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SOME NOTES ON THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

I. THE HISTORICAL VALUE OF THE STORIES IN THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

Jos. does not give an explicit account of the occupation of Canaan by the Israelites under the command of Joshua. In one place Jos. says that Joshua has occupied the whole Canaan, while in another it adds that Joshua is still to conquer many other territories in Canaan. In some places of Jos. it is said that Yahweh defeated the Canaanites and gave the conquered land to the Israelites, so it is the Lord, who conquered Canaan. The territory described in Jos. did not belong to the Israelites until the reign of King Solomon. In some stories there are insertions which are not contextual. There are also some repetitions and inconsistencies. According to Jos. the Israelites were conquering Canaan under Joshua's command quickly and without any difficulties. The lack of an explicit account and the presence of some characteristic details in the descriptions in Jos. may lead to the following question: what is the historical value of the accounts in Jos. about the occupation of Canaan by the Israelites under the command of Joshua?

The Biblical and archaeological data speak both for and against the authenticity of the stories in Jos. The following details speak for the authenticity of the stories: the Israelites' lack of resources whereas the Canaanites on whom Israel struck possessed them (cf. Jos. 11, 4; 17, 16); Joshua's war tactics: sending out spies to the city (cf. Jos. 2; 7, 2f.), an ambush (cf. Jos. 8), a night march and attack by surprise (cf. Jos. 10, 9; 11, 7), pursuit (cf. Jos. 10, 10; 11, 8), slaughter of the defeated enemy, destruction of his weapons, peace treaties; and also the authentic depiction of reality in Jos. (7, 21; 13, 1; 14, 6-14; 15, 63; 16, 10; 17, 13; 17, 14-18; 24), the use of very old expressions like kesita - "pieces of money" (cf. Jos. 24, 32). The above data sup-

port the authenticity of these stories. The authenticity of these stories is further supported by non-Biblical documents such as the tablets from Tell el-Amarna¹, the letter of Thutmose III², the temple of god Amon in Thebes³, the stele of Mesha, king of Moab⁴, the testimony of Procopius of Caesarea⁵, archaeological excavations⁶ that prove the annihilation of many cities at the end of the Late Bronze Age and their reconstruction in the Iron Age, an almost fourfold increase of population in the southern Canaan in that period⁷. The following texts in Jos. raise doubts regarding the possession of whole Canaan by the Israelites under the command of Joshua: Jos. 10,40; 11, 16-22; 13,1; 23,4 s.

The archaeological studies performed by K. Kenyon⁸ in Tell es-Sultan, and by Y. Aharoni⁹ in Galilee and north-eastern Negeb, and by J.A. Callaway¹⁰ in Ai and Raddanah do not support the theory of the occupation of Canaan by the Israelites in the transition period between the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age.

Jos. gives a theological interpretation¹¹ to those events and one can draw the following conclusions:

1. The stories in Jos. are of historic-didactic character.
2. There are references in the book to historical events concerning different periods of the history of Israel and other nations. Joshua the commander of Israel is the author of some events that are described in Jos. Many of events although performed by others were attributed to Joshua strictly for theological purposes.
3. The writers did not include the whole account of historical events as they happened in the course of time but just mentioned them and added their own reflections. It was their intention to induce their contemporaries to worship Yahweh, to urge them to be more faithful to Yahweh and to acknowledge Yahweh as a God stronger and more powerful than the gods of other nations.
4. It is the task of literary critics to determine which story presenting Joshua's achievements is the authentic one, and which is merely attributed to him.

II. THE LITERARY COMPOSITION OF JOS. 1,1-9

The following remarkable points can be noted in Jos. 1,1-9. There are three terms to refer to Israel: "the sons of Israel", a term drawing on the tradition of the holy place of Sichem and referring not so much to the total of the twelve generations as to the old tribes of Israel that united in Moab, made a covenant with Yahweh on Sinai and entered Canaan¹²; "all this people", which denotes

all the twelve generations gathered to worship Yahweh¹³; and "this people", by which is meant some part of the twelve generations allied to Yahweh¹⁴.

Yahweh gives the sons of Israel "every place you tread with the soles of your feet", whereas "all this people" gets the area "from the wilderness and Lebanon to the great river Euphrates and to the Great Sea westward".

Verse 7a is an almost literal repetition of verse 6a. The presence of these points in Jos. 1,1-9 has been explained in various ways.

