

## Chapter Five

1. When all the kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan to the west and all the kings of the Canaanites that were by the sea heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan for the people of Israel until they had crossed over, their heart melted, and there was no longer any spirit in them because of the people of Israel. 2. At that time the Lord said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the people of Israel again the second time." 3. So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the people of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth. 4. And this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: all the males of the people who came out of Egypt, all the men of war, had died on the way in the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt. 5. Though all the people who came out had been circumcised, yet all the people that were born on the way in the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised. 6. For the people of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness till all the nation, the men of war that came forth out of Egypt, perished because they did not hearken to the voice of the Lord; to them the Lord swore that he would not let them see the land which the Lord had sworn to their fathers to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey. 7. So it was their children whom he raised up in their stead that Joshua circumcised; for they were uncircumcised because they had not been circumcised on the way. 8. When the circumcising of all the nation was done, they remained in their places in the camp till they were healed. 9. And the Lord said to Joshua, "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." And so the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day. 10. While the people of Israel were encamped in Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at evening in the plains of Jericho. 11. And on the morrow after the Passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. 12. And the manna ceased on the morrow when they ate of the produce of the land; and the people of Israel had manna no more but ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year. 13. When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man stood before him with his drawn sword in his hand; and Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us or for our adversaries?" 14. And he said, "No; but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my Lord bid his servant?" 15. And the commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, "Put off your shoes from your feet; for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so.

This new chapter begins with the conjunctive *v-* translated as “when” to show the close connection between the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River and one of the chief tribes inhabiting Canaan, the Amorites, which heard of it. Encountering this tribe brought back mixed memories: for Joshua, his conquest under the leadership of Moses with outstretched arms and for the Amorites themselves, their humiliation at the hands of this invader. They knew full well about Moses, but Joshua? Was this upstart invader who had defeated our tribe attempting to pull off another victory...not just one but conquer an entire country? The details were sketchy except for his victory largely attributed to Moses.

Thus among all the Canaanite kings mentioned in vs. 1 this confrontation was more of a grudge match. These leaders heard about the Israelites having crossed the Jordan, word spreading quickly and not unexpected since they had spies keeping an eye on what was going on. The miraculous crossing of the Jordan evoked memories of the Red Sea event which caused their hearts to melt, *masas* being the verb as in 2.8 used by Rahab when she sheltered the two spies. Not only this, they lacked “spirit” or *ruach* also mentioned by Rahab in 2.11. So this twofold deflation (heart and spirit), if you will, which Rahab had observed even before the parting of the Jordan's waters was coming to pass, a favorable omen for the Israelites.

This deflation of the Canaanite kings spread automatically to their subjects giving Joshua vital time to pause and circumcise the people a second time as recounted in vs. 2. Here the Lord speaks with Joshua as he had done several times earlier, now to fashion knives of “flint” or *tsor* which has two other biblical references, Ex 4.25 and Ezk 3.9, the former being cited: “Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it.” The circumcision performed by Joshua doesn't hearken back to this incident but to the original one of Gn 17.10: “Every male among you shall be circumcised.” This is the second occasion, the last being in connection with the Passover: “And when a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised” [Ex 12:48]. Note that this command pertains not to Israelites who already had been circumcised. Some listening to Joshua may have recalled this incident, but now they were very few and quite advanced in age, having crossed two bodies of water in miraculous fashion. The location of this circumcision on the east bank of the Jordan River is Gibeath-haaroloth which translates in vivid fashion as Hill of the Foreskins.

Vs. 4 gives the “reason” (*davar*, cf. 4.10) for this circumcision *en masse*...all the men of war had died since Israel came out of Egypt. Note the emphasis upon the soldiers, for they were set aside shortly after crossing the Red Sea, and soon Joshua would call on their successors to advance upon Jericho. Vs. 5, however, includes the rest of the Israelites, those who had been born in the Sinai wilderness and who hadn't immediate experience of the Exodus and giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

Vs. 6 says that the people “walked” (the common verb *halak* which means to go) in the Sinai wilderness for forty years, and that the entire nation, again including the men of war, had perished there. *Halak* doesn't mean the same thing as to wander, also applicable here. It intimates the positive side of the Sinai years, a time of extended retreat, if you will. So if forty years had passed and some of the Israelites who had cross the Red Sea were in there teens or twenty's, that would put them now, if they had lived, in their late fifty's and sixty's, extremely old for the time. During the latter part of their wandering (and they don't seem to have known how long it would last; some thought it was their fate to do this), the Israelites wrestled with the idea of handing down the memory of recent events, chief among which was the Passover, the Red Sea crossing and later, the giving of the Torah. They had to put all three together into a coherent world view for transmission to future generations. Such was the deeper meaning of their crossing the Jordan River. From now on Israel's identity rested upon how well this threefold basis of their tradition would sustain them in a new land. New in the sense that they haven't been there and old in that their forebears once attempted to establish themselves.

