imagination of the landscape.*

*Connections: Zelophehad's daughters fulfill Numbers 27:1-11 and 36:1-12. The Canaanite chariots of iron (v. 16) anticipate Judges 1:19 and 4:3 (Sisera's iron chariots). Joshua's challenge to the Joseph tribes foreshadows the inter-tribal tensions of Judges. The Rephaim reference connects to Deuteronomy 2:10-11 and 3:11 (Og's bed).*

1The allotment for the tribe of Manasseh — Joseph's firstborn — was as follows: Machir, Manasseh's firstborn and the father of Gilead, received Gilead and Bashan because he was a warrior. 2The remaining Manassites received allotments by their clans: the descendants of Abiezer, Helek, Asriel, Shechem, Hephher, and Shemida. These were the male descendants of Manasseh son of Joseph, clan by clan. 3Now Zelophehad son of Hephher, son of Gilead, son of Machir, son of Manasseh, had no sons — only daughters. Their names were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. 4They came before Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the leaders, and said, "The LORD commanded Moses to give us an inheritance among our relatives." So, in obedience to the LORD's command, he gave them an inheritance among the relatives of their father. 5Ten parcels fell to Manasseh in addition to Gilead and Bashan east of the Jordan, 6because the daughters of Manasseh received an inheritance among the sons. The rest of the Manassites held the land of Gilead. 7Manasseh's boundary ran from Asher to Michmethath, which faces Shechem. The boundary went south to the inhabitants of En-tappuah. 8The land of Tappuah belonged to Manasseh, but the town of Tappuah on Manasseh's border belonged to the Ephraimites. 9The boundary descended to the Kanah Valley. South of the valley, these cities belonged to Ephraim even though they were among

Manasseh's cities. Manasseh's boundary was on the north side of the valley, ending at the sea. <sup>10</sup>To the south was Ephraim's territory, and to the north was Manasseh's, with the sea as their western boundary. They bordered Asher on the north and Issachar on the east. <sup>11</sup>Within Issachar and Asher, Manasseh held Beth-shean and its dependent towns, Ibleam and its towns, the residents of Dor and its towns, the residents of En-dor and its towns, the residents of Taanach and its towns, and the residents of Megiddo and its towns — three of the heights. <sup>12</sup>But the Manassites could not take possession of these cities. The Canaanites were determined to remain in this land. <sup>13</sup>When the Israelites grew stronger, they subjected the Canaanites to forced labor but did not drive them out completely. <sup>14</sup>The descendants of Joseph said to Joshua, "Why have you given us only one allotment — a single portion — as our inheritance? We are a numerous people, since the LORD has blessed us so abundantly." <sup>15</sup>Joshua answered them, "If you are so numerous, go up to the forest region and clear land for yourselves in the territory of the Perizzites and Rephaim, since the hill country of Ephraim is too cramped for you." <sup>16</sup>The descendants of Joseph replied, "The hill country is not enough for us, and all the Canaanites in the valley lands have iron chariots — both those in Beth-shean and its towns and those in the Valley of Jezreel." <sup>17</sup>Joshua said to the house of Joseph — to Ephraim and Manasseh — "You are indeed a numerous people with great strength. You will not have just one allotment. <sup>18</sup>The hill country will be yours. Though it is forested, you will clear it, and its farthest reaches will be yours. And you will drive out the Canaanites, even though they have iron chariots and are strong."

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. L'Makhir b'khor M'nasheh avi ha-Gil'ad ki hu hayah ish milchamah ('to Machir, firstborn of Manasseh, father of Gilead, because he was a man of war') — Machir's warrior status earned him the most formidable Transjordan territory: Gilead and Bashan, formerly Og's kingdom. The Machirite clan was the military backbone of Manasseh, and their Transjordan allotment (already described in 13:29-31) reflects their fighting capacity.
2. Six Manassite clans receive the western (Cisjordan) allotment. Abiezer's clan will produce Gideon (Judges 6:11). Shechem is both a clan name and the city that will become a major political and religious center. The listing 'the male descendants' (ha-z'kharim) sets up the contrast with the female claimants in the next verse.
3. Ts'lofchad — the man whose death without male heirs prompted a landmark legal ruling in Numbers 27:1-11: daughters can inherit when there are no sons. The five daughters successfully petitioned Moses for their father's nachalah, establishing a permanent precedent in Israelite inheritance law. Their inclusion here demonstrates that the ruling was honored in practice, not merely in principle.
4. YHWH tsivvah et Mosheh latet lanu nachalah b'tokh acheinu ('the LORD commanded Moses to give us an inheritance among our kinsmen') — the daughters of Zelophehad cite the divine precedent from Numbers 27:7. They do not merely request; they invoke established legal authority. Vayyitten lahem el pi YHWH nachalah b'tokh achei avihen ('he gave them, according to the LORD's word, an inheritance among the brothers of their father') — the ruling is honored without hesitation. Women receive covenant land alongside men. The nachalah system is based on family right, not gender.
5. Asarah chavalim ('ten portions/parcels') — the ten western portions correspond to six male clans (v. 2) plus the four remaining portions needed for the five daughters of Zelophehad's sub-clan, reflecting the complex clan arithmetic of inheritance distribution.
6. B'not M'nasheh nachalu nachalah b'tokh banav ('the daughters of Manasseh inherited an inheritance among his sons') — the narrator emphasizes the daughters' equal standing in the land distribution. The Zelophehad precedent is now embedded in the tribal record as accomplished fact.
7. Sh'khem ('Shechem') — one of the most historically significant cities in Israel: where Abraham first received the land promise (Genesis 12:6-7), where Jacob purchased land and built an altar (Genesis 33:18-20), and where the covenant renewal of chapter 24 will take place. Shechem sits in the pass between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim.
8. A precise territorial distinction: the surrounding land (erets Tappuah) belongs to Manasseh, but the city itself (Tappuah) belongs to Ephraim. Such border-city arrangements demonstrate the complexity of tribal boundaries in practice.
9. The Kanah Valley (Nachal Qanah) serves as the dividing line between the two Joseph tribes, with Ephraim holding enclaves on the southern side within Manasseh's broader territory. The intermingling reflects the close kinship between the tribes.
10. The summary positions the two Joseph tribes in relation to their neighbors: Asher to the northwest (along the Carmel coast) and Issachar to the northeast (in the Jezreel Valley). Manasseh's territory stretched from the Jordan to the Mediterranean — one of the widest east-west allotments.
11. Manasseh held important cities within the territories of neighboring tribes: Beth-shean (guarding the junction of the Jezreel and Jordan valleys), Ibleam (controlling a pass in the Carmel range), Dor (coastal), Taanach and Megiddo (controlling the Jezreel Valley). These were strategic cities, and Manasseh's claim to them reflects their military importance. Sh'loshet ha-nafet ('the three heights/districts') — a term of uncertain meaning, possibly referring to three elevated districts within these territories.
12. V'lo yakhlu b'nei M'nasheh l'horish et he-arim ha-elleh ('the sons of Manasseh could not dispossess these cities') — the third failure notice after Judah (15:63) and Ephraim (16:10). Vayyoel ha-K'na'ani lashavet ba-arets ha-zot ('the Canaanite was determined to dwell in this land') — the verb

yo'el ('was willing, was determined, persisted') shows Canaanite tenacity. They refused to leave.

13. Vayyitt'nu et ha-K'na'ani la-mas v'horesh lo horisho ('they put the Canaanite to forced labor but did not at all drive them out') — the same compromise as Ephraim (16:10). Economic exploitation replaces obedience to the divine command. The pattern — growing strong enough to enslave but choosing not to fully dispossess — reveals a failure of will, not capacity. When Israel became powerful enough to enforce the cherem, they chose profit over obedience.
14. Maddu'a natatta li nachalah goral echad v'chevel echad va-ani am rav ('why have you given me one lot and one portion when I am a large people?') — the Joseph tribes complain that their territory is too small for their population. The complaint contrasts sharply with Caleb's attitude: Caleb asked for the hardest territory (14:12), while Joseph demands easier, larger territory. Ad asher ad koh berkhami YHWH ('since the LORD has blessed me so much until now') — they cite divine blessing as the reason they deserve more land, turning theology into a self-serving argument.
15. Im am rav attah aleh l'kha ha-ya'arah u-vereta l'kha sham ('if you are a numerous people, go up to the forest and clear it for yourself there') — Joshua's response is bracing: if you need more land, go take it. Clear the forests, fight the Perizzites and Rephaim. The answer exposes the Joseph tribes' complaint as laziness disguised as piety — they want more land without more effort. Ki ats l'kha har Efrayim ('since the hill country of Ephraim is too narrow for you') — Joshua acknowledges their crowding but redirects them toward the solution: expansion through effort, not redistribution of others' allotments.
16. Rekhev barzel ('iron chariots') — the Canaanites' technological advantage. Iron chariots dominated the flat valley terrain where infantry was vulnerable. The Joseph tribes use the iron chariots as an excuse for not expanding into the valleys, ignoring the fact that God had already demonstrated His power over chariots at Merom (11:6-9). The complaint reveals a failure of faith: the tribe that cites God's blessing (v. 14) does not trust God's power against iron technology.
17. Am rav attah v'khoach gadol lakh ('you are a numerous people and great strength is yours') — Joshua now acknowledges both their numbers and their power. But instead of granting them additional territory at others' expense, he directs their power toward the challenge: if you are strong, use that strength to expand.
18. Ki torish et ha-K'na'ani ki rekhev barzel lo ki chazaq hu ('you will drive out the Canaanite, even though he has iron chariots, even though he is strong') — Joshua's final word directly addresses the iron chariot excuse. The chariots are real; the enemy is strong; and Joshua asserts that none of this matters. The tribe that claims God's blessing should act on God's power. The passage ends with a challenge rather than a concession — an echo of God's own words to Joshua in 1:6-9.

# 18

**Summary:** *The remaining seven tribes who have not yet received their inheritance are rebuked by Joshua. A survey commission maps the remaining land, and lots are cast at Shiloh to distribute territory. Benjamin's allotment is detailed.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *Joshua's rebuke (v. 3) is pointed: 'How long will you be slack about going in to possess the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you?' The gift requires action — inheritance is not passive. The assembly at Shiloh (v. 1) marks the tabernacle's first permanent location after the wilderness, and Shiloh will remain the central sanctuary until the ark's capture in 1 Samuel 4.*

**Translation Friction:** *The survey commission (v. 4-9) is described with administrative detail: seven men walk the land, divide it into seven portions, and write descriptions in a document (sefer). We rendered the process as the Hebrew presents it — this is ancient land surveying, and the vocabulary is technical. Benjamin's territory between Judah and Joseph (vv. 11-28) places the smallest tribe in the most strategic location.*

**Connections:** *Shiloh as the tabernacle site continues through Judges and into 1 Samuel 1-4. Its destruction becomes a prophetic warning in Jeremiah 7:12 and 26:6. Benjamin's territory includes Jerusalem (v. 28) — the city that straddles the Judah-Benjamin border and will become David's capital. The lot-casting at Shiloh connects to the Urim and Thummim tradition (Exodus 28:30).*

<sup>1</sup>The entire assembly of the Israelites gathered at Shiloh and set up the Tent of Meeting there. The land lay subdued before them. <sup>2</sup>Seven tribes among the Israelites had not yet received their inheritance. <sup>3</sup>Joshua said to the Israelites, "How long will you put off going in to take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has given you? <sup>4</sup>Appoint three men from each tribe. I will send them out to travel through the land, survey it for the purpose of their inheritance, and then report back to me. <sup>5</sup>They are to divide it into seven portions. Judah will remain in its territory to the south, and the house of Joseph in its territory to the north. <sup>6</sup>You are to survey the land in seven portions and bring the description here to me. I will