The followers of the Hexateuch theory assume that Jos. 1,1-9 is composed of the sources JE or E and some editorial additions¹⁵. W. Rudolph¹⁶ explains these points as being due to corrections made by later authors. A. Schulz¹⁷ distinguishes in Jos. 1,1-9 the narrative proper and later glosses. M. Noth¹⁸ finds in it traces of the Sichem tradition; the tradition was modified by the so-called Deuteronomistic school at the time of religious reform in the 7th century B.C. R. Nelson¹⁹ considers that Jos. 1,1-11 was composed by Dtr1 on the basis of traditions going back to Joshua's time. According to B. Peckham²⁰ Jos. 1,1-9 was written by two Deuteronomists: Dtr1 wrote Jos. 1,1a on the basis of Dt. 34,1a, 4-5, 7 and Jos. 1,3, 5ab^a drawing on Dt. 7,24b; 11,24a; 31,6b; Dtr2 supplemented the text of Dtr1 by making Joshua the legitimate successor of Moses and a model of obedience to the Torah. Peckham also thinks that Dtr2 drew on Dt. 1,38; 3,28; 31,7f.

God's speech to Joshua at Shittim mentions the land of Canaan under Israel's rule in the days of Joshua (v. 3) and of King Solomon (v. 4). The possession of Canaan is the fulfilment of Yahweh's promises to Israel ("as I declared to Moses", "I swore to their fathers"). God's promise to give the land to Israel is expressed in the perfect tense (Heb. nātan) when concerning "all this people" and in the future tense (Heb. it^{en}) when concerning "this people". God exhorts Israel to keep "all the Law" (Heb. sefer katōrāk), i.e., the old Book of the Covenant from pre-kingdom times which was discovered in the Temple under the king Josiah (cf. 2 K. 22) and which contained laws relating to the cult (cf. 2 K. 23). God imposes the obligation of keeping "all the Law" on "all this people" (v. 6), commands the leader he has appointed to study the Law carefully and stand firm in keeping it (v. 7) (this might refer to religious reform) and assures him that keeping "all the Law" will give the land to "this people". The observing of "all the Law" does not concern "the sons of Israel".

All this suggests that God's speech to Joshua in Shittim concentrates on observing the Law, especially those points in it that concerned the cult.

"All this people" is to worship only Yahweh, because he fulfilled the promises given to Moses. The promises were fulfilled between the days of Joshua, who received as much land as he was able to occupy, and the time of David, who

became master of the extensive area specified in v. 4. This truth was recorded after the schism of the 9th century B.C., during the spread of idolatry.

There was another attempt to do away with idolatry and introduce the exclusive cult of Yahweh during the religious reform of the 7th century B.C. It was then that the people were taught that king Josiah was the king of Israel by God's decree ("be strong") and that the religious reform was required by Yahweh himself ("stand firm"). The reform was to guarantee Israel prosperity.

During the Captivity, when Israel had been deprived of the land given by Yahweh, they were again instructed that keeping the Law would certainly restore them to their land. The people would enter Canaan from the Babylonian captivity in the same way as Joshua and his people had entered the land from the slavery in Egypt. God's speech to Joshua at Shittim contains some references to historical facts such as the general delimitation of the area conquered by Joshua (v. 3), the detailed delimitation of the area of Solomon's kingdom (v. 4) and the mention of the Book (Heb. sefer). These constitute the historical stratum of Jos. 1,1-9.

In the 9th century B.C. these references were combined and supplemented with the mention of Moses and the promise of peace (v. 5a). All that was put in the form of a prophetic revelation ("Yahweh spoke", v. 1); hence the supplementary part is ascribed to a prophet, who rendered God's speech in a form designed to defend the cult of Yahweh against idolatry. The supplementary portion is thus the prophetic stratum of Jos. 1,1-9.

The remaining additions are the work of known Deuteronomists from the days of the religious reform and the Captivity. Jos. 1,1-9 is thus a complex record of historical documents and of three stages of editorial reflexion. It was composed for the purpose of religious instruction about the cult.

Notes

¹ Cf. J.A. Knudtzon, Die El-Amarna Tafeln, 2 vol., Leipzig 1915.

² Cf. A. Jirku, Die ägyptischen Listen palästinensische und syrischer Ortsnamen in Umschrift und mit historisch-archäologischen Kommentar, Leipzig 1917, pp. 312f.

