

Exegetical Notes on Joshua

I use the Michigan transliteration scheme for biblical Hebrew, in which the alphabet is)bgdhwzx+yklmns(pcqr&\$t . Dagesh is a period, and length of vowels is not indicated.

2:1, Connection of *xere\$*

The translations uniformly take this word to modify “sent,” and the usual understanding is that the sending is intended to be secret from the Canaanites. The cantillation is against this. The preceding word bears *pa\$ta* (disjunctive), and *xere\$* bears *munax* (conjunctive), linking it to the following *le)mor*. On this basis one should translate, “Joshua sent ... two men as spies, saying secretly,” The point is then that they were sent on their mission without the knowledge of the rest of the Israelites. In confirmation, note that when they return in 2:23,24, it is to Joshua, and to him that they make their report. Also, when in 6:17 Joshua first tells the nation at large about these two men and Rahab, he describes them not as spies but as “messengers.” In God’s grace, they were messengers, evangelizing Rahab, and James memorializes this title. But Joshua never calls them “spies” before the rest of the nation. That aspect of their mission was confidential.

Joshua would certainly have a reason for caution in sending them out. The original spy mission in Num 13-14 was composed of representatives of each of the tribes, to support a referendum on the invasion, a referendum that backfired badly. Whatever the spies may discover, Joshua wants no danger of such a popular backlash. These two spies bear a private commission from Joshua. Their intelligence is for his information in carrying out his mission, not for the nation’s in deciding whether to undertake it.

2:1, “the land, even Jericho”

Jericho is not an afterthought or superfluous (Noth and others). Joshua is echoing the terms of the charter to the original spies (Num 13:18-20), which alternates “land” with three specifics on which they are to gather intelligence: the people, the land, and the agricultural fertility. This mission is more focused. It concerns only the cities, and in fact only one city, Jericho. But its continuity with the earlier one is seen in making that detail a specification of the more general term, “the land.”

2:1, why the harlot?

Why mention Rahab's occupation at all? I don't believe they went there to seek her services. Her residence would be a public place, a sort of inn, where they could attract little attention to themselves and at the same time hope to overhear conversations revealing the state of the inhabitants. But why not just call it an inn?

There may be an intent to recall the only previous reference to Israel's residence at Shittim, Num. 25:1, where the root *znh* is also prominent. There the nation fell victim to the impurities of the locals, converting to their fertility cult. Now, after extensive intervening discipline, they are tested once again, and this time it is the prostitute who adopts the faith of YHWH. Often the Lord will take us back to a place where once we failed in order to try again. Compare the return to Kadesh Barnea after the forty years of wandering (Num. 13:26; 20:1) before the final directed march through Transjordan to the plains of Moab, or Jonah's second commissioning after he so badly managed the first.

Did James understand the Discourse Structure of Joshua 2?

Joshua 2 consists of two conversational cycles (1b-7, 8-23a), the first built around Rahab's conversation with the king's constables, the second around her conversation with the spies. Surrounding these (1a, 23b-14) is an outer frame: spies commissioned by Joshua, and their report back to him. The conversational cycles are similar to one another. In both,

- the conversation is introduced and followed by non-conversational narrative (setting, 1a-2, 8, and epilog, 6-7, 21b-23a).
- the conversation is interrupted with a narrative statement in the middle (4a, 15).
- Thus both cycles are roughly chiasmic, bringing a certain amount of focus to the narrative interruptions (4a, 15).

These narrative interruptions (4a, 15) caught my attention, and I believe they may have caught the attention of others much earlier.

The NT twice mentions Rahab, once to praise her faith for receiving the spies (Heb 11:31), once to praise her faith-based works for receiving them (the same evidence of faith as in Heb.) and then sending them out (James 2:25). Both passages highlight the fact that she "received" the spies, using *dexomai* or its compound.