cast lots for you here before the LORD our God. <sup>7</sup>The Levites have no portion among you, because the priesthood of the LORD is their inheritance. And Gad, Reuben, and the half-tribe of Manasseh have already received their inheritance east of the Jordan, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave them." <sup>8</sup>The men set out on their way. Joshua charged those going to survey the land: "Go, travel through the land, write up a description, and come back to me. Then I will cast lots for you before the LORD at Shiloh." <sup>9</sup>The men went and traveled through the land, recording it city by city in seven portions in a document. Then they returned to Joshua at the camp in Shiloh. <sup>10</sup>Joshua cast lots for them at Shiloh before the LORD, and there he divided the land among the Israelites according to their tribal divisions. <sup>11</sup>The lot for the tribe of Benjamin came up first, clan by clan. Their allotted territory fell between the people of Judah and the people of Joseph. <sup>12</sup>Their northern boundary began at the Jordan, went up along the northern slope of Jericho, ascended westward into the hill country, and ended at the wilderness of Beth-aven. <sup>13</sup>From there the boundary crossed to Luz — to the southern slope of Luz (that is, Bethel) — then descended to Ataroth-addar, near the hill south of Lower Beth-horon. <sup>14</sup>The boundary curved around the western side, turning south from the hill facing Beth-horon, and ended at Kiriath-baal (that is, Kiriath-jearim), a city of Judah. This was the western side. <sup>15</sup>The southern side began at the edge of Kiriath-jearim. The boundary went westward to the spring of the waters of Nephtoah, <sup>16</sup>then descended to the foot of the hill facing the Valley of Ben-hinnom, at the northern end of the Valley of Rephaim. It went down through the Hinnom Valley along the southern slope of the Jebusite city and on down to En-rogel. <sup>17</sup>It turned north to En-shemesh, then went to Geliloth facing the Ascent of Adummim, and descended to the Stone of Bohan son of Reuben. <sup>18</sup>It crossed to the slope overlooking the Arabah on the north and descended into the Arabah. <sup>19</sup>The boundary passed along the northern slope of Beth-hoglah and ended at the northern bay of the Dead Sea, at the southern end of the Jordan. This was the southern boundary. <sup>20</sup>The Jordan formed the eastern boundary. This was the inheritance of the Benjaminites on all sides, clan by clan. <sup>21</sup>The cities of the tribe of Benjamin, clan by clan, were: Jericho, Beth-hoglah, Emek-keziz, <sup>22</sup>Beth-arabah, Zemaraim, Bethel, <sup>23</sup>Avvim, Parah, Ophrah, <sup>24</sup>Chephar-ammoni, Ophni, and Geba — twelve cities with their surrounding settlements. <sup>25</sup>Gibeon, Ramah, Beeroth, <sup>26</sup>Mizpah, Chephirah, Mozah, <sup>27</sup>Rekem, Irpeel, Taralah, <sup>28</sup>Zela, Ha-eleph, the Jebusite city (that is, Jerusalem), Gibeah, and Kiriath — fourteen cities with their surrounding settlements. This was the inheritance of the Benjaminites, clan by clan.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Vayyashkinu sham et Ohel Mo'ed ('they caused the Tent of Meeting to dwell there') — the verb shakan ('to dwell, to tabernacle') is the root of Shekhinah ('divine dwelling presence'). The tabernacle's installation at Shiloh marks a new phase: the center of worship moves from the military camp at Gilgal to a more permanent site in the central highlands. Shiloh will serve as Israel's central sanctuary throughout the Judges period until its destruction, likely by the Philistines (cf. Psalm 78:60; Jeremiah 7:12-14; 26:6).
1. V'ha-arets nikhb'shah lifneihem ('the land was subdued before them') — the passive verb nikhb'shah confirms the land is under Israelite control. The remaining allotments can proceed in relative security.
2. Shiv'ah sh'vatim ('seven tribes') — Judah, Ephraim, and the half-tribe of Manasseh have received their western allotments. Reuben, Gad, and the eastern half of Manasseh hold the Transjordan. Levi has no territorial inheritance. Seven tribes remain: Benjamin, Simeon, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan.
3. Ad anah attem mitrappim lavo lareshet et ha-arets ('how long will you be slack/negligent to go and possess the land?') — Joshua rebukes the remaining tribes for their passivity. The verb raphah (hitpaal, 'to be slack, to relax, to be negligent') suggests a failure of initiative. The land has been given; the tribes have not moved to claim it. Joshua's question echoes Moses's rebuke to the Reubenites and Gadites: 'Shall your brothers go to war while you sit here?' (Numbers 32:6).
4. Sh'loshah anashim la-shavet ('three men per tribe') — twenty-one men total will survey the remaining territory. V'yikht'vu otah l'fi nachalatam ('they will write/describe it according to their inheritance') — the survey is a written document, a formal land record. This is systematic, bureaucratic land management: survey, document, allocate by lot.
5. The existing allotments of Judah (south) and Joseph (north) serve as fixed boundaries. The seven remaining portions will be fitted between them and in the areas they have not claimed. The framework is already established; the survey fills in the gaps.
6. V'yariti lakhem goral poh lifnei YHWH Eloheinu ('I will cast lots for you here before the LORD our God') — the lot-casting takes place at Shiloh, before the Tent of Meeting, in the LORD's presence. The process is explicitly liturgical: the divine will determines which tribe receives which surveyed portion. Human planning (the survey) meets divine sovereignty (the lot).

7. Ki khunat YHWH nachalato ('the priesthood of the LORD is his inheritance') — a third formulation of Levi's non-territorial inheritance: in 13:14 it was the fire offerings, in 13:33 it was the LORD Himself, and here it is the priesthood. The three statements complement each other: Levi's inheritance is God (the person), the priesthood (the role), and the offerings (the provision).
8. L'khu v'hithalkhu va-arets v'khitvu otah v'shuvu elai ('go, walk through the land, write it up, and return to me') — the commission is clear: survey, document, return. The written survey will serve as the basis for the lot-casting. U-foh ashlik lakhem goral lifnei YHWH b'Shiloh ('here I will cast lots for you before the LORD at Shiloh') — Shiloh is established as the administrative and religious center for the remaining allocations.
9. Vayyikht'vuha l'arim l'shiv'ah chalaqim al sefer ('they wrote it up by cities into seven portions in a scroll/document') — the survey produces a written scroll (sefer), an official land register. This is one of the earliest descriptions of systematic cartography and territorial documentation in the Bible. The document serves as the authoritative reference for the lot-casting.
10. The lot-casting determines which of the seven surveyed portions goes to which tribe. The process combines human diligence (the survey) with divine determination (the lots). The result is binding — no tribe can dispute an allocation determined by lot before the LORD.
11. Bein b'nei Yehudah u-vein b'nei Yosef ('between the people of Judah and the people of Joseph') — Benjamin's territory sits between the two dominant tribal blocs: Judah to the south and Joseph (Ephraim/Manasseh) to the north. This buffer position will give Benjamin outsized political significance: Jerusalem sits on the Judah-Benjamin border, and the tribe will be torn between north and south throughout Israel's history.
12. Beit Aven ('house of wickedness/nothingness') — located near Bethel. The name may be an intentional derogatory distortion of Bethel ('house of God') used by later prophets to condemn the shrine's idolatrous practices (Hosea 4:15; 5:8; 10:5).
13. Luzah hi Beit El ('Luz, that is, Bethel') — the narrator again identifies Luz with Bethel, as in Genesis 28:19 where Jacob renamed the site after his vision of the heavenly stairway.
14. Qiryat Ba'al hi Qiryat Y'arim ir b'nei Yehudah ('Kiriath-baal, that is Kiriath-jearim, a city of Judah') — this Gibeonite city (9:17) sits on the boundary between Judah and Benjamin, and will host the ark of the covenant for twenty years (1 Samuel 7:1-2).
15. Benjamin's southern boundary is described from west to east — the same line as Judah's northern boundary (15:5-9) but traversed in the opposite direction. The shared border confirms that Benjamin and Judah are immediate neighbors.
16. The boundary passes through the same landmarks as Judah's northern border (15:7-8): the Valley of Hinnom, the Jebusite city (Jerusalem), En-rogel. Jerusalem sits precisely on the tribal boundary — technically in Benjamin but claimed by Judah. This ambiguity will persist until David makes it the capital of all Israel.
17. Even Bohan ben R'uven ('Stone of Bohan son of Reuben') — the same boundary marker noted in 15:6. The description confirms that Benjamin's southern boundary exactly matches Judah's northern boundary.
18. The Arabah here refers to the lower Jordan Valley near the Dead Sea — Benjamin's southeastern corner.
19. The southern boundary is complete — running from Kiriath-jearim in the west to the Dead Sea in the east, with Jerusalem on the border between Judah and Benjamin.
20. Benjamin's territory is now fully defined — a relatively small but strategically vital strip between Judah and Ephraim, stretching from the central highlands to the Jordan River, containing Jerusalem, Jericho, Bethel, Gibeon, and other sites of major significance.
21. Y'richo ('Jericho') — the first city conquered in the promised land is now part of Benjamin's inheritance. The site of Israel's greatest initial victory becomes a tribal city.
22. Beit El ('Bethel,' meaning 'house of God') — the site of Jacob's ladder vision (Genesis 28:10-22) and a major religious center throughout Israel's history. Its inclusion in Benjamin's territory (though near the Ephraim border) will have implications for the later division of the kingdom, when Jeroboam places a golden calf at Bethel (1 Kings 12:28-29).
23. Ofrah — likely the same Ophrah where Gideon will later build an altar and receive his call (Judges 6:11, 24), though some identify Gideon's Ophrah with a site in Manasseh.
24. Geva ('Geba') — an important military site on the Benjaminite border with Ephraim. It will be the location of Jonathan's bold attack on the Philistine garrison (1 Samuel 13:3; 14:1-15) and will serve as the northern boundary of Judah in the later monarchy ('from Geba to Beersheba,' 2 Kings 23:8). The first city district totals twelve cities.
25. Giv'on ('Gibeon') — the Hivite city that deceived Israel into a covenant (chapter 9). It is now formally within Benjamin's territory. Ha-Ramah ('Ramah') — later the home of Samuel (1 Samuel 7:17; 8:4). B'erot ('Beeroth') — one of the four Gibeonite cities (9:17).
26. Ha-Mitspah ('Mizpah') — one of the most important assembly sites in Israel's history. Samuel will gather Israel here to pray before the Philistine defeat (1 Samuel 7:5-12). Saul will be chosen king here (1 Samuel 10:17-25). After Jerusalem's fall, Gedaliah will govern from Mizpah (2 Kings 25:23; Jeremiah 40:6). K'firah ('Chephirah') — another Gibeonite city (9:17).
27. Lesser-known Benjaminite settlements in the hill country.
28. Ha-Y'vusi hi Yerushalayim ('the Jebusite city, that is Jerusalem') — Jerusalem appears in Benjamin's city list, confirming that the city is technically in Benjaminite territory even though Judah claims it as well (15:8, 63). Giv'at ('Gibeah') — later notorious as the site of the horrific crime in Judges 19-21 and as Saul's hometown and royal capital (1 Samuel 10:26; 11:4; 15:34). The second district totals fourteen cities, bringing Benjamin's total to

twenty-six.

## 19

*Summary: The remaining six tribes receive their territorial allotments by lot at Shiloh: Simeon within Judah's territory, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan. Joshua himself receives Timnath-serah in Ephraim's hill country.*

*What Makes This Remarkable: Simeon's allotment is embedded within Judah's territory (v. 1) — 'their inheritance was within the inheritance of Judah, because the portion of Judah was too large for them.' This absorption anticipates Simeon's eventual disappearance as a distinct tribe and partially fulfills Jacob's prophecy in Genesis 49:7 ('I will scatter them in Israel'). Joshua receives his inheritance last (vv. 49-50), after all the people have been settled — the leader takes what remains, not first pick.*

*Translation Friction: Dan's allotment (vv. 40-48) is described and then immediately noted as insufficient — 'the territory of Dan slipped away from them' (v. 47), leading to the migration and conquest of Laish described in Judges 18. We rendered yetse mehem as the territory 'slipping away' to preserve the Hebrew's sense of loss rather than mere military failure.*

*Connections: Simeon's absorption into Judah fulfills Genesis 49:7. Dan's migration to Laish is narrated in Judges 18. Joshua's personal inheritance at Timnath-serah (v. 50) is his burial place (24:30). The city lists in this chapter overlap with the Levitical cities in chapter 21 and the lists in 1 Chronicles 6.*

<sup>1</sup>The second lot fell to Simeon — to the tribe of Simeon, clan by clan. Their inheritance was within the territory of Judah. <sup>2</sup>Their inheritance included Beersheba (or Sheba), Moladah, <sup>3</sup>Hazar-shual, Balah, Ezem, <sup>4</sup>Eltolad, Bethul, Hormah, <sup>5</sup>Ziklag, Beth-marcaboth, Hazar-susah, <sup>6</sup>Beth-lebaoth, and Sharuhem — thirteen cities with their surrounding settlements. <sup>7</sup>Ain, Rimmon, Ether, and Ashan — four cities with their surrounding settlements. <sup>8</sup>along with all the settlements surrounding these cities as far as Baalath-beer (Ramah of the Negev). This was the inheritance of the tribe of Simeon, clan by clan. <sup>9</sup>Simeon's inheritance came out of Judah's allotment, because Judah's portion proved too large for them. So the Simeonites received their inheritance within Judah's territory. <sup>10</sup>The third lot came up for Zebulun, clan by clan. The boundary of their inheritance reached to Sarid. <sup>11</sup>Their boundary went up westward to Maralah, reached Dabbesheth, and extended to the wadi facing Jokneam. <sup>12</sup>From Sarid it turned eastward toward the sunrise along the boundary of Chisloth-tabor, then went out to Daberath and up to Japhia. <sup>13</sup>From there it passed eastward to Gath-hepher, to Eth-kazin, and went out to Rimmon, curving toward Neah. <sup>14</sup>The boundary turned north of it to Hannathon and ended at the Valley of Iphtah-el. <sup>15</sup>including Kattath, Nahalal, Shimron, Idalah, and Bethlehem — twelve cities with their surrounding settlements. <sup>16</sup>This was the inheritance of the Zebulunites, clan by clan — these cities with their surrounding settlements. <sup>17</sup>The fourth lot came out for Issachar — for the Issacharites, clan by clan. <sup>18</sup>Their territory included Jezreel, Chesulloth, Shunem, <sup>19</sup>Hapharaim, Shion, Anaharath, <sup>20</sup>Rabbith, Kishion, Ebez, <sup>21</sup>Remeth, En-gannim, En-haddah, Beth-pazzez. <sup>22</sup>The boundary reached Tabor, Shahazumah, and Beth-shemesh, and ended at the Jordan — sixteen cities with their surrounding settlements. <sup>23</sup>This was the inheritance of the tribe of Issachar, clan by clan — the cities with their surrounding settlements. <sup>24</sup>The fifth lot came out for the tribe of Asher, clan by clan. <sup>25</sup>Their territory included Helkath, Hali, Beten, Achshaph, <sup>26</sup>Allammelech, Amad, Mishal — reaching to Carmel on the west and to Shihor-libnath. <sup>27</sup>It turned eastward to Beth-dagon, reached Zebulun and the Valley of Iphtah-el to the north, then to Beth-emek and Neiel, going out to Cabul on the north. <sup>28</sup>including Ebron, Rehob, Hammon, and Kanah, as far as Great Sidon. <sup>29</sup>The boundary turned to Ramah and continued to the fortified city of Tyre, then turned to Hosah, ending at the sea in the region of Achzib. <sup>30</sup>also Ummah, Aphek, and Rehob — twenty-two cities with their surrounding settlements. <sup>31</sup>This was the inheritance of the tribe of Asher, clan by clan — these cities with their surrounding settlements. <sup>32</sup>The sixth lot came out for Naphtali — for the Naphtalites, clan by clan. <sup>33</sup>Their boundary ran from Heleph, from the oak at Zaananim, through Adami-nekeb and Jabneel to Lakkum, ending at the Jordan. <sup>34</sup>The boundary turned westward to Aznoth-tabor, and from there to Hukok. It bordered Zebulun on the south, Asher on the west, and the Jordan on the east. <sup>35</sup>The fortified cities were Ziddim, Zer, Hammath, Rakkath, and Chinnereth, <sup>36</sup>Adamah, Ramah, Hazor, <sup>37</sup>Kedesh, Edrei,