As for that ominous warning mentioned in vs. 6, the reason for the Israelites having perished is because they failed to listen to the Lord's “voice” or *qol* as in Nm 14.22: “None of the men who have seen my glory and my signs which I have wrought in Egypt and in the wilderness and yet have put me to the proof these ten times and have not hearkened to my voice.” Both verses read literally “in (*b-*) my voice” which has a more intimate connection. Vs. 23 of Numbers continues with the theme of the verse at hand about not seeing (the common verb *raha*) “the land which I swore to give to their fathers; and none of those who despised me shall see it.” This land, of course, is “flowing” with milk and honey, the verb being *zuv* which also can apply to a gushing forth. “That you may multiply greatly as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you in a land flowing with milk and honey” [Dt 6.3].

Vs. 7 again mentions those whom Joshua had circumcised, more specifically, the

children of those who failed to hearken to the Lord's voice. While engaged in this affair—he must have had the assistance of a number of chosen men—Joshua couldn't help but recall that incident back in the Sinai wilderness when Israel failed to listen to the Lord. Would these, their children, do the same? Part of the circumcision ceremony must have consisted of a formulaic verse or the like as a reminder to each male whom Joshua approached.

While this circumcising was taking place, it would have been an ideal time for the Canaanites to attack. However, they failed to do so, for Joshua went to great length to conceal what was going on. The Israelites had to rest in their camp as vs. 8 notes until everyone who had been circumcised recovered, the time not being specified. During this time, however, the Canaanites grew increasingly suspicious and asked among themselves as to why weren't the Israelites advancing.

So once this important ritual had been accomplished, the Lord spoke to Joshua [vs. 9] “in this day” which stands in contrast with all the days in the Sinai wilderness when Israel failed to hearken to him. He puts this in terms of a “reproach” or *cherpah*, a noun connoting scorn and contempt which had been looming over Israel's head all these years. “Take away from me their scorn and contempt, for I have kept your testimonies” [Ps 119.23]. In the verse at hand this oppressive weight has been “rolled away,” *galal* suggesting a certain ease removing an obstacle. “And when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep” [Gn 29.3]. It seems this *cherpah*...without mentioning it exactly...goes back to Ex 32.12: “Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent did he bring them forth, to slay them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth?'” Such a *cherpah* always was on the minds of Israel, a taunt that remained with them throughout their forty years of wandering. Although it didn't happen, the possibility nevertheless remained, and now on the eastern bank of the Jordan they could roll...*galal*...this reproach off their minds. Obviously the Israelites named the place where they had been circumcised Gilgal. Since it was in celebration of that *cherpah* cast on them as a kind of spell by the Egyptians, it could remain there as a taunt against the Canaanites not to try something similar.

By no mere coincidence it was the time of Passover, the one at hand being the most significant celebration since that night in Egypt before crossing the Red Sea. Now all Passovers would be celebrated in Canaan, Israel's ancestral homeland,

something the patriarchs never knew. Joshua deliberately has it on the plains of Jericho, the same place where the Transjordanian tribes put on a show of military force [cf. 4.14], so all the inhabitants of Jericho could have a full view of what was going on.

Significantly—and to the relief of Israel—the day after the Passover they ate the “produce” of the land or *havor* which has one other biblical reference, that being in the next verse. More properly *havor* pertains to corn and can apply to the offering of the soil. The *havor* at hand consists of unleavened cakes and parched grain which came as a tremendous relief after the basic diet of manna and quails. Still, the unleavened cakes reminded them of their forebears' hasty exit from Egypt. The current situation, while not as desperate as then, was not much different because the people were under threat of being assaulted by the Canaanites. And so, any food had to be prepared quickly.

The conjunctive *v-* which begins vs. 12 is significant insofar as it speaks of the manna which “ceased” the next day, *shavath* being the verb (Sabbath is derived from it) which alternately means to rest. “On the ninth day of the month beginning at evening, from evening to evening shall you keep your Sabbath” [Lv 23.32]. Nothing is said of the quail which is mentioned only three times in Exodus and Numbers; presumably it had ceased as well. Of course, the people were grateful for this sustenance in the desert but more grateful for a change in diet.

So at this juncture those among the Israelites responsible for having maintained their traditions and hence their identity, chiefly oral at this stage, recounted how well over four hundred years ago the Lord has summoned their father Abraham to leave his native land: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation” [Gn 12.1-2]. Joshua was keen to have this story fixed in the mind and heart of each Israelite but with a major difference. Abraham went into a foreign land whereas Israel was entering or re-entering their former homeland. Still, it was foreign to them. After all, their ancestors had been wanderers and not long afterward left for Egypt to seek protection under Joseph. Joseph was so important to Israel's survival that his final request was to have his bones taken from Egypt and returned home where, it was hoped, he would continue to protect his people. Moses fulfilled this as Ex 13.19 recounts: “God will visit you; then you must carry my bones with you from here.” Although we don't hear Joshua carrying on this sacred tradition, we can be

sure that second to the “ark” or '*aron* in importance is the '*aron* of Joseph, the same word applicable to both, the latter found in Gn 50.26.