The usual LXX reflex of *dexomai* is *lqx*, which occurs in Joshua 2 only in 4a. It is true that LXX at this point uses *lambanw*, which is the more common reflex of *lqx*. LXX Joshua nowhere uses *dexomai*. But most LXX occurrences of *dexomai* represent *lqx*, so this is the Hebrew verb that would occur to a Greek speaker thinking about *dexomai* and

back-translating from a broad knowledge of the LXX. So Hebrews and James appear to have Josh 2:4a in mind as the basis for their statement that “Rahab received the spies.”

Their understanding is at variant with the usual translations, which take *lqx* as just a helper verb to the main idea, “she had taken them and hidden them,” with no special content. Problem: the suffix on “hid” is singular, not plural: “She had taken *them* and hidden *it*.” If “took” is just a helper verb, then “it” must refer to the spies, but this would be clumsy grammatically. (The rabbis explained that one of them was a Levite and declined to be hidden, trusting in God to deliver him!)

The idea that 4a is to be understood as perfect tense also does not fit the plot. What has happened up to this point that would lead the spies to reveal themselves to her as Israelites, and lead her to conceal them? They lodge in a public house precisely to avoid attention and disclosure.

Hebrews and James suggest that the “taking” or “receiving” is stronger than that, something that results from her faith, and something that she may well have wanted to hide from the king’s messengers. Then “hid it” refers to the fact of her receiving them. She received the two men, and didn’t tell the king about it.

But now: what does it mean to receive them? Can’t mean simply that she let them into her house.

- She doesn’t hide that. Her first words of response are, “There came men unto me.”
- Admitting two strangers into an inn is hardly an act of faith (Hebrews) or a good work to justify one (James).

A good clue is Matt. 10:41, “He that receiveth [*dexomai*] a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward.” Our reception of someone includes our attitude toward him.

- Originally, she received them as lodgers.
- The king wants her to recognize them as spies, and hand them over to him.

But with a heart prepared by God and already fearing him, she receives them sympathetically, as potential “messengers” (James), and resolves to hide both them and her sympathy for them from the king. It may be that it is at this moment, as the king’s constables stand before her, that she resolves to protect the men as God’s messengers, and to conceal from the king the fact of their presence in her house.

It is fair to ask whether *lqx* is used in the sense of receiving someone into a company. *qbl* is used this way once, in 1 Chr. 12:18, but in the Qal *qbl* is only a late word, and relatively scarce (12 occurrences). *lqx* may be used this way in Ezek 16:61, but there it may be in the sense of a gift. Still, her receipt is stronger than just opening the door to them; she is protecting them.

Back now to the discourse structure of the chapter. We have two conversational cycles, each interrupted (4a, 15). 4a highlights her reception of the spies, and 15 describes how she sent them out. Is it a coincidence that these two details are the very ones picked up by the NT? I'm particularly intrigued by James, who summarizes the entire incident with the very two actions that are highlighted by the intrinsic structure of the chapter! I suspect he sees the same structural features that I do. When I get to glory, I intend to seek him and Joshua out and have a discussion on the literary architecture of the chapter. Want to join us?

Command Patterns in ch. 3-6

In his foundation work on paragraph types ("An Apparatus for the Identification of Paragraph Types," *Notes on Linguistics* 15 (July 1980) 5-22), Robert Longacre identifies what he calls an "execution paragraph," consisting of two slots: a plan, and its execution. Both may be by the same person ("She said, 'I'm going downtown.' Then she went shopping."), or the plan may be a suggestion or command by one party, followed by execution by another. "The Lord said, 'Noah, build an ark.' So Noah built an ark." The backbone of Joshua 3-4 is a three-fold repetition of an elaboration of this execution paragraph, in which the initial command comes from the Lord to Joshua (3:7-8; 4:1-3; 4:14-16), then Joshua passes it on to the people (3:9-13; 4:4-7; 4:17), who then execute it (3:14-16; 4:8-9; 4:18). (On starting the third initial command with 4:14, see below.) The same pattern is seen with doubling in the commands concerning the conquest of Jericho in ch. 6 (with some embellishment). The Lord's command in vv.2-5 has two parts: days 1-6 (3-4a) and day 7 (4b-5). Joshua's forwarding of the command and the people's obedience are doubled, once for days 1-6 (6-7, 8-14) and again for day 7 (16-19, 20-26).