En-hazor, <sup>38</sup>Yiron, Migdal-el, Horem, Beth-anath, and Beth-shemesh — nineteen cities with their surrounding settlements. <sup>39</sup>This was the inheritance of the tribe of Naphtali, clan by clan — the cities with their surrounding settlements. <sup>40</sup>The seventh lot came out for the tribe of Dan, clan by clan. <sup>41</sup>The territory of their inheritance included Zorah, Eshtaol, Ir-shemesh, <sup>42</sup>Shalabbin, Aijalon, Ithlah, <sup>43</sup>Elon, Timnah, Ekron, <sup>44</sup>Eltekeh, Gibbethon, Baalath, <sup>45</sup>Jehud, Bene-berak, Gath-rimmon, <sup>46</sup>Mejarkon, Rakkon, and the territory facing Joppa. <sup>47</sup>When the Danites lost their territory, they went up and attacked Leshem, captured it, and put it to the sword. They took possession of it, settled there, and renamed Leshem as Dan, after their ancestor Dan. <sup>48</sup>This was the inheritance of the tribe of Dan, clan by clan — these cities with their surrounding settlements. <sup>49</sup>When they had finished distributing the land as an inheritance with its boundaries, the Israelites gave an inheritance to Joshua son of Nun among them. <sup>50</sup>By the LORD's command they gave him the city he requested — Timnath-serah in the hill country of Ephraim. He rebuilt the city and settled there. <sup>51</sup>These are the inheritances that Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the heads of the ancestral houses of the Israelite tribes distributed by lot at Shiloh before the LORD, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. So they finished dividing the land.

#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Vay'hi nachalatom b'tokh nachalat b'nei Yehudah ('their inheritance was within the inheritance of Judah') — Simeon does not receive an independent territory but an enclave within Judah's allotment. This arrangement fulfills Jacob's prophecy in Genesis 49:7: 'I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.' Simeon effectively becomes absorbed into Judah, eventually losing tribal identity. The 'scattering' prophesied by the patriarch is accomplished through the allocation.
2. B'er Sheva ('Beersheba') — the patriarchal well-city (listed in Judah's cities, 15:28) now allocated to Simeon. The overlap between Judah's and Simeon's city lists confirms Simeon's territory is carved from Judah's allocation, likely because Judah's territory proved too large for one tribe.
3. These cities also appear in Judah's Negev list (15:28-29), confirming the territorial overlap.
4. Chormah ('Hormah') appears in both tribal lists (15:30), reinforcing the shared territory.
5. Beit ha-Markavot ('house of chariots') and Chatsar Susah ('enclosure of horses') — these names suggest military installations for chariot horses, possibly remnants of Canaanite or Egyptian military infrastructure in the Negev.
6. Sharuhen — an important fortified city in the western Negev, known from Egyptian records as a Hyksos stronghold that Pharaoh Ahmose besieged after expelling the Hyksos from Egypt (c. 1550 BC).
7. The second Simeonite district totals four cities. The combined total (seventeen) represents Simeon's modest allocation — among the smallest of the tribal territories.
8. Ba'alat B'er Ramat Negev ('Baalath-beer, Ramah of the Negev') — the southernmost extent of Simeon's territory, deep in the arid Negev.
9. Ki hayah cheleq b'nei Yehudah rav mehem ('because the portion of Judah was too large for them') — the narrator provides the practical explanation for Simeon's enclave arrangement: Judah had more land than its population needed. Divine lot and practical geography converge: the lot placed Simeon within Judah, and the excess territory made it workable. Providence operates through demographic realities.
10. Zebulun received territory in the lower Galilee, between the Jezreel Valley and the hills north of the Carmel range. Jacob's blessing predicted Zebulun would 'dwell at the shore of the sea' (Genesis 49:13), though the allotment described here does not reach the coast — a tension noted by many commentators.
11. The western boundary approaches the Carmel range near Jokneam (12:22). Zebulun's territory covers the fertile valleys of the lower Galilee — good agricultural land.
12. Kislot Tavor ('flanks of Tabor') — the slopes of Mount Tabor, which rises dramatically from the Jezreel Valley. Tabor will be the staging ground for Deborah and Barak's battle against Sisera (Judges 4:6, 12, 14). Daverat ('Daberath') — a Levitical city at the base of Tabor (21:28).
13. Gittah Chefer ('Gath-hepher') — the hometown of the prophet Jonah son of Amittai (2 Kings 14:25). This otherwise minor border town becomes significant as the birthplace of the reluctant prophet who was sent to Nineveh.
14. Gei Yiftach El ('Valley of Iphtah-el,' meaning 'God opens') — this valley forms part of Zebulun's northern boundary and also borders Asher (v. 27).
15. Beit Lechem ('Bethlehem') — this is the Galilean Bethlehem (distinct from the Judean Bethlehem of David and later of Jesus), located in Zebulun's territory. The existence of two Bethlehems in different tribal territories is well attested. Nahalal appears in Judges 1:30 as a city where Zebulun failed to drive out the Canaanites.
16. Zebulun's allocation is complete — a modest territory in the lower Galilee, but strategically located near major trade routes and the fertile Jezreel Valley.

17. Issachar received territory in the eastern Jezreel Valley and the hills south of the Sea of Galilee — some of the most fertile agricultural land in all of Canaan. Jacob blessed Issachar as a 'strong donkey lying down between the sheepfolds,' who 'saw that rest was good and that the land was pleasant' (Genesis 49:14-15).
18. Yizr'elah ('Jezreel') — the city that gives its name to the great valley. It will become a royal residence for the Omride dynasty and the site of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21) and Jezebel's death (2 Kings 9:30-37). Shunem — where the Shunammite woman will host Elisha (2 Kings 4:8-37).
19. Issachar's city list continues through the Jezreel Valley settlements.
20. Qishyon ('Kishion') — a Levitical city (21:28). Its location near the Kishon River connects it to the valley where Deborah's army will defeat Sisera (Judges 4-5).
21. Ein Gannim ('spring of gardens') — a well-watered site, reflecting the agricultural richness of Issachar's territory.
22. Tavor ('Tabor') — Mount Tabor, the distinctive dome-shaped mountain rising 1,886 feet above the Jezreel Valley. This Beth-shemesh ('house of the sun') is a different city from the one in Judah/Dan (15:10). Tots'ot g'vulam ha-Yarden ('their boundary ended at the Jordan') — Issachar's eastern boundary touches the Jordan, giving the tribe a cross-section from the Jezreel Valley to the Jordan Rift.
23. Issachar's allocation is complete — sixteen cities in some of the most productive agricultural land in the promised territory.
24. Asher received the northwestern coastal strip along the Mediterranean, from Carmel northward to Sidon — territory rich in natural resources. Jacob blessed Asher: 'His food will be rich; he will provide royal delicacies' (Genesis 49:20). Moses blessed Asher: 'Most blessed of sons is Asher; let him be favored among his brothers, and let him dip his foot in oil' (Deuteronomy 33:24).
25. Achshaph — one of the cities whose king joined Jabin's northern coalition (11:1; 12:20).
26. U-faga b'Karmel ha-yammah ('reaching to Carmel on the sea/west') — Mount Carmel, the dramatic headland jutting into the Mediterranean, forms a natural boundary. It will become the site of Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18).
27. Kavul ('Cabul') — a settlement in western Galilee. The name will recur when Solomon gives twenty Galilean cities to Hiram king of Tyre, who calls the territory 'Cabul' (1 Kings 9:13) — apparently unimpressed.
28. Ad Tsidon Rabbah ('as far as Great Sidon') — Asher's ideal territory extends to the major Phoenician city of Sidon on the Lebanese coast. In practice, the Phoenician cities remained independent. Asher's allotment is aspirational in its northern reaches.
29. Ir mivtsar Tsor ('the fortified city of Tyre') — Tyre, the great Phoenician island-fortress, appears in Asher's boundary description. Like Sidon, Tyre remained Phoenician throughout Israel's history and became a major trade partner under Solomon and Ahab. Achzib — a coastal city that Asher failed to capture (Judges 1:31).
30. Asher's total is twenty-two cities — a substantial coastal territory, though much of it remained in Phoenician control.
31. Asher's allocation is complete — the northwestern coastal strip with aspirational boundaries reaching to Sidon and Tyre.
32. Naphtali received territory in the upper Galilee, the mountainous region north of the Sea of Galilee. Moses blessed Naphtali: 'satisfied with favor and full of the blessing of the LORD; possess the sea and the south' (Deuteronomy 33:23).
33. Me-Elon b'Tsa'anannim ('from the oak/terebinth at Zaanannim') — this landmark tree is the site where Jael will kill Sisera with a tent peg (Judges 4:11). The boundary description casually mentions a location that will become the site of one of the most dramatic events in the Judges period.
34. Uviyhudah ha-Yarden mizrach ha-shamesh ('and Judah at the Jordan toward the sunrise') — this puzzling reference to 'Judah upon the Jordan' in northern Galilee has produced many interpretations. It may refer to a Judahite enclave, a textual corruption, or a variant name for a geographic feature. The most common explanation is that it refers to territory associated with the Israelite settlement broadly rather than the specific tribe of Judah.
35. Chammat ('Hammath,' meaning 'hot spring') — likely the hot springs south of Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee. Kinneret ('Chinnereth') — the city that gives its name to the Sea of Chinnereth/Galilee, located on the northwestern shore of the lake. Rakkath — possibly the site later rebuilt as Tiberias.
36. Chatsor ('Hazor') — the great city Joshua burned (11:10-11) now appears in Naphtali's city list, indicating it has been rebuilt for Israelite settlement.
37. Qedesh ('Kedesh') — Kedesh-naphtali, later designated as a city of refuge (20:7) and a Levitical city (21:32). It will be the staging ground for Barak's army in the battle against Sisera (Judges 4:6, 9-10).
38. Beit Anat ('Beth-anath,' meaning 'house of Anath') — named after the Canaanite warrior goddess Anath. Both Beth-anath and Beth-shemesh ('house of the sun') in Naphtali are cities where the Canaanites were not driven out (Judges 1:33), another instance of incomplete conquest.
39. Naphtali's allocation is complete — nineteen cities in the upper Galilee, including Hazor, Kedesh, and the Sea of Galilee shore.
40. Dan is the last tribe to receive its allotment by lot. Dan's original territory was in the central-western region between Judah, Ephraim, and Benjamin — bordering the Philistine coastal plain. The territory proved untenable, leading to Dan's migration north (Judges 18).
41. Tsor'ah v'Eshta'ol ('Zorah and Eshtaol') — the Samson cities (Judges 13:2, 25; 16:31). These towns in the Sorek Valley were also listed in Judah's territory (15:33), reflecting the overlapping claims in this contested border zone.

42. Ayyalon ('Aijalon') — the valley where the moon stood still during Joshua's battle (10:12). This strategic valley controlling access from the coastal plain to the highlands is within Dan's allotment.
43. Timnah — where Samson's Philistine wife lived (Judges 14:1). Ekron — the northernmost Philistine city. Dan's territory theoretically extends into Philistine territory, but the Danites were unable to hold this land (v. 47; Judges 1:34-35).
44. Gibbethon — a Philistine-held city where two Israelite kings will be assassinated during siege operations (1 Kings 15:27; 16:15-17), demonstrating how long the Danite/Israelite struggle against Philistine control in this region persisted.
45. B'nei V'raq ('Bene-berak') — a town in the coastal plain, later the site of a significant rabbinic community.
46. Mei ha-Yarqon ('waters of the Yarkon') — the Yarkon River, which flows to the Mediterranean near modern Tel Aviv. Yafo ('Joppa') — the ancient port city on the Mediterranean coast, later the port from which Jonah will flee (Jonah 1:3) and where Peter will receive his vision of the clean and unclean animals (Acts 10:5-11).
47. Vayyetsē g'vul b'nei Dan mehēm ('the territory of Dan went out from them' or 'was too small for them') — the Hebrew is terse but the meaning is clear: Dan could not hold its allotted territory against Philistine and Amorite pressure (Judges 1:34-35). Vayyilachamu im Leshem ('they fought against Leshem') — the Danite migration to the far north, narrated in detail in Judges 18. Leshem (called Laish in Judges 18:7) was a peaceful, isolated city in the upper Jordan Valley that Dan conquered and renamed. Vayyiqr'u l'Leshem Dan k'shem Dan aviheḥem ('they called Leshem Dan, after the name of Dan their father') — the renamed city gives rise to the expression 'from Dan to Beersheba' (the full extent of Israel, north to south).
48. Dan's allocation is nominally complete, but uniquely among the tribes, the Danites could not hold it and migrated to a completely different location. Their story is the most dramatic illustration of the gap between divine grant and human possession.
49. Vayyitt'nu v'nei Yisrael nachalah liYhoshua bin Nun b'tokham ('the Israelites gave an inheritance to Joshua among them') — Joshua receives his personal inheritance last, after every tribe has been allocated. The leader who distributed everyone else's land receives his own only when all others are settled. This selflessness contrasts with the Joseph tribes' complaint (17:14-18): Joshua asks for nothing while his kinsmen demand more.
50. Al pi YHWH ('by the LORD's command') — even Joshua's personal inheritance is divinely authorized. Et ha-ir asher sha'al ('the city he requested') — Joshua asked for a specific city, not the best territory. Timnat Serach b'har Efrayim ('Timnath-serah in the hill country of Ephraim') — a modest city in his own tribal territory. The name means 'extra portion' or 'portion of the sun.' Vayyivneh et ha-ir vayyeshev bah ('he built the city and settled there') — Joshua had to rebuild the city himself, suggesting it was in poor condition. The conqueror of Canaan retires to a ruined town he must personally reconstruct. The humility is remarkable.
51. B'goral b'Shiloh lifnei YHWH petach Ohel Mo'ed ('by lot at Shiloh before the LORD at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting') — the closing verse brings together every element of the allocation process: the authorized administrators (Eleazar, Joshua, tribal heads), the method (lot), the location (Shiloh), the divine presence (before the LORD), and the sacred site (the Tent of Meeting). Vay'khallu mechaleq et ha-arets ('they finished dividing the land') — the land distribution is complete. The promise to Abraham of land for his descendants has been fulfilled in its initial form — allocated by tribe, waiting for full possession.