Some time, albeit brief, passed when Joshua approaches Jericho as recounted in vs. 13. He seems to be alone, possibly wanting to draw near the city as closely as possible without putting himself in undue danger. The Hebrew text, however, reads literally “in (*b-*) Jericho” intimating that Joshua had the ability to go right into the city without being detected since the Lord sheltered him from being discovered. The verse at hand has the familiar biblical words “he lifted up his eyes” suggesting that Joshua realized suddenly where he was, in Jericho, and was startled at encountering someone who recognized him. He seemed to some kind of soldier with drawn sword whom Joshua approached right “in (*b-*) Jericho” and asked if he were with or against him. Actually Joshua had no choice; though armed, he was no match for what obviously is a formidable opponent.

This man turns out to be “commander” or *sar* of the Lord's army, a term which also means a prince or chief. “For by me princes rule” [Prv 8.16]. Immediately Joshua gave this man...angel?...reverence and “worshiped” or *shachah*. “That you may not be mixed with these nations left here among you...or bow down yourselves to them” [23.7]. Vs. 15 continues with Joshua showing reverence by having removed the sandals from his feet after the example of Moses to whom the Lord said “Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” [Ex 3.5]. *Qodesh* is the adjective for holy as something set apart (cf. 6.19). Something similar same may be applied to the ground on which Joshua is standing, though the word '*adamah* or “ground isn't used as it is in the Exodus verse. In other words '*adamah* and *maqom* are one and the same whereas in the verse at hand this distinction isn't made.

## Chapter Six

1. Now Jericho was shut up from within and from without because of the people of Israel; none went out, and none came in. 2. And the Lord said to Joshua, "See, I have given into your hand Jericho with its king and mighty men of valor. 3. You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. 4. And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark; and on the seventh day you shall march around the city seven

times, the priests blowing the trumpets. 5. And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, as soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up every man straight before him." 6. So Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the Lord." 7. And he said to the people, "Go forward; march around the city, and let the armed men pass on before the ark of the Lord." 8. And as Joshua had commanded the people, the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the Lord went forward, blowing the trumpets with the ark of the covenant of the Lord following them. 9. And the armed men went before the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard came after the ark while the trumpets blew continually. 10. But Joshua commanded the people, "You shall not shout or let your voice be heard, neither shall any word go out of your mouth until the day I bid you shout; then you shall shout." 11. So he caused the ark of the Lord to compass the city, going about it once; and they came into the camp and spent the night in the camp. 12. Then Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the Lord. 13. And the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the Lord passed on, blowing the trumpets continually; and the armed men went before them, and the rear guard came after the ark of the Lord while the trumpets blew continually. 14. And the second day they marched around the city once and returned into the camp. So they did for six days. 15. On the seventh day they rose early at the dawn of day and marched around the city in the same manner seven times: it was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times. 16. And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, "Shout; for the Lord has given you the city. 17. And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the Lord for destruction; only Rahab the harlot and all who are with her in her house shall live because she hid the messengers that we sent. 18. But you, keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction lest when you have devoted them you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction and bring trouble upon it. 19. But all silver and gold and vessels of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord; they shall go into the treasury of the Lord." 20. So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people raised a great shout, and the wall fell down flat so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. 21. Then they utterly destroyed all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep and asses with the edge of the sword. 22. And

Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, "Go into the harlot's house, and bring out from it the woman and all who belong to her, as you swore to her." 23. So the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and mother and brothers and all who belonged to her; and they brought all her kindred and set them outside the camp of Israel. 24. And they burned the city with fire and all within it; only the silver and gold and the vessels of bronze and of iron they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord. 25. But Rahab the harlot, and her father's household, and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive; and she dwelt in Israel to this day because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho. 26. Joshua laid an oath upon them at that time saying, "Cursed before the Lord be the man that rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho. At the cost of his first-born shall he lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest son shall he set up its gates." 27. So the Lord was with Joshua; and his fame was in all the land.

Not unsurprisingly this new chapter begins with the conjunctive *v-* which translates as “now.” Joshua had just confronted the angelic commander of the Lord's armies after which action shifts immediately by means of the conjunctive to Jericho as being “shut up” or *sagar* which also applies to delivering up. “And as soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut” [2.7]. More specifically, Jericho's gates were locked fast both “from within and from without,” the two being rendered by a second use of the verb *sagar* reading literally “did shut up and was shut up.” Added to this impending sense of doom are the “sons of Israel” as the text reads literally whom the inhabitants could see off in the distance. At the same time they weren't completely ignorant of activity in the Israelite camp, having sent out scouts and perhaps even infiltrators to gather information.