³ Cf. J. Garstang, The Foundations of Biblical History: Joshua - Judges, London 1931, pp. 19-28. J. Garstang found in the temple of god Amon 27 names of towns that are mentioned in the Book of Joshua.

⁴ Cf. H. Donner, W. Rölling, Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften, Wiesbaden 1962, n° 181.

⁵ Policarpus, De Bello Vandalico 2,10 [in:] PG 38,5.

⁶ Cf. W.F. Albright, The Israelite Conquest of Canaan in the Light of Archaeology, BASOR 74(1939) 4, pp. 11-23; G.E. Wright, Introduction [in:] R.G. Boling and G.E. Wright, Joshua. A new translation with introduction and commentary, (Anchor Bible 6), New York 1982, pp. 72-88; Y. Yadin, Military and Archaeological Aspects of the Conquest of Canaan in the Book of Joshua, Jerusalem 1960; W. Thomas, Archaeology and Old Testament Study, Oxford 1967.

⁷ L.E. Stager, Highland Village Life in Palestine Some Three Thousand Years Ago, The Oriental Institute Notes and News 69(1981) 1.

⁸ K. Kenyon, Digging up Jericho, London 1957.

⁹ Y. Aharoni, The Settlement of the Israelite Tribes in Upper Galilee, Jerusalem 1957; idem, The Settlement of the Tribes in the Negeb, A New Picture, Ariel 41(1976), pp. 3-19.

¹⁰ J.A. Callaway, The 1968-1969 Ai (et-Tell) Excavation, BASOR 198 (1970), pp. 7-31; idem, New Evidence on the Conquest of Ai, JBI 87(1968), pp. 312-320; J.A. Callaway and R.E. Colley, A Salvage Excavation at Raddanah in Birch, BASOR 201(1971), pp. 9-19.

¹¹ The terms in the Book of Joshua: men ready (Heb. hālûsē - Jos. 4,13), soldiers (Heb. hamil hamāh - Jos. 6,3), his men (Heb. hehalûs - Jos. 6,7.9.13), troops (Heb. is gibore hahajil - Jos. 8,3), all his soldiers (Heb. kōl - am hamile hamāh - Jos. 8,3.11; 10,7; 11,7), all the people (Heb. kōl hagōj - Jos. 3,17; 4,1), people of Israel (Heb. bēnē Iisrā'el - Jos. 1,2-4,21; 5,1), all the men of Israel (Heb. kōl is Iisrā'el - Jos. 10,24), the officers (Heb. anē sē hamile hamāh - Jos. 10,24) have a liturgical character (cf. G.D. Cova, Popolo e vittoria l'uso di trwhehrj' in Gios 6, Bb 66(1986), pp. 221-240).

¹² R.G. Boling, Joshua [in:] R.G. Boling, G.E. Wright, op.cit., p. 216.

¹³ A.R. Hulst, am/gōj Volk [in:] E. Jenni, C. Westermann, Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament, München 1971-, vol. 2, pp. 290-325.

¹⁴ G.D. Cova, op.cit.

¹⁵ J. Wellhausen (Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments, Berlin 1903, p. 111) assumes that v. 1-2 were due to JE while the remaining part was written by the redactor. A. Dillmann (Die Bücher Numeri, Deuteronomium und Josua, Leipzig 1886², p. 203) finds evidence of some independent author in v. 3-6. D.C. Steuernagel (Lehrbuch der Einleitung in des Alte Testament mit einem Anhang über die Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen, Tübingen 1912, p. 273) assumes that v. 1-2 come from Dtr2 and v. 3-9 from several redactors.

¹⁶ W. Rudolph, Der Elohist von Exodus bis Joshua (BZAW 68), Berlin 1938, pp. 258-263.

¹⁷ A. Schulz, Das Buch Josue (Die Heilige Schrift des Alten Testaments II, 3), Bonn 1924, p. 2.

¹⁸ M. Noth, Das Buch Josue (=HAT I, 7), Tübingen 1953², VII.

¹⁹ R.D. Nelson, review of the commentary by G.E. Wright, R.G. Boling, op. cit., [in:] CBQ 45(1983), p. 95.

²⁰ B. Peckham, The Composition of Joshua 3-4, CBQ 46(1984), pp. 428ff.