## 20

**Summary:** *Six cities of refuge are designated — three west of the Jordan and three east — where those who kill unintentionally can flee from the blood avenger and receive a fair trial before the congregation.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The cities of refuge institutionalize the distinction between murder and manslaughter. The manslayer must 'stand at the entrance of the city gate and state his case' (v. 4) — he must explain himself publicly, not simply claim asylum. The congregation judges (v. 6), not the blood avenger and not the accused. The killer remains in the city until the death of the high priest (v. 6) — a curious provision that ties individual atonement to the priestly office, as if the high priest's death provides some form of release.*

**Translation Friction:** *The phrase bivli da'at (v. 3, 'without knowledge') is the legal standard for unintentional killing — identical to Deuteronomy 19:4. The connection between the manslayer's release and the high priest's death (v. 6) is theologically suggestive but unexplained by the text — we noted the interpretive traditions without endorsing a specific reading.*

**Connections:** *This chapter implements Numbers 35:9-34 and Deuteronomy 19:1-13. The go'el haddam ('blood avenger') institution connects to the go'el theology in Ruth and to the broader kinship-redemption framework. The high priest's death as a release mechanism is explored in Hebrews 9:11-15. The six cities are distributed across all tribal territories, ensuring accessibility.*

1The LORD spoke to Joshua: 2"Tell the Israelites: Designate the cities of refuge that I instructed you about through Moses, 3so that anyone who kills a person accidentally and without intent may flee there. These cities will serve as your refuge from the blood avenger. 4He must flee to one of these cities, stand at the entrance of the city gate, and present his case to the elders of that city. They must take him into the city, give him a place, and let him live among them. 5If the blood avenger pursues him, the elders must not surrender the killer to him, because he struck his neighbor without intent and bore him no prior hatred. 6He must remain in that city until he has stood trial before the assembly and until the death of the high priest serving at that time. Then the killer may return to his own city and his own home — to the city from which he fled. 7They set apart Kedesh in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali, Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the hill country of Judah. 8East of the Jordan, near Jericho, they designated Bezer in the wilderness on the plateau from the tribe of Reuben, Ramoth in Gilead from the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan from the tribe of Manasseh. 9These were the designated cities for all the Israelites and for the resident alien living among them, so that anyone who killed a person accidentally could flee there and not die by the hand of the blood avenger before standing trial before the assembly.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The cities of refuge fulfill the command given through Moses in Numbers 35:9-34 and Deuteronomy 19:1-13. Now that the land is allocated, the judicial infrastructure must be established.
2. *Arei ha-miqlat* ('cities of refuge/asylum') — from the root *qalat* ('to take in, to receive'). These cities provide legal sanctuary for those accused of unintentional killing. The institution reflects a sophisticated distinction between murder (intentional killing) and manslaughter (accidental killing) that is foundational to biblical jurisprudence. *Asher dibbarti aleikhem b'yad Mosheh* ('which I spoke to you by the hand of Moses') — continuity with Mosaic legislation is explicitly stated.
3. *Rotseach makkeh nefesh bishgagah bivli da'at* ('a killer who strikes a person by mistake without knowledge') — two terms reinforce the unintentional nature: *bishgagah* ('in error, by mistake') and *bivli da'at* ('without knowledge/intent'). *Go'el ha-dam* ('the blood avenger/redeemer of blood') — the nearest male kinsman obligated to avenge the victim's death. The *go'el* is the same word used for 'kinsman-redeemer' in Ruth 3-4 and for God as Israel's 'Redeemer' (Isaiah 41:14; 43:14). The cities of refuge protect the accidental killer from the *go'el*'s legitimate but potentially unjust vengeance.
4. *V'amad petach sha'ar ha-ir v'dibber b'oznei ziqnei ha-ir hahi et d'varav* ('he shall stand at the entrance of the city gate and speak his case in the ears of the elders of that city') — the city gate is the seat of justice in ancient Israel. The accused presents his case publicly to the elders, who serve as the initial court. *V'asfu oto ha-irah* ('they shall gather him into the city') — the elders are obligated to receive him; this is not optional hospitality but a legal duty. The accused receives shelter, housing, and community membership pending trial.
5. *V'lo sone hu lo mitmol shilshom* ('he was not hating him from yesterday or the day before') — the legal test for manslaughter vs. murder is prior relationship. If the accused had no history of hostility toward the victim, the killing is presumed accidental. This temporal criterion — 'yesterday and the day before' — is a standard Hebrew legal idiom for established pattern of behavior (cf. Exodus 21:29, 36; Deuteronomy 19:4, 6).
6. *Ad mot ha-kohen ha-gadol asher yihyeh bayyamim hahem* ('until the death of the high priest who serves in those days') — the high priest's death functions as a kind of expiation or amnesty. The accidental killer's exile ends when the high priest dies, regardless of how long that takes. The theological logic connects the high priest's death to atonement — as the high priest represents the nation before God, his death releases accumulated guilt. Some later interpreters saw this as a type of the ultimate priestly sacrifice. The restriction is substantial: the killer must live in the refuge city for years or decades, separated from home and inheritance.
7. *Vayyaqdishu* ('they set apart/consecrated') — the verb *qadash* ('to make holy, to set apart') indicates these cities receive a sacred legal status. The three western cities are evenly distributed north-to-south through the central highlands: Kedesh (north), Shechem (center), Hebron (south). This ensures that no Israelite is more than a day's journey from refuge. All three cities have deep patriarchal associations: Shechem (Genesis 12:6; 33:18), Hebron (Genesis 13:18; 23:2), and Kedesh (a name meaning 'holy').
8. Three eastern cities mirror the three western ones, providing the same north-to-south coverage in the Transjordan: Golan (north), Ramoth-gilead (center), Bezer (south). The six cities together form a comprehensive network ensuring that every Israelite — whether east or west of the Jordan — has accessible refuge. *Ramot ba-Gil'ad* ('Ramoth in Gilead') will become a strategically contested city, the site where Ahab is killed (1 Kings 22:3-37) and where Jehu is anointed (2 Kings 9:1-6).
9. *V'la-ger ha-gar b'tokham* ('and for the resident alien dwelling among them') — the cities of refuge are not exclusively for Israelites. The *ger* (resident alien, sojourner) has equal access to legal protection. This provision extends the rule of law to non-Israelites living in the land — a remarkable feature of biblical jurisprudence. The institution simultaneously limits vengeance (the *go'el* cannot act before trial), protects the innocent (accidental killers receive sanctuary), ensures justice (a trial must occur), and includes foreigners (the *ger* has equal standing before the law).

## 21

**Summary:** *The Levites receive forty-eight cities distributed among all the tribes, including the six cities of refuge. The chapter concludes with a sweeping summary: 'Not one word of all the good promises the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed — everything came to pass.'*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The Levitical city system disperses the priestly tribe throughout all Israel — they have no contiguous territory but are present everywhere, ensuring that every part of the land has access to teaching and worship leadership. The summary statement (vv. 43-45) is the theological climax of the allotment section: God's promise is fulfilled, the land is given, rest is achieved. 'Not one word failed' (lo nafal davar, v. 45) — the verb nafal ('fall') means not one promise dropped to the ground unfulfilled.*

**Translation Friction:** *The Levitical city lists involve numerous textual variants between Joshua 21 and its parallel in 1 Chronicles 6:54-81. We followed the Joshua text and noted significant variants. The phrase lo nafal davar (v. 45, 'not one word fell') uses a physical metaphor — words stand or fall like soldiers. We rendered it 'not one word... failed' to capture the sense while noting the Hebrew image.*

**Connections:** *The Levitical cities implement Numbers 35:1-8. The fulfillment declaration (v. 45) is echoed in 1 Kings 8:56 by Solomon at the Temple dedication. The city lists parallel 1 Chronicles 6:54-81. The dispersal of Levi fulfills Jacob's prophecy (Genesis 49:7) but transforms the curse into a priestly vocation.*

<sup>1</sup>The heads of the Levite ancestral houses approached Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the heads of the ancestral houses of the Israelite tribes. <sup>2</sup>They addressed them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan: "The LORD commanded through Moses that we be given cities to live in, along with their pasturelands for our livestock." <sup>3</sup>So the Israelites gave the Levites these cities with their pasturelands from their own inheritance, in accordance with the LORD's command. <sup>4</sup>The lot fell to the Kohathite clans. The descendants of Aaron the priest — who were Levites — received by lot thirteen cities from the tribes of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin. <sup>5</sup>The remaining Kohathites received by lot ten cities from the clans of the tribe of Ephraim, the tribe of Dan, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. <sup>6</sup>The Gershonites received by lot thirteen cities from the clans of the tribe of Issachar, the tribe of Asher, the tribe of Naphtali, and the half-tribe of Manasseh in Bashan. <sup>7</sup>The Merarites, by their clans, received twelve cities from the tribe of Reuben, the tribe of Gad, and the tribe of Zebulun. <sup>8</sup>The Israelites gave these cities with their pasturelands to the Levites by lot, just as the LORD had commanded through Moses. <sup>9</sup>From the tribe of Judah and the tribe of Simeon they gave the following cities, listed here by name. <sup>10</sup>These went to the descendants of Aaron from the Kohathite clans of the Levites, because the first lot fell to them. <sup>11</sup>They gave them Kiriath-arba — that is, Hebron — in the hill country of Judah, with its surrounding pasturelands. (Arba was the ancestor of Anak.) <sup>12</sup>However, the open fields of the city and its surrounding villages had been given to Caleb son of Jephunneh as his possession. <sup>13</sup>To the descendants of Aaron the priest they gave Hebron — the city of refuge for the killer — with its pasturelands, and Libnah with its pasturelands, <sup>14</sup>Jattir with its pasturelands, Eshtemoa with its pasturelands, <sup>15</sup>Holon with its pasturelands, Debir with its pasturelands, <sup>16</sup>Ain with its pasturelands, Juttah with its pasturelands, and Beth-shemesh with its pasturelands — nine cities from these two tribes. <sup>17</sup>From the tribe of Benjamin: Gibeon with its pasturelands, Geba with its pasturelands, <sup>18</sup>Anathoth with its pasturelands, and Almon with its pasturelands — four cities. <sup>19</sup>The total number of cities for the descendants of Aaron the priests was thirteen cities with their pasturelands. <sup>20</sup>The remaining Kohathite clans of the Levites received their allotted cities from the tribe of Ephraim. <sup>21</sup>They gave them Shechem — the city of refuge for the killer — with its pasturelands in the hill country of Ephraim, and Gezer with its pasturelands, <sup>22</sup>Kibzaim with its pasturelands, and Beth-horon with its pasturelands — four cities. <sup>23</sup>From the tribe of Dan: Eltekeh with its pasturelands, Gibbethon with its pasturelands, <sup>24</sup>Aijalon with its pasturelands, and Gath-rimmon with its pasturelands — four cities. <sup>25</sup>From the half-tribe of Manasseh: Taanach with its pasturelands, and Gath-rimmon with its pasturelands — two cities. <sup>26</sup>The total for the remaining Kohathite clans was ten cities with their pasturelands. <sup>27</sup>To the Gershonites from the Levitical clans: from the half-tribe of Manasseh they gave Golan in Bashan —

the city of refuge for the killer — with its pasturelands, and Be-eshterah with its pasturelands — two cities. <sup>28</sup>From the tribe of Issachar: Kishion with its pasturelands, Daberath with its pasturelands, <sup>29</sup>Jarmuth with its pasturelands, and En-gannim with its pasturelands — four cities. <sup>30</sup>From the tribe of Asher: Mishal with its pasturelands, Abdon with its pasturelands, <sup>31</sup>H elkath with its pasturelands, and Rehob with its pasturelands — four cities. <sup>32</sup>From the tribe of Naphtali: Kedesh in Galilee — the city of refuge for the killer — with its pasturelands, Hammoth-dor with its pasturelands, and Kartan with its pasturelands — three cities. <sup>33</sup>The total number of cities for the Gershonite clans was thirteen cities with their pasturelands. <sup>34</sup>To the Merarite clans — the remaining Levites — from the tribe of Zebulun: Jokneam with its pasturelands, Kartah with its pasturelands, <sup>35</sup>Dimnah with its pasturelands, and Nahalal with its pasturelands — four cities. <sup>36</sup>From the tribe of Reuben: Bezer with its pasturelands, Jahaz with its pasturelands, <sup>37</sup>Kedemoth with its pasturelands, and Mephaath with its pasturelands — four cities. <sup>38</sup>From the tribe of Gad: Ramoth in Gilead — the city of refuge for the killer — with its pasturelands, Mahanaim with its pasturelands, <sup>39</sup>Heshbon with its pasturelands, and Jazer with its pasturelands — four cities in all. <sup>40</sup>The total number of cities for the Merarite clans — the remaining Levitical families — was twelve cities by their lot. <sup>41</sup>The total number of Levitical cities within the territory held by the Israelites was forty-eight cities with their pasturelands. <sup>42</sup>Each of these cities included its surrounding pasturelands; this was the arrangement for every one of these cities. <sup>43</sup>The LORD gave Israel the entire land he had sworn to give their ancestors. They took possession of it and settled in it. <sup>44</sup>The LORD gave them rest on every side, exactly as he had sworn to their ancestors. Not one of their enemies could stand against them; the LORD handed all their enemies over to them. <sup>45</sup>Not a single word failed from all the good promises the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. Everything was fulfilled.