Vs. 2 begins with the conjunctive *v-* as “and” with the previous verse which has the effect of sandwiching it in between the concluding verse of Chapter Five (the commander of the Lord's armies) and the opening verse of Chapter Six, Jericho boxed up and bracing for an all-out assault. The Lord's commander hadn't said anything about what is about to happen except that Joshua remove his sandals in his presence because the ground on which he is standing is holy. He had nothing more to say than that, really. Joshua knew instinctively what this meant not so much for himself but for the Israelites. From that very moment onward the entire land of Canaan would be *qodesh* or holy. The Lord himself spoke of this early on: “Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you as I promised to Moses” [1.3].

Now in vs. 2 the Lord speaks directly to Joshua, pretty much taking up after his commander-in-chief had done now with the heavenly army ready to be deployed at a moment's notice. He continues through vs. 5 laying out in some detail the manner by which the assault on Jericho is to be preceded. You get the impression that the Lord is speaking as though the battle had been won which was the overall sense right from the beginning, the Canaanites knowing this but afraid to admit it. However, Joshua needed reassurance, looking with furtive glances toward Jericho while at the same time trying to remain focused upon the Lord speaking with him. Mention of men of "valor" or *chayl* [cf. 1.14] are those warrior of proven character. To have them bottled up within Jericho indeed was encouraging; they were too frightened to come out and make an attack.

In vs. 3 the Lord proposes a novel way to attack Jericho. Joshua is to take his men of "valor" or *chayl* (surely Jericho's *chayl* were looking on from the ramparts) and "march around" the city for six full days. The verb here is *savav* meaning to turn about. "It was only on that day (i.e., the seventh) that they marched around the city seven times" [vs. 15]. In the verse at hand, the Israelite are to perform this *savav* just once for six consecutive days. While it was an unmistakable show of force, those on Jericho's ramparts must have been puzzled. Why this one march around Jericho and no more? After each time the Israelites withdraw from view. Still, the people were afraid to leave the city, hesitating even to send spies to reconnoiter the situation.

The king and his subjects within Jericho didn't have a clue how long this daily march would last, presumably taking place at the same time of day. Now from this point on (that is, vs. 4) the text makes liberal use of the number "seven" or *shevah*, the verbal root meaning to swear an oath insofar as it was considered sacred...six days of creation followed by the seventh on which the Lord rested being the template for all subsequent uses. Some in Jericho may have been familiar with the sacred number seven among the Israelites and therefore braced themselves for what would soon to happen. And so on the seventh day their foreboding came true when Joshua picked out seven priests to march before the ark and to do this seven times. Especially unnerving for those in Jericho was the continuous blast of trumpets on rams' horns, a low rumbling noise that was inescapable. Even people deep within the city couldn't escape it, rattling the walls and all the rest, a premonition of what would soon occur. However, it was music to the ears of Rahab and her family now

assembled in her house.

In vs. 5 the priests are to stop, again with the ark just behind them and give out one sustained blast or *mashak* which means to draw out (A not dissimilar verses is Ex 19.13: “When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain”). So at this point the people are to give a “great shout” or *teruhah* which can apply to a tumult or joyful noise. Anyway, it's to be as loud and sustained as possible. This will cause Jericho's entire wall to fall “flat” or *tachat* which fundamentally means under. Even before the dust settles or better, while the dust is still rising (it can act as cover), the Israelites are to rush the city, “every man straight before him.” Of course those on Jericho's battlements were the first to collapse into the rubble without knowing what hit them.

With these instructions having been circulated among the people, in vs. 6 Joshua bids the priests to take up the ark of the covenant. The verb here is *qara'*, more to call, and connotes a certain urgency. Most likely the priests both bearing the ark and the seven blowing on the trumpets didn't have a clear idea of what they were about to do. As for the blowing, it must have been a constant, low vibrating sound that unsettled the foundations of Jericho in preparation for its final collapse. In other words, those blowing the seven trumpets are to loosen up these foundations in preparation for its collapse. Immediately after addressing the priests Joshua tuns attention to (cf. vs. 7) the people to follow behind the priests and “armed men” [*chalats*, cf. 4.13] who preceded the priests. Just like the priests, the people had no clear idea of what this was about, and some may have grumbled among themselves but remained quiet out of fear.

Vs. 9 has all this battle formation in a four-fold order as follows: the armed men, priests with the trumpets, priests bearing the ark and the rear guard. This time the priests are to blow their trumpets “continuously” which is rendered by the participle *'asaph* (cf. vs. 16) meaning to collect or gather, the sense being that the sound grew to such a pitch which no one knew where it would stop. Of course, both those in Jericho and the Israelites were quite anxious, knowing that something dreadful is about to happen. Then Joshua orders the people to maintain complete silence which is to last for some time as indicated by the words of vs. 10, “until the day I bid you shout,” the verb being *ruah* which also means to sound a trumpet; also it translates as to be evil or receive an injury. “Make a joyful noise to the Lord” [Ps 100.1]. Since Joshua speaks of a day, this may be in the context of the other days

the people are to walk around Jericho. So when they heard that time frame, they knew they would be out in the field exposed to the inhabitants of Jericho for a fairly long time.