3:7; 4:14, How does the Lord Magnify Joshua?

The first and last forwarded command paragraphs in the episode of crossing the Jordan (ch. 3-4) are very similar to one another. Each focuses on the priests' relation to the river (first paragraph: tell them to stop when they reach the middle; second paragraph: tell them they may come up). Each is also associated with a reference to the Lord's magnifying Joshua. In the first, this reference is embedded in the Lord's speech, as a motive for the command. Because of the repetition both of priestly movements and the

magnification motif, I suspect the second should also be associated with its paragraph, by taking 4:15 as explicative of 14: “The Lord magnified Joshua, in this way: he spake unto Joshua, saying, ‘tell the priests....’” What is so wonderful about these two commands (“stand still, move”), that they should inspire the people to fear? During the wilderness wanderings, the ark followed the cloud, and the people followed the ark. In Num 10:35,36, Moses appears not to be commanding the ark to move so much as interpreting its sovereign motions. Now the ark moves at Joshua’s command. God is leading through a man, rather than through his direct revelation in the cloud.

Associated with this elevation of Joshua is a significant change in the Ark’s position. Throughout the wilderness wanderings it was apparently at the head of the column, seeking out the next encampment (cf. Num. 10:33). Joshua apparently expects that continue in Canaan, for he originally commands the people (3:3,4) to go “after” the ark, leaving a respectable distance. In this light, the Lord’s command for the priests to stop in the river while the nation passes over represents a significant change in policy, and when next we see the column in motion, around Jericho, the ark is now in the midst, not at the head; or as Joshua says on receiving the Lord’s command, “The living God is AMONG you” (3:10).

4:12-13, Where are the Rest of RGM/2?

At first glance, there appears to be an inconsistency between the promise of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh in Num. 32:21, 27 that they would go “all armed for war,” a multitude we expect from Num. 26:7, 18, 34 to total over 110,000 men, and the report of Josh 4:13 that only 40K actually participated in the invasion. A key term in both Num. 32 and Josh. 4 is *xaluc*, usually translated “armed.” The term appears again in 6:9, where it is again puzzling. It describes the portion of the procession at Jericho that precedes the Ark, in contrast to the rear guard that follows it, yet 6:3 specifically says that only the men of war participate in the procession.

Both puzzles are resolved if one derives *xaluc* not from BDB’s second root (where the Qal is attested only in this passive ptc form), but from the first (“to draw off or out, withdraw”), which has a live Qal. From *xlc* I, the form would mean mean "withdrawn, drawn out," and thus could plausibly mean a group of men “selected” for a specific mission, or what we call even in modern military parlance, a “detachment.” This is actually a better rendering, given its contexts.

- The passive ptc appears first in Num 31:5 to describe a smaller force selected from the whole to battle Midian. Cf. the verb in 31:3. The context emphasizes that this is not the entire group.
- Twice in 1 Chr 12 (23,24) to describe the forces that fell away to David during the time of Saul, a self-appointed detachment from Saul’s army.

- Two late uses do not furnish data either for or against the “detachment” hypothesis: Isa 15:4, to describe forces of Moab; 2 Chr 28:14, an expeditionary force from Israel against Judah.

Other than Josh 6, the other 9x, in Numbers 32, Deut, and Josh 4:13, all refer to the forces of RGM/2. If we take the term here also in the sense of a “detachment” of the complete force of RGM, then 4:13 does not violate the promise to Moses by sending only 40K out of the total; they committed to send, not “all the armed men,” but “the entire detachment,” which numbered about 35% of their total strength. And in Josh. 6, it is this detachment that takes the lead-most position in the march around Jericho, just as they led the way across the Jordan in Josh. 4.

I ordinarily have little patience with the NEB, but it is interesting that they have embedded this interpretation explicitly in their translation of 6:7.