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Levites approach the same leadership trio (Eleazar, Joshua, tribal heads) who oversaw all the land allocations. Their claim is presented publicly and formally, not as a private petition. This fulfills Numbers 35:1-8, where the LORD instructed that the Levites receive cities and surrounding pasturelands from each tribe's inheritance.
2. Migrasheiheh ('their pasturelands/common lands') — the Levites do not receive agricultural territory but cities with surrounding open land for grazing. The migrash is a belt of open land extending outward from the city wall (Numbers 35:4-5 specifies 1,000 cubits). The Levites' request appeals entirely to Mosaic authority — Yahweh tsivvah v'yad Mosheh ('the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses'). Their claim rests on divine instruction, not negotiation.
3. Min-nachalatum ('from their inheritance') — each tribe contributes from its own allotted territory. The Levites receive a distributed inheritance rather than a contiguous one. This arrangement embeds the priestly and teaching tribe throughout the entire nation, ensuring that instruction in the Torah is accessible to all Israel, not concentrated in a single region.
4. The Kohathites are divided into two groups: the priestly line (descendants of Aaron) and the non-priestly Kohathites. Aaron's descendants receive cities closest to Jerusalem (from Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin), positioning the priestly families near the future temple site — though this significance would only become apparent centuries later under David and Solomon.
5. The non-priestly Kohathites receive cities from the central tribes, extending Levitical presence through the Joseph territory and into the coastal region near Philistine territory (Dan).
6. The Gershonite cities are distributed through the northern and northeastern tribes, ensuring Levitical presence in the Galilee region and the Transjordan Bashan.
7. The Merarites receive the southern Transjordan and one northern tribe (Zebulun). The three Levite clans — Kohath, Gershon, Merari — together receive 48 cities (13 + 10 + 13 + 12), exactly the number prescribed in Numbers 35:7.
8. Ka'asher tsivvah Yahweh b'yad Mosheh ba-goral ('just as the LORD had commanded by the hand of Moses, by lot') — the lot (goral) ensures the distribution is perceived as divinely directed rather than humanly negotiated. The summary statement frames the entire Levitical allocation as obedience to prior divine command.
9. The detailed city-by-city listing begins with the priestly Aaronite cities from Judah and Simeon. This specificity ensures the allocation is a matter of permanent public record, not a vague promise.
10. Ki lahem hayah ha-goral ri'shonah ('because the first lot was theirs') — the Aaronite priests receive priority in the allocation, consistent with their elevated status within the Levitical order.
11. Hebron serves dual duty: it is both a city of refuge (20:7) and a priestly city. The parenthetical identifying Arba as the ancestor of the Anakim connects this allocation back to Caleb's conquest of the giant inhabitants (14:12-15; 15:13-14).

12. A careful distinction: the priestly Levites receive the city of Hebron and its immediate pasturelands, while Caleb retains the agricultural fields (s'deh) and dependent villages (chatsirim). This prevents a conflict between Caleb's personal inheritance (14:13-14) and the Levitical allocation. Both claims are honored simultaneously.
13. The text explicitly labels Hebron as *ir miqlat ha-rotseach* ('the city of refuge for the killer'), linking it to the institution from chapter 20. Libnah was a Canaanite royal city conquered in the southern campaign (10:29-30).
14. Jattir and Eshtemoa are towns in the southern Judean highlands, both listed among Judah's cities in 15:48, 50. David would later send plunder to Eshtemoa (1 Samuel 30:28).
15. Debir, formerly Kiriath-sepher, was captured by Othniel (15:15-17). Its inclusion as a Levitical city further transforms Canaanite urban centers into Israelite religious infrastructure.
16. Beth-shemesh ('House of the Sun') is the city where the ark of the covenant will later arrive when returned by the Philistines (1 Samuel 6:12-19). Nine cities from Judah and Simeon form the core of the Aaronite priestly network.
17. Gibeon — the city of the deception treaty (chapter 9) — now becomes a Levitical city, an ironic transformation. Gaba will later serve as an Israelite military outpost against the Philistines (1 Samuel 13:3).
18. Anathoth will later be the hometown of the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:1; 11:21-23). Its identification as a Levitical/priestly city illuminates Jeremiah's priestly lineage.
19. The summary count confirms thirteen priestly cities (nine from Judah/Simeon and four from Benjamin), matching the lot drawn in verse 4.
20. The section now details the non-priestly Kohathite cities, beginning with those from Ephraim's territory.
21. Shechem functions as both refuge city and Levitical city, like Hebron. Its deep patriarchal history (Abraham's first altar in Canaan, Genesis 12:6; Jacob's purchase of land, Genesis 33:19) will culminate in the covenant renewal of chapter 24. Gezer was a Canaanite city whose inhabitants Ephraim failed to dispossess (16:10); its designation as a Levitical city suggests intended Israelite occupation despite the incomplete conquest.
22. Beth-horon (Upper and Lower) guards a critical pass from the coastal plain into the central highlands. It was the site of the Amorite rout during the southern campaign (10:10-11). Its assignment as a Levitical city positions Levites along a vital strategic corridor.
23. Gibbethon will later feature as a Philistine-held city that Israel repeatedly besieges (1 Kings 15:27; 16:15-17), highlighting the difficulty Dan faced in occupying its allotted territory.
24. Aijalon is the valley where the sun stood still during the southern campaign (10:12). Its allocation as a Levitical city connects the land distribution to the conquest narrative.
25. Taanach lies near Megiddo in the Jezreel Valley, an area of strategic importance throughout Israelite history. The second Gath-rimmon here may reflect a textual variant; some scholars suggest this should read 'Ibleam' based on the parallel in 1 Chronicles 6:70.
26. Ten cities for the non-priestly Kohathites, matching the count in verse 5.
27. Golan in Bashan serves as both refuge and Levitical city (cf. 20:8). Be-eshterah (also called Ashtaroth) was formerly the capital of King Og of Bashan (12:4; 13:12, 31). Its transformation from a pagan royal seat (the name likely derives from the goddess Ashtoreth) into a Levitical city is theologically significant.
28. Daberath sits at the base of Mount Tabor in the Jezreel Valley, an area that will feature prominently in the Deborah-Barak narrative (Judges 4:6, 12).
29. En-gannim ('spring of gardens') — this is a different city from the Jarmuth listed among the five Amorite kings defeated in chapter 10 (which was in Judah's territory).
30. Asher's territory lies along the northern Mediterranean coast. These Levitical cities position priestly-teaching families in a region with heavy Canaanite and Phoenician cultural influence.
31. Rehob appears as one of the cities Asher failed to fully dispossess (Judges 1:31), suggesting that Levitical occupation of these northern cities may have been tenuous.
32. Kedesh in Galilee is the third western refuge city (cf. 20:7). Its name ('holy place') suggests a pre-Israelite sacred site now incorporated into the Levitical system. Kedesh will later be the home of Barak (Judges 4:6) and the site of Israelite defeat by Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria (2 Kings 15:29).
33. Thirteen Gershonite cities, matching the count in verse 6.
34. The Merarite section completes the three-part Levitical distribution. Jokneam guards the southern approach to the Jezreel Valley, a strategically vital location.
35. Nahalal is listed among the Canaanite cities that Zebulun failed to drive out, instead subjecting them to forced labor (Judges 1:30).
36. Bezer is the Transjordan city of refuge (20:8). Jahaz was the site of Israel's decisive battle against Sihon king of the Amorites (Numbers 21:23; Deuteronomy 2:32).

37. Kedemoth was the staging area from which Moses sent emissaries to Sihon (Deuteronomy 2:26).
38. Mahanaim ('two camps') is where Jacob encountered angels (Genesis 32:2) and where Ish-bosheth will establish his rival kingdom (2 Samuel 2:8) and David will flee during Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 17:24). Its assignment as a Levitical city weaves patriarchal history into the national infrastructure.
39. Heshbon was the capital of King Sihon (Numbers 21:25-26; Joshua 12:2). Like Be-eshterah/Ashtaroth, a former enemy capital is now repurposed as a Levitical city.
40. Twelve Merarite cities, matching the count in verse 7. The grand total across all three Levitical clans: 13 (Aaronite) + 10 (other Kohathites) + 13 (Gershonites) + 12 (Merarites) = 48 cities.
41. Forty-eight Levitical cities exactly matches the number commanded in Numbers 35:7. This correspondence demonstrates Israel's faithfulness in executing the Mosaic legislation regarding the Levites.
42. A formulaic closing note confirming that the standard arrangement — city plus surrounding pasturelands — applied uniformly to all forty-eight Levitical cities.
43. This climactic summary (vv. 43-45) is one of the most theologically significant passages in Joshua. Vayyirashuhah vayyeshvu vah ('they took possession of it and settled in it') — the twin verbs yarash ('possess, dispossess') and yashav ('settle, dwell') mark the fulfillment of the promise trajectory that began with Abraham in Genesis 12:7. The statement is programmatic rather than absolute — it declares the essential fulfillment of the land promise even though some areas remain unconquered (cf. 13:1-7; 15:63; 16:10; 17:12-13).
44. Vayyanach Yahweh lahem missaviv ('the LORD gave them rest round about') — the verb nuach ('to rest') echoes the purpose statement of Deuteronomy 12:10 and 25:19. Rest (menucha) is the goal of the entire exodus-conquest narrative: God's people dwelling securely in God's land under God's rule. Lo amad ish bifneihem ('not a man stood before them') — this bold claim, read alongside the incomplete-conquest notices, affirms divine faithfulness to the covenant promises. Military opposition has been broken even where demographic displacement is incomplete.
45. Lo nafal davar mikkol ha-davar ha-tov ('not one thing fell from all the good word') — nafal ('fell') is used for the failure or dropping of a word. The assertion is absolute: every good thing God promised has come to pass. This verse is the thematic pivot of the entire book, the bridge between the conquest/allocation narrative (chs. 1-21) and the farewell/warning section (chs. 22-24). Joshua will repeat this claim in his farewell speech (23:14) but add the sobering corollary: just as every good promise was fulfilled, so every threat of judgment will be fulfilled if Israel disobeys.

## 22

**Summary:** *Joshua blesses the Transjordan tribes and sends them home. They build a large altar by the Jordan, provoking the western tribes to threaten war. The Transjordan tribes explain the altar is a 'witness' — not for sacrifice — and conflict is averted.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The near-civil-war over an altar reveals how seriously Israel takes centralized worship. The western tribes assume the altar violates Deuteronomy 12 and invoke the Achan precedent (v. 20) — one tribe's sin can bring judgment on all. The Transjordan explanation is theological: the altar is called Ed ('witness,' v. 34), a memorial ensuring future generations cannot say 'you have no share in the LORD.' The danger is not idolatry but exclusion — the river might become a boundary that severs covenant membership.*

**Translation Friction:** *The phrase ma'al ma'al (v. 16, 'acted treacherously with treachery') echoes the Achan language of 7:1. We rendered it consistently. The altar's name Ed (v. 34) is textually uncertain in some manuscripts — some read 'they called the altar Ed' while others omit the name. We followed the Masoretic reading and noted the variant.*

**Connections:** *The Achan warning (v. 20) references chapter 7. The centralized-worship concern reflects Deuteronomy 12. The Peor reference (v. 17) points to Numbers 25. This episode anticipates the tribal fractures that dominate Judges and eventually split the kingdom (1 Kings 12). The 'witness' concept connects to the stone witnesses in Genesis 31:47-48 and Joshua 24:27.*