Vs. 11 interestingly has Joshua causing the ark of the Lord to go around the city (*savav* as in vs. 3) as though it were propelled not by the priests bearing it but on its own power. The ark encircled Jericho one time only after which “they” returned to the camp for the night. “They” is in parentheses because those involved aren't specified, certainly the priests, but this can be another way of showing the self-propelled movement of the ark.

The next day (vs. 12) Joshua “rose early” or *shakam*, the verb suggestive of doing something urgently or earnestly. One wonders if Joshua had slept at all, let alone the people. They had to keep vigilant against a sneak attack from Jericho even if they received reports of the inhabitants being too afraid to go outside the city. During all this Rahab watched from her home built into the city wall. The two spies hadn't given her the details about how Israel would take Jericho, just that she and her extended family would be spared. Therefore as soon as Rahab saw the Israelites starting their procession around the city some six days earlier, quickly she summoned her family which she hoped would be spared. Immediately she displayed her scarlet cord so everyone could see where she lived. In the meanwhile, the only thing Rahab and her family could do was to wait.

Vss. 13-15 describe what the Lord said already to Joshua with Israel carrying out these orders. Then in vs. 16 Joshua gives the word to have the people shout because the Lord has handed over Jericho to them. More specifically, Jericho will be “devoted” or *cherem* to the Lord (vs. 17), a noun rendered more as “something devoted.” It is derived from a verbal root meaning to destroy...not just that but to do so utterly, sparing nobody, including women and children, animals and property. It seems that *cherem* is a kind of holocaust offering to the Lord without any exceptions. “But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted thing” [7.1]. The exception to this is, of course, Rahab and her family who had sheltered the two spies whom Joshua calls here “messengers” or *mal'ak* (cf. vs. 25). Despite its apparent brutality, *cherem* is a way of setting the stage for conquest of Canaan, to wipe out the population and more importantly, their gods, so that Israel may reclaim its original inheritance and turn full attention to worship of the Lord.

Joshua couldn't stress enough the idea of *cherem* which occurs four times in vs. 18. The people are to “keep” themselves from it, *shamar* [cf. vs. 8] which is backed up by use of the preposition *min* or “from.” If *cherem* isn't strong enough, it extend to everyone and everything within Jericho which ultimately is a simple command by reason of its universality. The danger is that this *cherem* can extend to the camp of Israel and have the same total devastating effect by reason of it becoming a “thing for destruction” which also is rendered by this word. To top this off, vs. 18 has the verb *hakar*, “to bring trouble” which connotes a stirring up. One such incident where a single individual wrecked havoc on the nation occurs after the botched raid on Ai where Joshua asks the guilty person “Why did you bring trouble upon us” [7.25]?

In vs. 19 Joshua narrows down the scope of *cherem* or that which is exempt from it, namely, silver and gold as well as vessels made of bronze and iron to be considered “sacred” (*qodesh*) to the Lord. In a sense, *qodesh* (cf. 5.15) is not unlike *cherem* by reason of its exclusiveness or being apart from the ordinary. In the verse at hand, it is to be deposited in Lord's “treasury” or '*otsar* mentioned again in vs. 24. There seems no mention of this place of safe-keeping during Israel's forty years of wandering in Sinai though Moses had sacred vessels made for worship. In other words, the idea of '*otsar* appears to be a recent development, a place (it was portable since Israel was still on the move) where all future booty will be stored not only for worship but for an incipient treasury which at this point primarily is to fund military ventures.

As do so many of the verses in Joshua, vs. 20 begins with the conjunctive *v-* and translates here as “so.” That is to say, immediately after Joshua takes pains to warn Israel about *cherem* and the deadly result of not following his injunction, Jericho fell. That is to say, the people heard the trumpet sound, raised a shout after which the city's defenses collapsed. This was a good sign insofar as that each Israelite grasped the idea of *cherem* and were ready to implement it. “Edge of the sword” in vs. 21 adds to the severity of this idea of devotion as destruction.