5:11, Don't Lose the Old Corn.

Modern translators universally take the noun (*abur* in 5:11,12 (appearing only here) in the generic sense of “produce,” sometimes rendering it with the same term used for *tebu)ah* at the end of v.12. The AV derived the word from the temporal sense of (*BR* and renders it “old corn.”

In doing so I believe they are strongly and properly influenced by the legislation in Lev. 23:10-14, given specifically for the time “When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof” (v.10). That legislation specifies that the new harvest may be enjoyed for the first time only after the wave sheaf has been offered to the Lord, and this takes place “on the morrow after the sabbath,” the sabbath apparently being the day of rest commanded for the day after Passover in Lev. 23:7. So the order is: Passover on 14 Nisan, sabbath on 15 Nisan, firstfruits and consumption of the new harvest on 16 Nisan.

Josh 5:11, 12 says specifically that the Israelite ate (*abur* on the morrow after the Passover, and that the manna did not cease until the following day, from which point on they ate of the *tebu)ah* of the land. Had they eaten of crops they found growing in the field on 15 Nisan, they would have violated Lev. 23. Now, its later history shows that Israel was certainly capable of violating Lev. 23, but the entire tenor of Josh 5 is one of sacral preparation of the people for holy war. The narrator emphasizes their OBEDIENCE in preparation for the victory of ch. 6 just as much as ch. 7 emphasizes Achan's DISOBEDIENCE as the foundation for the disaster at Ai, and it would be exceedingly careless (and without literary purpose) for him to document an explicit

disregard for the ordinance of firstfruits. I believe he chose (*abur*, with its temporal overtones, to refer to old grain Israel had discovered in grainaries or storehouses, emphasizing its distinction from the new crop that would come under the proscription of Lev. 23. Modern renderings seem oblivious to the issue, which is sad.

6:4, “Trumpets of Rams’ Horn”?

The word commonly rendered here (and in vv. 5, 6, 8, 13) “ram” nowhere in the Bible has that sense. There are clear words for “ram” and “ram’s horn,” but this is not one of them. The word is used extensively (and almost exclusively) in Lev. 25, 27, to describe the year of Jubilee. These are really “the jubilee trumpets.” The reference may be to the particular trumpet call to be used, the *teru(ah*, which initiated the Jubilee (Lev. 25:9) and also was the signal for Israel to attack in battle (Num. 10). But why the explicit association with the Jubilee at this initial engagement in Canaan? Perhaps a figurative echo of the restoration of property in the jubile year. Like a poor man forced to sell his land to survive, Jacob and his sons abandoned the land that God had promised them to flee to Egypt in time of famine. Now the rightful owners return to their possession, accompanied by trumpets appropriate to announce that joyful occasion. (In his magisterial study of the sociology of the Jubilee, R. North agrees that *ybl* has nothing to do with rams.)

Doublets in 10:6-43

Critical readings of the chapter take issue with the repeated notice that Joshua returned to the camp at Gilgal at 15 and 43, sometimes positing a merger of different source documents. It is not as often noticed that another doublet recounts the Israelites’ nighttime movement against Gibeon in 7 and 9. If these alternated, we would think there might be two sorties from Gilgal to Gibeon. But

- The kings’ flight in 16 is a specific instance of the peoples’ flight in 11;
- 19-20 appears to be the same rout as 13, before the people get into their cities.

I believe the repetitions are part of the narrator’s structuring of the present text, not artifacts of earlier textual history, and that they set up a symmetry emphasizing the parallelism between divine and human action.

The repeated notices of Joshua’s nighttime advance against Gibeon in 7,9 conclude two different reasons for his attack:

- 6-7, because the Gibeonites called for him.
- 8-9, because the Lord sent him.