<sup>1</sup>Then Joshua summoned the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. <sup>2</sup>He said to them, "You have kept everything that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, and you have obeyed me in everything I commanded you. <sup>3</sup>You have not abandoned your brothers through this long period — to this very day — and you have carried out the charge of the commandment of the LORD your God. <sup>4</sup>Now the LORD your God has given rest to your brothers, just as he promised

them. So turn and go to your tents, to the land of your possession that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you across the Jordan. <sup>5</sup>Only take great care to carry out the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the LORD charged you: to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to keep his commandments, to hold fast to him, and to serve him with all your heart and all your life. <sup>6</sup>Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they departed for their tents. <sup>7</sup>To the one half-tribe of Manasseh Moses had given territory in Bashan, while Joshua had given the other half territory among their brothers west of the Jordan. When Joshua sent them away to their tents, he also blessed them. <sup>8</sup>He told them, "Return to your tents with great wealth — with very large herds, with silver, gold, bronze, iron, and a great quantity of clothing. Divide the plunder from your enemies with your brothers." <sup>9</sup>The Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh left the Israelites at Shiloh in the land of Canaan to travel to the land of Gilead — the land of their possession that they had received in accordance with the LORD's command through Moses. <sup>10</sup>When they reached the region of the Jordan in the land of Canaan, the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh built an altar there by the Jordan — an impressively large altar. <sup>11</sup>The Israelites received word: "The Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh have built an altar facing the land of Canaan, in the Jordan region, on the Israelite side." <sup>12</sup>When the Israelites heard this, the entire assembly of the Israelites gathered at Shiloh to march against them in war. <sup>13</sup>The Israelites sent Phinehas son of Eleazar the priest to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh in the land of Gilead, <sup>14</sup>along with ten leaders — one leader from each ancestral house for every tribe of Israel. Each was the head of his ancestral house among the divisions of Israel. <sup>15</sup>They came to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh in the land of Gilead and said to them: <sup>16</sup>"This is what the entire assembly of the LORD says: What is this treachery you have committed against the God of Israel? You have turned away from following the LORD today by building yourselves an altar — rebelling against the LORD this very day! <sup>17</sup>Is the sin at Peor not enough for us? We have not yet purified ourselves from it to this day, even though a plague struck the assembly of the LORD! <sup>18</sup>And now you would turn away from following the LORD today? If you rebel against the LORD today, tomorrow his anger will fall on the entire assembly of Israel! <sup>19</sup>If the land of your possession is defiled, then cross over to the land of the LORD's possession, where the LORD's tabernacle stands, and take territory among us. But do not rebel against the LORD, and do not rebel against us, by building an altar for yourselves besides the altar of the LORD our God. <sup>20</sup>Did not Achan son of Zerah commit treachery with what was devoted to destruction, and wrath fall on the entire assembly of Israel? He was not the only one who perished for his sin." <sup>21</sup>The Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh answered the heads of the Israelite divisions: <sup>22</sup>"The Mighty One, God, the LORD! The Mighty One, God, the LORD! He knows — and let Israel know — if this was in rebellion or in treachery against the LORD, then do not spare us today! <sup>23</sup>If we built an altar to turn away from following the LORD, or to offer burnt offerings, grain offerings, or fellowship offerings on it — let the LORD himself call us to account! <sup>24</sup>Rather, we did this out of a specific concern — that in the future your children might say to our children, 'What do you have to do with the LORD, the God of Israel?' <sup>25</sup>For the LORD has set the Jordan as a boundary between us and you, Reubenites and Gadites. You have no share in the LORD!' And your children would cause our children to stop revering the LORD. <sup>26</sup>So we said, 'Let us take action and build an altar — not for burnt offerings and not for sacrifice, <sup>27</sup>but as a witness between us and you and our generations after us — that we perform the service of the LORD before him with our burnt offerings, our sacrifices, and our fellowship offerings. Then your children will not say to our children in the future, 'You have no share in the LORD.'" <sup>28</sup>We reasoned that if they say this to us or to our descendants in the future, we can reply, 'Look at this replica of the LORD's altar that our ancestors built — not for burnt offerings and not for sacrifice, but as a witness between us and you.' <sup>29</sup>Far be it from us to rebel against the LORD or to turn away from following the LORD today by building an altar for burnt offerings, grain offerings, or sacrifice — apart from the altar of the LORD our God that stands before his tabernacle!" <sup>30</sup>When Phinehas the priest and the leaders of the assembly — the heads of the Israelite divisions who were with him — heard what the Reubenites, Gadites, and Manassites said, they were satisfied. <sup>31</sup>Phinehas son of Eleazar the priest said to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the Manassites, "Today we know that the LORD is among us, because you have not committed this treachery against the LORD. You have now rescued the Israelites from the hand of the LORD!" <sup>32</sup>Phinehas son of Eleazar the priest and the leaders returned from the Reubenites and Gadites in the land of Gilead to the Israelites in the land of Canaan and brought back their report. <sup>33</sup>The report satisfied the Israelites. They

praised God and abandoned any plan to march against the Reubenites and Gadites in war to devastate the land where they lived. <sup>34</sup>The Reubenites and the Gadites named the altar "Witness" — "For it is a witness between us that the LORD is God."

#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The narrative returns to the Transjordan tribes who were first commissioned in chapter 1. Having fulfilled their military obligation to fight alongside their brothers west of the Jordan, they are now formally dismissed.
2. Joshua's commendation highlights dual obedience: to the original command of Moses (Numbers 32:20-22) and to Joshua's own instructions (1:12-18). The Transjordan tribes' faithfulness is explicitly confirmed — they did not abandon the western campaign.
3. Zeh yamim rabbim ('this many days') — the conquest has taken years. The Transjordan warriors have been away from their families and their already-allocated territory throughout the entire campaign. Mishmeret mitsvat Yahweh ('the charge/duty of the commandment of the LORD') — their obedience is framed not merely as military duty to Joshua but as covenant faithfulness to God.
4. Heniach Yahweh Eloheikhem la'acheikhem ('the LORD your God has given rest to your brothers') — the condition for the Transjordan tribes' return has been met. The rest (menucha) promised in Deuteronomy 12:10 and affirmed in 21:44 triggers the release of their military obligation. P'nu ul'khu lakhem l'ohaleikhem ('turn and go to your tents') — the dismissal formula sends them home.
5. Joshua's farewell charge to the eastern tribes echoes the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:5) and the covenant stipulations of Deuteronomy. Five imperatives define covenant faithfulness: love (ahavah), walk (halak), keep (shamar), hold fast (davaq), serve (avad). Raq ('only/but') signals that the commission is conditional — their departure is permitted, but covenant loyalty must continue. Ul'dovqah bo ('to cling to him') — the verb davaq is used of the marriage bond in Genesis 2:24 and describes Israel's most intimate loyalty to God.
6. Vay'varekh otam ('he blessed them') — Joshua performs a priestly function, invoking God's favor upon the departing tribes. The blessing signals formal closure of their joint military service.
7. The narrator pauses to clarify the divided Manasseh situation — one half received land from Moses in the Transjordan, the other from Joshua in Canaan proper. This division will become a source of tension in the following narrative.
8. The enumeration of riches — livestock, precious metals, iron, clothing — describes the war spoils accumulated through the conquest campaigns. The instruction to divide the plunder with those who remained in the Transjordan follows the precedent Moses established for shared spoils (Numbers 31:27) and David will later codify (1 Samuel 30:24-25).
9. The departure from Shiloh marks a geographic separation: the central sanctuary remains in Canaan while the eastern tribes cross back over the Jordan. This physical distance creates the theological anxiety that drives the rest of the chapter.
10. Mizbeach gadol l'mar'eh ('an altar great in appearance') — the altar's conspicuous size is emphasized, making it impossible to overlook. The critical detail is its location: on the western bank of the Jordan, still technically in Canaan. This ambiguity — who built it and why — triggers the crisis. From the western tribes' perspective, an unauthorized altar threatens the centralization of worship commanded in Deuteronomy 12.
11. The report reaches the western tribes as alarming news. El mul erets K'na'an ('facing the land of Canaan') — the phrasing suggests the altar is oriented toward Canaan, visible from the western side. El ever b'nei Yisra'el ('on the side of the Israelites') — the altar stands at the border, a visible marker between east and west.
12. The western tribes' immediate response is military mobilization — the same response mandated in Deuteronomy 13:12-18 for a city that has turned to idolatry. The willingness to wage civil war against fellow Israelites demonstrates the seriousness with which they view potential apostasy. The Achan narrative (chapter 7) proved that one group's sin brings judgment on the entire community.
13. Phinehas is the ideal choice for this embassy. He had demonstrated zealous loyalty to the LORD by acting against apostasy at Baal-peor (Numbers 25:7-13), for which he received the covenant of perpetual priesthood. His presence signals both the gravity of the accusation and the theological competence of the delegation.
14. Ten tribal leaders accompany Phinehas — one from each of the western tribes (excluding Reuben, Gad, and the eastern half of Manasseh). The delegation's size gives it national authority; this is not an informal inquiry but an official confrontation.
15. The delegation crosses the Jordan into Gilead — notably choosing diplomacy before military action, despite the army already being assembled at Shiloh.
16. Mah ha-ma'al hazzeh ('what is this treachery?') — ma'al is a strong term for covenant unfaithfulness, the same word used for Achan's violation (7:1). The accusation is framed as rebellion (mered) against God, not merely a dispute between tribes. The delegation speaks as kol adat Yahweh ('the entire assembly of the LORD'), investing their words with collective covenant authority.
17. The delegation invokes the Baal-peor catastrophe (Numbers 25:1-9) as a corporate memory of apostasy's consequences. The claim that Israel has 'not yet purified from it to this day' treats the Peor incident as ongoing corporate guilt — the wound is still fresh, and another act of unfaithfulness could reopen it. The plague at Peor killed 24,000 Israelites.

- 18.** The theological principle of corporate solidarity: one group's sin brings divine wrath on the whole community. This is the Achan principle (chapter 7) and the lesson of Peor (Numbers 25). The delegation's concern is not merely tribal purity but national survival.
- 19.** A remarkable offer: if the eastern tribes feel their Transjordan territory is ritually impure (t'me'ah) — lacking the divine presence that sanctifies Canaan — they are invited to relocate within the western territories. Erets achuzzat Yahweh ('the land of the LORD's possession') — the land where the tabernacle dwells is considered the LORD's own property. This implies that land east of the Jordan, though divinely allocated, has a secondary status. Mibal'adei mizbach Yahweh ('besides/apart from the altar of the LORD') — the concern is cultic centralization: only one legitimate altar exists.
- 20.** The Achan reference (chapter 7) is the delegation's most powerful argument. Ma'al ma'al ba-cherem ('he committed treachery regarding the devoted things') — the same term ma'al used in verse 16. Achan's individual sin caused Israel's defeat at Ai and resulted not only in his death but in the deaths of the thirty-six soldiers who fell in battle (7:5). V'hu ish echad lo gava ba'avono l'vaddo ('he was one man — he did not perish in his sin alone') — corporate accountability means individual transgression has collective consequences.
- 21.** The eastern tribes now deliver their defense — a carefully constructed theological argument that will vindicate their intentions.
- 22.** El Elohim Yahweh, El Elohim Yahweh — the triple divine name, repeated twice (six total names), forms the most solemn oath formula in the Hebrew Bible. This is an appeal to the divine court: God is invoked as witness, judge, and guarantor of truth. The eastern tribes stake their lives on their sincerity — 'do not spare us today' (al toshi'enu) — if their motives are impure. The intensification through repetition conveys the emotional weight of being unjustly accused.
- 23.** The eastern tribes categorically deny all three types of sacrificial use: olah (burnt offerings), minchah (grain offerings), and zivchei sh'lamim (fellowship/peace offerings). By denying sacrificial intent, they eliminate the charge of cultic rivalry with the Shiloh tabernacle. Yahweh hu y'vaqqesh ('let the LORD himself seek it out') — they submit to divine judgment rather than human.
- 24.** The true motive emerges: fear of future exclusion. Middea'gah middavar ('out of anxiety about a matter') — the eastern tribes acted from theological worry, not rebellion. Their fear is that the Jordan will become not just a geographic boundary but a covenant boundary, and their descendants will be cut off from worship of the LORD.
- 25.** Ein lakhem cheleq ba-Yahweh ('you have no share/portion in the LORD') — this feared declaration would sever the eastern tribes from Israel's covenant identity. The Jordan River, intended merely as a geographic feature, could become a theological barrier. The concern anticipates the real historical tensions between the Transjordan and Cisjordan communities.
- 26.** The emphatic lo l'olah v'lo l'zavach ('not for burnt offering and not for sacrifice') is the interpretive key to the entire episode. The altar has no sacrificial function. It is a witness marker, a memorial — a purpose that the following verse will make explicit.
- 27.** Ki ed hu beinenu uveineikhem ('for it is a witness between us and you') — the altar is a memorial, not a cultic rival. Its purpose is testimonial: to declare across generations that the eastern tribes belong to the same covenant community and worship the same God at the same central sanctuary. The irony is layered: the very act that appeared to threaten cultic unity was motivated by a desire to preserve it.
- 28.** Tavnit mizbach Yahweh ('the pattern/replica of the altar of the LORD') — the altar is explicitly described as a tavnit, a copy or representation of the legitimate altar. The word tavnit is the same used for the 'pattern' of the tabernacle shown to Moses on Sinai (Exodus 25:9). The copy points to the original; it does not replace it.
- 29.** Chalilah lanu ('far be it from us / heaven forbid') — the strongest Hebrew expression of moral horror at the accusation. The eastern tribes affirm the exclusive legitimacy of the tabernacle altar at Shiloh. Mil'vad mizbach Yahweh Eloheinu asher lifnei mishkano ('apart from the altar of the LORD our God which is before his tabernacle') — they acknowledge one legitimate altar, one tabernacle, one place of sacrifice.
- 30.** Vayyitav b'eineihem ('it was good in their eyes') — the defense is accepted. Phinehas, the zealot who killed an Israelite and a Midianite woman for idolatry at Peor (Numbers 25:7-8), is persuaded that the altar poses no threat to covenant faithfulness. His acceptance carries enormous weight.
- 31.** Hayom yada'nu ki v'tokheinu Yahweh ('today we know that the LORD is in our midst') — the absence of sin confirms the divine presence. Phinehas's declaration reverses the crisis: the feared ma'al has not occurred, so the feared wrath will not come. Az hitsaltem et b'nei Yisra'el miyyad Yahweh ('then you have delivered the Israelites from the hand of the LORD') — a striking phrase: rescue not from enemies but from God's own judgment. The greatest danger Israel faces is not foreign armies but divine wrath provoked by covenant unfaithfulness.
- 32.** The delegation returns with the exonerating report. Diplomacy, led by the right person (Phinehas), has prevented a catastrophic civil war.
- 33.** Vay'var'khu Elohim ('they blessed/praised God') — the resolution prompts worship. The phrase 'to devastate the land' (l'shachet et ha-arets) reveals how close the nation came to fratricidal destruction. The entire episode models a pattern: accusation, investigation, defense, resolution — a template for handling internal conflict within the covenant community.
- 34.** The altar receives the name Ed ('Witness'). The naming act mirrors other memorial-naming episodes in the Pentateuch (e.g., Galeed in Genesis 31:47-48). Ki Yahweh ha-Elohim ('for the LORD is God') — the confession embedded in the naming affirms the shared monotheistic faith of all twelve tribes, east and west. The altar becomes a permanent declaration that geographic separation does not create theological division.