Prior to the dramatic event of the previous verse, Joshua was careful to have the two spies whom Rahab had sheltered at the ready in order to rescue her and her household. This then did at once and entered her house as recounted in vs. 23. However, her house had been built in the city wall (cf. 2.15) meaning it alone of the entire defensive structure of Jericho did not collapse. It remained standing there

like a tower. The spies had to enter Rahab's house, using the same cord she had let them down with [cf. 2.15]. After a quick assessment of the situation, the two men rushed Rahab and her entire household down the rope after which that part of the wall collapse. It must have been a sizable group of people: father, mother, brother and the indefinite "all who belonged to her" of vs. 22. Once down and making their way through the ban of *cherem* that was starting to devastate Jericho, Rahab's family couldn't stop thanking her enough for her act of heroism while other considered it a betrayal but never would say it aloud. Yet as pointed out earlier, Rahab may be taken as representing those few descendants who managed to survive in Canaan as descendants of Abraham. At last they were among their own but then again, not quite. They found themselves being whisked off "outside the camp of Israel" [vs. 23]. Not that they were untrustworthy but had to undergo a prolonged period of decontamination, if you will, for having been associated with Canaan and Jericho. In other words, their position outside the camp was a mitigated *cherem*. Probably it lasted for several months or longer, the time not being specified. Joshua had to make sure Israel was fully committed to the task begun and to carry it through.

Apparently there is a distinction between *cherem* and burning Jericho with fire as recounted in vs. 24. Both the slaughter of humans and animals along with physical items couldn't be left to rot and decay, meaning that once the city had been secured, the burning process could begin. Again, Joshua tells everyone about the exception of silver and gold as well as vessels of bronze and iron to be put into the treasury. In vs. 19 this *'otsar* is put as "treasury of the Lord" whereas vs. 24 has "treasury of the house of the Lord." Mention of "house" can be taken as in broader context, of the material put there distinct from divine worship and for support of the community at this early precarious stage.

The harsh tone of the previous verses is modified by vs. 25, again the conjunctive *v-* as "but" and pertains to Rahab along with her both immediate and extended family. As vs. 23 recounts, they are kept outside Israel's camp for an indefinite period of time. However, the verse at hand suggests that any purification or trial period has passed, and that they have taken a place in Israel's heritage. This can be intimated by "dwelt in Israel" which is rendered literally as "dwelt in the midst of Israel," *qerev* (cf. 4.8) referring to the interior of something, right at its heart. And so Rahab's household could re-establish its rightful place in the land she and her descendants had never left, this *qerev* being a special place of honor.

In vs. 26 Joshua lays an oath (*shavah*: the verbal root to the number seven so prominent regarding the fall of Jericho) on all the people saying that whoever attempts to rebuild the city will be “cursed” or ‘*arar*. “Now therefore you are cursed, and some of you shall always be slaves (etc.)” [9.23]. In other words, this ‘*arar* will have the same force as *cherem*, that which is devoted to destruction. It pertains first to the man who “rises up” (*qum*, cf. 2.11) followed by building Jericho, the two being an expression of arrogance and rebellion. If anyone does make this attempt, the price will be frightfully high. Jericho’s foundation will be laid at the cost of one’s first-born as well as its gates at the cost of this person’s youngest son. Mention of the former is especially frightful because it refers to the rightful heir of one’s family. If that person is cut off, one’s bloodline comes to an end.

Vs. 27 brings to a close Chapter Six with yet another conjunctive *v-* here as “so” which has a way of summing up the essence of all that had gone before. That is to say, the Lord was with Joshua and his “fame” spread throughout the land, *shomah* being a participle for the common verb to hear. That is to say, this *shomah* was heard (*shamah*) throughout Canaan, and did not bode well for its inhabitants.

## Chapter Seven

1. But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things; for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things; and the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel. 2. Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai which is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel and said to them, "Go up and spy out the land." And the men went up and spied out Ai. 3. And they returned to Joshua and said to him, "Let not all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai; do not make the whole people toil up there, for they are but few." 4. So about three thousand went up there from the people; and they fled before the men of Ai, 5. and the men of Ai killed about thirty-six men of them and chased them before the gate as far as Shebarim and slew them at the descent. And the hearts of the people melted and became as water. 6. Then Joshua rent his clothes and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord until the evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust upon their heads. 7. And Joshua said, "Alas, O Lord God, why have you brought this people over the Jordan at all, to give us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us?"

Would that we had been content to dwell beyond the Jordan! 8. O Lord, what can I say, when Israel has turned their backs before their enemies! 9. For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it and will surround us, and cut off our name from the earth; and what will you do for your great name?" 10. The Lord said to Joshua, "Arise, why have you thus fallen upon your face? 11. Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant which I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own stuff. 12. Therefore the people of Israel cannot stand before their enemies; they turn their backs before their enemies because they have become a thing for destruction. I will be with you no more unless you destroy the devoted things from among you. 13. Up, sanctify the people, and say, `Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow; for thus says the Lord, God of Israel, "There are devoted things in the midst of you, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the devoted things from among you." 14. In the morning therefore you shall be brought near by your tribes; and the tribe which the Lord takes shall come near by families; and the family which the Lord takes shall come near by households; and the household which the Lord takes shall come near man by man. 15. And he who is taken with the devoted things shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of the Lord, and because he has done a shameful thing in Israel.'" 16. So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel near tribe by tribe, and the tribe of Judah was taken; 17. and he brought near the families of Judah, and the family of the Zerahites was taken; and he brought near the family of the Zerahites man by man, and Zabdi was taken; 18. and he brought near his household man by man, and Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken. 19. Then Joshua said to Achan, "My son, give glory to the Lord God of Israel and render praise to him; and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me." 20. And Achan answered Joshua, "Of a truth I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and this is what I did: 21. when I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels, then I coveted them and took them; and behold, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent with the silver underneath." 22. So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and behold, it was hidden in his tent with the silver underneath. 23. And they took them out of the tent and brought them to Joshua and all the people of Israel; and they laid them down before the Lord. 24. And Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan the son of Zerah and the silver and the mantle and the bar of gold and his sons and daughters and his oxen and asses and sheep and his tent and all that he had; and they brought them up