Similarly, the repeated reports of the return to Gilgal in 15 and 43 conclude battle reports with two different emphases:

- 10-15 focuses on the *means* of victory, three miracles that God wrought. God is the subject of the three main events, and in particular of the verb “smote” *nkh* v.10.
- 16-43 focuses on the two-fold *scope* of victory as summarized in 40-42, not only the kings and their people during the Long Day (16-27), but also all the country (28-39). Joshua is the subject throughout, in particular of “smote” at (20), 26, 28, 30, 32, 33, 35, 37, 39, 40, 41.

Indeed, both sections remind us at the end (14, 42) that “the Lord fought for Israel.” But the thrust of the two is plainly different, 10-15 focusing on what God did and 16-43 on what Joshua did.

Thus each doublet sets up an alternation dividing its section in two, and the resulting four sections form a chiasm:

6-7, human summons

8-9, divine summons

10-15, divine victory

16-43, human victory

Paradigmatic Division in Josh 9, 10, 11

The headings to ch. 9(1-2), 10(1-5), and 11(1-5) show a pattern that I describe in my thesis as “paradigmatic division,” related to Melamed’s “breakup of stereotyped pairs.” The heading in ch. 11 shows the overall paradigm, and reports

1. How the news of Israelite conquest came to local kings;
2. A political enumeration of the kings involved;
3. A summary of the geographical regions involved;
4. A summary of the ethnic groups involved;
5. An account of how the gentiles gather together against Israel.

Ch. 9 has omits part 2, while ch. 10 omits parts 3 and 4 (except for the brief reference to the kings as “of the Amorites”). The effect is a formal signature of what is evident thematically, that ch. 9-10 are a unit in the history of the conquest.

The Dynamic of Scripture and Spirit in the Conquest of Canaan

The last point enables a hermeneutical observation on the history of the conquest that I find pertinent to my own pilgrimage; perhaps it will be useful to you as well. Four major battles or campaigns are described in the course of the conquest: Jericho (ch. 5-6), Ai (7-8), the southern confederacy (9-10), and the northern confederacy (11). All four are authorized by antecedent Scripture (the commands in Deut for Israel to invade the land and kill its inhabitants). Yet Scripture alone is not sufficient for the successful discharge of the mission. All four campaigns also include direct revelation from the Lord to Joshua: the interview with the Captain of the Lord’s Host in 5:13-6:5 before the attack on Jericho; 8:1-2 before Ai; 10:8 before the southern campaign; and 11:6 before the northern. Two

notable efforts in which this immediate spiritual guidance is not received are marked as defective: the first attack on Ai in ch. 7 (marked by the defeat) and the treaty with Gibeon (with the narrator's explicit criticism in 9:14). The last is especially noteworthy, since the history is at pains to emphasize how careful the Israelites were trying to be to obey the strictures of Deut. 20. The moral is that God's people must depend not only on Scripture for their leadership, but also on immediate direction from the Lord.

Looking back, I find that most of my work in biblical studies has been driven by a conviction that if only I learned enough Hebrew and cognates and knew the history and geography of the region well enough, the Scriptures would yield to me whatever I needed to know. I began to be aware of the imbalance in this position about five or six years ago when working through the book of Acts, and noticing how regularly the Holy Spirit intervened to direct the early church. At that time the pillar that led Israel in the desert occurred to me as an illustration of the principles involved. There was only one pillar, the Shekinah cloaked in a thick cloud. During the day the cloud was visible. At night the light within would shine out through the cloud. Sometimes Israel could see the Shekinah (the actual presence of God); at other times they saw only the cloud (a physical, tangible evidence of God's presence). But the two never moved in separate directions, and the nation was safest when it followed them both. Similarly, in our day there are those who deny any need for disciplined study of the Scriptures, insisting on the superiority of the Spirit's direct, unmediated leadership; and there are those in the same condition I was in my academic years of minimizing the unmediated work of the Spirit, insisting on the sufficiency of the Scriptures. Both are necessary. Together they form the guiding pillar that directs the people of God. It led Israel in the desert; it guided Joshua during his conquest; it led the early church in Acts; and it guides us today. May God help us never to close our eyes to either of its facets.