## 23

**Summary:** *Joshua, old and near death, summons Israel's leaders for a farewell address. He reminds them of God's faithfulness in the conquest and warns that intermarriage and covenants with the remaining nations will lead to their destruction.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *Joshua's farewell mirrors Moses's: both aging leaders gather Israel to remind them of God's acts and warn against apostasy. The phrase 'not one thing has failed of all the good things the LORD your God promised you' (v. 14) echoes 21:45, but here it carries a warning: the same God who fulfilled every good promise will fulfill every threat. The theological logic is symmetrical — God's faithfulness cuts both ways.*

**Translation Friction:** *The verb davaq (v. 12, 'cling/hold fast') — the same word used for marital union in Genesis 2:24 and for covenant loyalty in Deuteronomy 10:20 — here describes the forbidden attachment to pagan nations. The word's range allows for bitter irony: the clinging Israel should give to God, they might give to the nations instead.*

**Connections:** *Joshua's farewell echoes Moses's in Deuteronomy 31-33. The conditional promise-and-warning structure parallels Deuteronomy 28. The 'thorn in your eyes' metaphor (v. 13) echoes Numbers 33:55. The entire address is vindicated by the book of Judges, which narrates exactly the apostasy Joshua warns against.*

<sup>1</sup>A long time afterward, when the LORD had given Israel rest from all their enemies on every side, and Joshua had grown old and advanced in years, <sup>2</sup>Joshua summoned all Israel — their elders, heads, judges, and officials — and said to them, "I have grown old and am advanced in years. <sup>3</sup>You yourselves have witnessed everything the LORD your God did to all these nations on your behalf, for the LORD your God is the one who fought for you. <sup>4</sup>Look — I have allotted to you by lot these remaining nations as an inheritance for your tribes, along with all the nations I have already cut off, from the Jordan to the Great Sea in the west. <sup>5</sup>The LORD your God himself will push them back from before you and dispossess them on your behalf, and you will take possession of their land, just as the LORD your God promised you. <sup>6</sup>Be very strong in keeping and carrying out everything written in the Book of the Law of Moses, never turning from it to the right or the left, <sup>7</sup>so that you do not associate with these nations remaining among you. Do not invoke the names of their gods, do not swear by them, do not serve them, and do not bow down to them. <sup>8</sup>Instead, hold fast to the LORD your God, just as you have done to this day. <sup>9</sup>The LORD has dispossessed great and powerful nations before you; to this day, no one has been able to stand against you. <sup>10</sup>One of you puts a thousand to flight, because the LORD your God is the one who fights for you, just as he promised. <sup>11</sup>Guard yourselves carefully — love the LORD your God. <sup>12</sup>But if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you, and intermarry with them — if you go among them and they among you — <sup>13</sup>then know with certainty that the LORD your God will no longer dispossess these nations before you. Instead, they will become a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land the LORD your God has given you. <sup>14</sup>Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and all your life that not a single word has failed from all the good promises the LORD your God made concerning you. Everything has come true for you; not one word has failed. <sup>15</sup>But just as every good promise the LORD your God made to you has been fulfilled, so the LORD will bring upon you every harmful word until he has destroyed you from this good land the LORD your God has given you. <sup>16</sup>When you violate the covenant of the LORD your God that he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and you will perish quickly from the good land he has given you."

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Miyamim rabbim ('after many days') — an unspecified but significant period has elapsed since the conquest and allocation. The nation has enjoyed the rest (menucha) promised in 21:44. Vihoshua zaqen ba bayyamim ('Joshua was old, come into days') — the same phrase used of Abraham (Genesis 24:1) and David (1 Kings 1:1). Joshua's mortality sets the stage for his farewell: he must secure the nation's commitment to the covenant before he dies.

2. The fourfold leadership structure (elders, heads, judges, officers) represents the complete governing apparatus of Israel. Joshua's self-identification as old and dying mirrors Moses' farewell in Deuteronomy 31:2 ('I am 120 years old today'). The parallels between Joshua's farewell and Moses' farewell are deliberate — Joshua speaks as Moses' authorized successor, passing on the same covenantal charge.
3. *Atem r'item* ('you yourselves have seen') — Joshua appeals to the living memory of his audience. They are eyewitnesses of divine action, not recipients of secondhand tradition. *Yahweh Eloheikhem hu ha-nilcham lakhem* ('the LORD your God — he is the one fighting for you') — the divine warrior theme from 10:14, 42 is restated as the interpretive lens through which the entire conquest must be understood.
4. *Hippalti lakhem* ('I have caused to fall to you by lot') — the verb *naphal* ('to fall') describes the lot casting that determined tribal territories. Joshua notes the distinction between nations already conquered (*asher hikh'rati*, 'which I cut off') and those still remaining (*ha-nish'arim*, 'the remaining ones'). The Great Sea (*ha-yam ha-gadol*) is the Mediterranean.
5. *V'horish otam millifneikhem* ('he will dispossess them from before you') — the verb *yarash* in the Hiphil means to cause to possess or to dispossess. The remaining nations are not Israel's problem to solve alone; God will complete what he began. *Ka'asher dibber Yahweh Eloheikhem lakhem* ('as the LORD your God spoke to you') — the fulfillment formula. God's word is the guarantee.
6. *Vachazaqtem me'od* ('be very strong') — the same command given to Joshua in 1:7. Now Joshua passes it on to the nation. *Sefer torat Mosheh* ('the book of the Law of Moses') — the written Torah is the permanent standard. *L'vilti sur mimmennu yamin us'mol* ('not turning from it right or left') — the image of a straight path with the Torah as the road. This verse directly echoes Deuteronomy 5:32 and Joshua 1:7, creating a literary frame around the entire book.
7. Four prohibitions escalate the danger: mentioning pagan deity names, swearing oaths by them, serving them, worshipping them. The progression moves from casual cultural accommodation to full apostasy. *L'vilti vo ba-goyim* ('not to enter among the nations') — the warning is against social integration that leads to religious syncretism. *Uv'shem elohem lo tazkiru* ('do not invoke the name of their gods') — even casual reference to pagan deities is forbidden (cf. Exodus 23:13).
8. *Ba-Yahweh Eloheikhem tid'baqu* ('to the LORD your God you must cling') — *davaq* ('cling, hold fast') is the marriage-bond verb from Genesis 2:24, the same term used in Joshua's charge to the Transjordan tribes (22:5). The positive command balances the four negative prohibitions: the antidote to pagan attraction is deeper loyalty to the LORD.
9. *Goyim g'dolim va'atumim* ('nations great and mighty') — the adjectives emphasize that Israel's success is disproportionate to its own strength. The military record confirms divine involvement: the victories cannot be explained by Israel's resources alone.
10. *Ish echad mikkem yirdof elef* ('one man from you shall pursue a thousand') — this ratio echoes the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:30. The hyperbolically favorable odds demonstrate divine empowerment. The verse restates the divine warrior theology: military success is God's gift, not human achievement.
11. *V'nishmartem me'od l'nafshoteikhem* ('guard yourselves greatly for your lives') — the self-guarding command (*shamar*) is existential. Love for God is not merely an emotion but a matter of survival. *L'ahavah et Yahweh Eloheikhem* ('to love the LORD your God') — the Shema command (Deuteronomy 6:5) is the single imperative that encompasses all obedience.
12. *Im shov tashuvu* ('if you indeed turn back') — the doubled verb emphasizes deliberate apostasy, not accidental error. *V'hitchatantem bahem* ('and intermarry with them') — intermarriage is the primary mechanism of assimilation. The warning proves prophetic: the opening chapters of Judges describe exactly this pattern of coexistence leading to syncretism.
13. *Yado'a ted'u* ('know with certainty') — the doubled verb creates an emphatic absolute: there is no ambiguity about the consequences. The imagery escalates: *pach* ('snare'), *moqesh* ('trap'), *shotet* ('whip/scourge'), *ts'ninim* ('thorns'). The unfaithful nation will be tormented by the very peoples it failed to dispossess. *Ad avod'khem me'al ha'adamah ha-tovah* ('until you perish from this good land') — the ultimate consequence is loss of the land itself. The promise-fulfillment of 21:43-45 is conditional; the same God who gave the land can remove Israel from it.
14. *Holekh ha-yom b'derekh kol ha-arets* ('going today in the way of all the earth') — a euphemism for death, also used by David in 1 Kings 2:2. *Lo nafal davar echad* ('not one word has fallen') — this is the exact repetition of 21:45, now placed on Joshua's own lips. The double statement (*hakol ba'u lakhem, lo nafal mimmennu davar echad* — 'everything came to you, not one word from it has failed') is emphatic: God's faithfulness to his promises is complete and beyond dispute.
15. *Ken yavi Yahweh aleikhem et kol ha-davar ha-ra* ('so the LORD will bring upon you every harmful/evil word') — the symmetry is devastating. The same faithfulness that guarantees promises guarantees threats. God's reliability is not selective; if he keeps his word regarding blessings, he will keep it regarding curses. This is the Deuteronomic covenant theology in its starkest form: the blessings of Deuteronomy 28:1-14 and the curses of Deuteronomy 28:15-68 are equally certain.
16. *B'ovr'khem et berit Yahweh Eloheikhem* ('when you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God') — the use of 'when' rather than 'if' in the Hebrew construction carries a sobering undertone. The *berit* (covenant) is the foundational relationship; violating it through worship of other gods triggers the covenant curses. *V'charah af Yahweh bakhem* ('the anger of the LORD will burn against you') — divine anger is the covenant's enforcement mechanism. *Va'avadtem m'herah me'al ha-arets ha-tovah* ('you will perish quickly from the good land') — the warning is exile. Joshua's farewell ends not with comfort but with the sharpest possible warning: the land is a gift that can be revoked.

## 24

**Summary:** *At Shechem, Joshua rehearses Israel's entire history from Abraham to the conquest, challenges them to 'choose this day whom you will serve,' and the people covenant to serve the LORD. Joshua sets up a stone witness, and the book closes with his death and burial.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The covenant at Shechem follows the structure of an ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaty: historical prologue (vv. 2-13), stipulation (vv. 14-15), witness (v. 27), and deposit of the document. Joshua's challenge — 'choose this day whom you will serve' (v. 15) — is the Bible's most famous statement of free will. But the history he recites is entirely about God's actions: 'I took... I gave... I sent... I brought... I delivered.' The choice is real, but it is made against a backdrop of unearned grace.*

**Translation Friction:** *The phrase 'gods your fathers served beyond the River' (v. 2) reveals that Abraham's family worshipped other gods before God's call — a startling admission that election is not merit-based. The large stone 'under the oak that was in the sanctuary of the LORD' (v. 26) blends Canaanite sacred-tree tradition with Israelite covenant practice. We rendered it without editorial comment. Joshua's three-fold warning 'you cannot serve the LORD' (v. 19) is not discouragement but realism.*

**Connections:** *The Shechem covenant connects to Genesis 12:6 (Abraham's first altar), Genesis 33:18-20 (Jacob at Shechem), and Deuteronomy 27 (the Ebal/Gerizim ceremony). Joseph's bones are buried here (v. 32), fulfilling Genesis 50:25 and Exodus 13:19. The stone witness echoes Genesis 28:18 (Jacob's pillar) and Joshua 4 (the Jordan stones). The closing obituary pattern — Joshua, then Eleazar — mirrors the Pentateuch's ending with Moses.*

1Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, heads, judges, and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God. 2Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your ancestors lived beyond the Euphrates River — Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor — and they served other gods. 3 I took your father Abraham from beyond the Euphrates and led him through all the land of Canaan. I multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac. 4I gave Isaac both Jacob and Esau. To Esau I gave the hill country of Seir to possess, while Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt. 5I sent Moses and Aaron, and I struck Egypt with plagues — as I acted in their midst — and afterward I brought you out. 6I brought your ancestors out of Egypt, and you came to the sea. The Egyptians pursued your ancestors with chariots and cavalry to the Sea of Reeds. 7They cried out to the LORD, and he placed darkness between you and the Egyptians. He brought the sea over them and covered them. Your own eyes saw what I did in Egypt. Then you lived in the wilderness for a long time. 8I brought you to the land of the Amorites who lived east of the Jordan. They fought against you, but I handed them over to you, and you took possession of their land. I destroyed them before you. 9Then Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, rose up and fought against Israel. He sent for Balaam son of Beor to curse you, 10but I refused to listen to Balaam. Instead he blessed you repeatedly, and I rescued you from his hand. 11You crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The leaders of Jericho fought against you, as did the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites, and Jebusites, but I handed them over to you. 12I sent the hornet ahead of you, and it drove them out before you — including the two Amorite kings. It was not by your sword or your bow. 13I gave you a land you did not toil for, cities you did not build — and you settled in them. You eat from vineyards and olive groves you did not plant.' 14"Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve him with integrity and faithfulness. Put away the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. 15But if serving the LORD seems wrong to you, then choose for yourselves today whom you will serve — whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." 16The people responded, "Far be it from us to abandon the LORD and serve other gods! 17For the LORD our God is the one who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery, who performed these great signs before our eyes, and who guarded us along the entire road we traveled and among all the peoples we passed through. 18The LORD drove out all the peoples before us, including the Amorites who inhabited the land. We too will serve the LORD, for he is our God." 19Joshua said to the people, "You are not

able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. <sup>20</sup>If you abandon the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and consume you, after having been good to you." <sup>21</sup>The people said to Joshua, "No! We will serve the LORD." <sup>22</sup>Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him." They said, "We are witnesses." <sup>23</sup>"Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and turn your hearts toward the LORD, the God of Israel." <sup>24</sup>The people said to Joshua, "The LORD our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey." <sup>25</sup>So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day and established a statute and an ordinance for them at Shechem. <sup>26</sup>Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak that was in the sanctuary of the LORD. <sup>27</sup>Joshua said to all the people, "This stone will be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words the LORD spoke to us. It will be a witness against you, so that you do not deny your God." <sup>28</sup>Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to his own inheritance. <sup>29</sup>After these events, Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of one hundred and ten years. <sup>30</sup>They buried him within the territory of his inheritance at Timnath-serah in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. <sup>31</sup>Israel served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and throughout the lifetime of the elders who outlived Joshua and who had experienced everything the LORD had done for Israel. <sup>32</sup>The bones of Joseph, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem in the plot of land that Jacob had purchased from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for one hundred pieces of silver. It became part of the inheritance of the descendants of Joseph. <sup>33</sup>Eleazar son of Aaron also died and was buried at Gibeah, which had been given to his son Phinehas in the hill country of Ephraim.