to the Valley of Achor. 25. And Joshua said, "Why did you bring trouble on us? The Lord brings trouble on you today." And all Israel stoned him with stones; they burned them with fire and stoned them with stones. 26. And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day; then the Lord turned from his burning anger. Therefore to this day the name of that place is called the Valley of Achor.

As soon as Israel had taken Jericho and made it a *cherem* or a holocaust devoted to the Lord, the situation went downhill rapidly. This is indicated by use of the familiar conjunctive *v-* which begins vs. 1 as an ominous “but.” Note the close identity between the nation of Israel and one individual of that nation, Achan, who sets off a series of disastrous events immediately after the successful capture and destruction of Jericho. One person alone has infected everyone else, and at this early stage no one knows why.

*Mahal* is the verb for “broke faith” as applied to the “sons of Israel” or all the people and means to act treacherously or to take anything by stealth. “What is this treachery which you have committed against the God of Israel in turning away this day from following the Lord” [22.16]? The verb is used with the noun *cherem* or “devoted things” reading literally as “acted treacherously in (*b-*) the devoted things.” In other words, the treachery is inserted within the devoted things meaning that who ever did this—and the person or persons weren't known yet—is just as good as the ruins of Jericho. This will be revealed shortly by the failed attempt to take Ai.

Achan is mentioned as the culprit and zeroed in, if you will, by his three paternal descendants: Carmi, Azbdi and Zerah, all belonging to the tribe of Judah. No one saw Achan picking through the ruins of Jericho for the *cherem*; many were doing this but had in mind Joshua's decree to hand them over to the treasury of the Lord. Achan didn't seem to have any evil intent, just on the spot greed in the midst of incredible confusion which would cost not just his life but his family's and possessions. Because the decree of *cherem* was so severe, the Lord was keeping a close eye-out on the situation. As soon as he spotted Achan, he manifested his “anger” or '*aph* which alternately means nose, the idea being that anger is expressed by heavy, short breathing. “Then the Lord turned from his burning anger” [vs. 27]. In the verse at hand, '*aph* is used with the verb *charah* which means something like a fire came from the Lord's nostrils (cf. vs. 27 just cited). And so this fire-like breathing was directed not to Achan nor the tribe of Judah to which he belongs but

to the nation, the preposition *b-* being used as literally “*in* the people of Israel.” Thus the entire nation, so recently victorious, was on fire. One wonders what Rahab and her family were thinking about all this after their recent deliverance. It just may undo everything they hoped for.

So while Achan went about his apparently casual thievery, Joshua quickly makes a move against a nearby town called Ai which is close to Beth-aven translated as House of Wickedness. The RSV has a footnote saying that Ai is “a deliberate, mocking distortion of the following name, Bethel.” Joshua did this even before the fires at Jericho were quenched because he heard reports that the Ai-ites could attack in an attempt to come to the rescue of their neighbors. Besides, the Israelites were vulnerable at this point, not expecting an attack from elsewhere. Just as he had done with Jericho, Joshua sent out men (the number isn't given) to “spy out” the land, *ragal* (cf. 2.1). Perhaps they might find someone like Rahab who would give inside information. Anyway, it was a gamble and one that had to be done immediately else Israel come under attack.

The spies did as they were told, that is, they spied out Ai as well as the land. They took advantage of the confusion there brought on by Israel's destruction of Jericho, pretending to be inhabitants who have escaped. So among the confusion and fear it was easy to assess the strengths and weaknesses of Ai. That's why the men reported to Joshua in vs. 3 that two or three thousand men are sufficient to “attack” or *nakah* which also means to strike or smite and is found next in vs. 5 as well as frequently throughout the Book of Joshua. They added that the entire people of Israel doesn't have to “toil” up there suggesting Ai is situated on a hill, *yagah* being the verb which connotes weariness. “The toil of a fool wearies him so that he does not know the way to the city” [Ecc 10.15].