#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Shechem is the most theologically resonant location possible for this covenant ceremony. Abraham built his first altar here (Genesis 12:6-7), Jacob purchased land and erected an altar here (Genesis 33:18-20), and Joseph's bones will be buried here (24:32). Vayyityats'vu lifnei ha-Elohim ('they presented themselves before God') — the verb yatsav ('to station oneself, present oneself') is used for solemn assembly before the divine presence. The same fourfold leadership structure (elders, heads, judges, officers) from 23:2 is convened.
2. Koh amar Yahweh ('thus says the LORD') — Joshua speaks as a prophetic messenger, delivering God's words in the first person. This is the 'messenger formula' used by the prophets. The historical review begins with Israel's pagan origins: Terah and the patriarchal family worshipped other gods (elohim acherim) in Mesopotamia. This starting point is theologically critical — Israel's election was not based on prior merit or piety. God chose Abraham from an idolatrous family.
3. Va'eqqach et avikhem et Avraham ('I took your father Abraham') — God speaks in the first person throughout this historical recital. Every verb is in divine first person: 'I took,' 'I led,' 'I multiplied,' 'I gave.' This sustained use of the divine 'I' makes the entire history of Israel a record of God's actions, not human achievements.
4. The historical summary moves swiftly through the patriarchal period. The reference to Esau receiving Seir establishes that land allocation is a recurring divine pattern — God assigns territory to nations. Jacob's descent to Egypt sets up the exodus narrative that follows.
5. Va'eggof et Mitsrayim ('I struck Egypt') — the entire Exodus event is compressed into a single sentence. The plagues, the confrontation with Pharaoh, the Passover — all are summarized under the divine first person. The emphasis is on agency: God sent, God struck, God brought out.
6. Yam Suf ('Sea of Reeds') — rendered literally rather than following the traditional 'Red Sea' translation, which derives from the Septuagint (erythra thalassa). The Hebrew suf refers to reeds or rushes, and the exact body of water remains debated. The pursuit with chariots and cavalry represents the full military might of ancient Egypt.
7. Vayyasem ma'afel beinekhem uvein ha-mitsrim ('he placed darkness between you and the Egyptians') — this refers to the pillar of cloud that separated Israel from the pursuing army (Exodus 14:19-20). Vattir'einah eineikhem ('your eyes saw') — God addresses the current generation as participants in the historical events, blurring the line between past and present. Covenant memory makes the exodus personally real for every generation.
8. The Transjordan conquest under Moses (Numbers 21:21-35) is the first military chapter of the larger conquest narrative. The pattern is consistent: enemies fight, God delivers, Israel possesses.
9. The Balak-Balaam episode (Numbers 22-24) is presented as a military threat neutralized by divine intervention. Balak's strategy was to use supernatural power (cursing) when conventional warfare proved insufficient.
10. V'lo aviti lishmo'a l'vil'am ('I was not willing to listen to Balaam') — God's sovereign refusal to allow the curse transforms every attempted imprecation into a blessing (Numbers 23:11, 20; 24:10). Va'atsil etkhem miyado ('I delivered you from his hand') — divine rescue operates not only through military victory but through control of prophetic speech.
11. The seven-nation list represents the full array of Canaan's inhabitants (cf. Deuteronomy 7:1). The divine first person continues to dominate: 'I handed them over' (va'etten otam b'yedkhem). The conquest narrative is compressed to a single verse — details that occupied chapters 6-12 are

summarized under the governing theme of divine agency.

12. Va'eshlach lifneikhem et ha-tsir'ah ('I sent the hornet before you') — the tsir'ah ('hornet') is debated: literal stinging insects, a metaphor for panic or plague, or possibly Egyptian military forces (the bee was a symbol of Lower Egypt). Whatever the referent, the point is emphatic: Lo v'charb'kha v'lo v'qasht'kha ('not by your sword and not by your bow') — Israel's military technology was not the decisive factor. The two Amorite kings are Sihon and Og (cf. 2:10; 9:10).
13. The closing line of God's historical speech echoes Deuteronomy 6:10-11 with devastating precision. Everything Israel enjoys is unearned: the land (not their labor), the cities (not their construction), the vineyards and olive groves (not their planting). The entire historical survey — from Terah's idolatry in Mesopotamia to the unearned abundance in Canaan — establishes one theme: grace precedes demand. God's gifts create the obligation of loyalty.
14. V'attah ('now therefore') — the transition from historical recital to demand. B'tamim uve'emet ('in wholeness/integrity and in truth/faithfulness') — tamim means complete, without division; emet means reliable, genuine. Service to God must be undivided and authentic. V'hasiru et ha-elohim asher av'du avoteikhem ('put away the gods your ancestors served') — this command implies that some Israelites still possess idols, a shocking revelation. The idolatrous past of Mesopotamia and Egypt still has a hold on the present community. Rachel stole Laban's teraphim (Genesis 31:19); the golden calf was an Egyptian import (Exodus 32); idolatry is a persistent temptation.
15. Bacharu lakhem ha-yom et mi ta'avdun ('choose for yourselves today whom you will serve') — this is the most famous verse in Joshua and one of the most quoted in the Hebrew Bible. The demand for choice assumes genuine freedom; covenant loyalty cannot be coerced. Joshua presents two alternatives to serving the LORD: the gods of Mesopotamia (ancestral paganism) or the gods of the Amorites (local paganism). Neither option is presented favorably. V'anokhi uveiti na'avod et Yahweh ('as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD') — Joshua's personal declaration models the response he expects. His commitment is not contingent on the nation's decision.
16. Chalilah lanu me'azov et Yahweh ('far be it from us to abandon the LORD') — the same formula of moral revulsion used by the eastern tribes (22:29). The people's response is emphatic and immediate.
17. The people echo God's historical recital with their own memory. Ha-ma'aleh otanu ('the one who brought us up') — the exodus is the defining act. Mi-beit avadim ('from the house of slaves') — the standard Deuteronomic formula (Deuteronomy 5:6; 6:12; 8:14). The people cite three divine acts: deliverance from Egypt, miraculous signs, and protection on the journey.
18. Gam anachnu na'avod et Yahweh ki hu Eloheinu ('we too will serve the LORD, for he is our God') — the people's affirmation matches Joshua's declaration in verse 15. The confession ki hu Eloheinu ('for he is our God') is a covenant formula: it identifies the relationship that determines identity and obligation.
19. Lo tukh'lu la'avod et Yahweh ('you are not able to serve the LORD') — Joshua's startling response challenges the people's easy commitment. His warning is not that God is unwilling to be served but that the standard is impossibly high. Elohim q'doshim hu ('he is a holy God') — the plural q'doshim is an intensive plural ('supremely holy'), not a numerical plural. El qanno hu ('he is a jealous God') — qanno describes God's exclusive demand for loyalty (cf. Exodus 20:5; 34:14). Lo yissa l'fish'akhem ('he will not bear/forgive your rebellion') — the severity is designed to ensure the people understand the weight of their commitment.
20. V'shav v'hera lakhem v'khillah etkhem acharei asher hetiv lakhem ('he will turn and bring harm and consume you after he has done you good') — the contrast between past goodness and future judgment is sharp. God's prior generosity intensifies rather than mitigates the consequences of unfaithfulness. The word khillah ('consume, finish off') is absolute.
21. Lo, ki et Yahweh na'avod ('No — rather, the LORD we will serve') — the people persist despite Joshua's warning. The doubled commitment (vv. 16-18, 21) after being warned of the impossibility of true faithfulness (v. 19) deepens the solemnity. The reader, knowing the book of Judges, understands how quickly this commitment will be tested.
22. Edim atem bakhem ('you are witnesses against yourselves') — a covenant-lawsuit formula. The people's own declaration becomes testimony that can be used against them in the event of future unfaithfulness. They bear witness to their own freely chosen obligation. The exchange has the formal structure of a legal proceeding: charge, response, witness testimony.
23. Hasiru et elohi ha-nekhar asher b'qirb'khem ('put away the foreign gods that are in your midst') — the command confirms that foreign gods were indeed present among the Israelites (cf. v. 14). This echoes Jacob's command at Shechem to put away foreign gods (Genesis 35:2-4) — at the same location. V'hattu et l'vavkhem ('incline your hearts') — the verb natah ('to incline, to bend') asks for the reorientation of the inner self toward God.
24. The third and final affirmation — the most complete: na'avod ('we will serve') and nishma ('we will obey/listen'). The verb shama adds the dimension of hearing and heeding God's ongoing instruction. This mirrors the Sinai declaration na'aseh v'nishma ('we will do and we will hear/obey,' Exodus 24:7).
25. Vayyikhrot Yehoshua berit la-am ('Joshua cut a covenant with the people') — the verb karat ('to cut') reflects the ancient practice of cutting animals in covenant ceremonies (cf. Genesis 15:10, 17-18). This Shechem covenant is the culminating act of the book of Joshua — it renews the Sinai covenant on Canaan's soil. Vayyasem lo choq umishpat ('he set for him a statute and an ordinance') — Joshua formalizes the covenant obligations in legal terms.

- 26.** Vayyikhtov Yehoshua et ha-d'varim ha-elleh b'sefer torat Elohim ('Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God') — Joshua adds the covenant text to the existing Torah scroll, establishing continuity between Mosaic legislation and the Shechem covenant. The great stone (even g'dolah) functions as a witness monument, like the stones at Gilgal (4:20) and the altar 'Witness' (22:34). Tachat ha-allah asher b'miqdash Yahweh ('under the oak in the sanctuary of the LORD') — this oak likely connects to the oak of Moreh where Abraham first received the land promise (Genesis 12:6) and where Jacob buried the foreign gods (Genesis 35:4). The location ties patriarchal history to national covenant.
- 27.** Ki hi sham'ah et kol imrei Yahweh ('for it has heard all the words of the LORD') — the stone is personified as a witness that 'heard' the covenant proceedings. This literary device gives the covenant a permanent, physical guarantor. Creation itself testifies to the covenant (cf. Deuteronomy 30:19, where heaven and earth are called as witnesses). Pen t'kach'shun b'Eloheikhem ('lest you deny/lie against your God') — the stone guards against future apostasy by preserving the memory of the commitment.
- 28.** Ish l'nachalato ('each to his inheritance') — the covenant assembly concludes with the people dispersing to their territorial allotments. The nachalah is no longer a promise but a reality. The link between covenant commitment and land possession is maintained: the people go from the covenant ceremony to their God-given inheritance.
- 29.** Eved Yahweh ('servant of the LORD') — the title previously reserved for Moses (1:1, 2, 7, 13, 15) is now applied to Joshua. This is the ultimate honor: Joshua has completed his commission and earned the same title as his predecessor. One hundred and ten was considered the ideal lifespan in Egyptian culture; it is also the age at which Joseph died (Genesis 50:26). The narrative bookend with Joseph is deliberate.
- 30.** Bighvul nachalato ('within the border of his inheritance') — Joshua is buried in the modest city he personally requested (19:50). The servant-leader who oversaw the distribution of an entire land rests in the small inheritance he humbly claimed last. Timnath-serah means 'remaining portion' — fitting for the leader who took what was left after all others were served.
- 31.** Va'asher yad'u et kol ma'aseh Yahweh asher asah l'Yisra'el ('who knew all the work of the LORD that he did for Israel') — faithfulness lasted as long as eyewitnesses survived. Once the generation that personally experienced God's acts died, the next generation 'did not know the LORD' (Judges 2:10). This verse is both a commendation and a warning: covenant fidelity depends on transmitted memory. When the testimony fails, apostasy follows.
- 32.** The burial of Joseph's bones fulfills the oath from Genesis 50:25 and Exodus 13:19. Joseph's dying request — that his bones be carried to the promised land — expressed faith that God would fulfill his promise. The burial at Shechem, on land Jacob purchased (Genesis 33:19), creates a chain of legal ownership: patriarchal purchase, exodus transport, conquest-era burial. B'me'ah q'sitah ('for one hundred qesitah') — the qesitah is an archaic unit of value, possibly a specific weight of silver. The Joseph burial narrative closes the arc that began in Genesis and links the patriarchal era to the conquest era.
- 33.** The book closes with three burials: Joshua (v. 30), Joseph (v. 32), and Eleazar (v. 33). Joshua represents faithful leadership, Joseph represents fulfilled promise across centuries, and Eleazar represents the priesthood that mediated between God and Israel throughout the conquest and allocation. Giv'at Pinchas ('the hill of Phinehas') — the priestly inheritance passes to the next generation. The triple burial ending simultaneously commemorates the past, marks the transition to a new era, and silently raises the question that the book of Judges will answer: what happens when this generation's witness fades?