With this intelligence in hand, Joshua does as his spies had informed him. Why not? He had success with Jericho and presumed the same would happen with Ai. However, he felt uneasy and couldn't quite put his hand upon this feeling. Joshua received no reports of sympathizers like Rahab; surely he was hoping the spies might run across a few. Anyway, Ai was different...small than Jericho, and there was plenty of confusion going on as a result of the recent battle in Israel's favor. To Joshua's surprise...actually shock...the smaller number of soldiers sent to assault Ai were beaten soundly. And just like the Canaanites whom Rahab had reported in 2.9, “the hearts of the people melted” [*masas*, vs. 5]. Even worse, these melted hearts

“became as water” meaning they were just as ruined as the city of Jericho. Obviously the Ai-ites were out for revenge and knew they could inflict a damaging blow upon these invaders from across the Jordan River.

Understandably Joshua was distraught and expressed it in familiar cultural terms, that is, by renting his clothes and falling face down upon the earth, here before the ark of the Lord. While his pain was genuine, he was aware of setting himself as an example to the people. Joshua and everyone in the Israelite camp were too stunned after their victory at Jericho and just before that, their triumphal crossing of the Jordan River which the Lord had split on their behalf. The elders joined in, all with ashes on their heads, and stayed that way until evening.

Most likely the assault on Ai was early in the morning and didn't last long. That means Joshua and the others remained in their grief-stricken positions from approximately mid morning onwards. Each man didn't dare utter a word, but running through their minds was anger at the spies for having given a false, optimistic report about Ai's defenses. Surely Joshua would take out his wrath on them when the time came. All the while, however, Achan quietly went about his business in the camp, carefully stashing his booty in the ground under his tent. Chances are he was just too stupid to realize what was going on and was disturbed at Israel's defeat just as much as everyone else.

After some time Joshua spontaneously blurts out a question to the Lord as to why he brought Israel over the Jordan River to slay them by the Amorites. Then he utters something not unlike the Israelites had done when they first encounter difficulties after their miraculous crossing of the Red Sea: “Would that we had been content to dwell beyond the Jordan!” One of those complaints in the Sinai wilderness is “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst” [Ex 17.3]? As for the verse at hand, the verb for “content” is *ya'al* which also means a being before or first. “But the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land” [17.12].

Joshua continues with his complaint which the elders with him clearly heard, that is, he laments that the Israelites have turned their “backs” on their enemies, *horeph* more specifically referring to the neck and found next in vs. 12. “I have seen this people and behold, it is a stiff-necked people” [Ex 34.9]. Joshua then brings to conclusion his lament before the ark of the Lord with what troubles him the most,

namely, that neighboring tribes will get wind of their defeat at Ai and be emboldened to attack them. However, he gets comfort from the words of Rahab to the spies, “For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea...and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites” [2.10].

The verse at hand speaks of Israel's name being cut off from the “earth” or *'erets* [cf. 1.2]. In this context such a drastic fate means that not only will Israel fail to re-occupy the land promised to them but will nullify all that Abraham and his sons had done many years before. In other words, the original promise to Abraham by the Lord would turn out to be false and delusional. Joshua must have wished Moses were alive; surely he would have gotten the people out of this mess. In the meanwhile, he and the elders had to keep out of view from the Ai-ites who'd take special delight in taunting them.

Vs. 10 begins with the conjunctive *v-* not translated in the RSV meaning that as soon as Joshua had finished his lament in the presence of Israel's elders—again, this is toward the evening—the Lord answers him and continues speaking through vs. 15. For the bulk of the day Joshua had laid prostrate on the ground before the ark, so the response must have come from the ark though in no dramatic outward manifestation. The days for such dramatic manifestations are past now, the time when Israel had been wandering in the Sinai wilderness. This represents a shift in divine communication which has moved from externals to within a person's spirit even though it will still have plenty of miraculous trappings in the future.

Now without any introduction, if you will, the Lord rebukes Joshua not unlike he had done with Moses: “Why do you cry to me” [Ex 14.15]? There's a certain tongue-in-cheek humor in the Lord's question, “Why have you thus fallen upon your face?” Implied is that Joshua should have started his search for the tragedy at once, not pinning it upon the spies' apparent misinformation but going to the source, who and how many Israelites had coveted the *cherem* from Jericho. If he had done that after the defeat at Ai, things might have turned out better. This abrupt approach by the Lord is also intended to shake any complacency Joshua might have gotten from two successive victories and therefore set him up for a disastrous defeat later on from which he wouldn't recover. The prospect of being enslaved in the land of their ancestors was unthinkable, let alone being exposed to the worship of alien gods.

In vs. 11 the Lord really puts it to Joshua and by extension the elders with him who, in turn, would communicate these words to the people. In rapid succession the Lord comes off with five complaints:

1) The first is a blanket statement, namely, that Israel has “sinned” or *chata'* which fundamentally means to miss the mark. The real source of *chata'* (Achan) later in vs. 2 admits” Of a truth I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel.”

2) Israel has “transgressed” the Lord's covenant, *havar* meaning to cross as found in 3.4: “that you may know the way you shall go, for you have not passed this way before.”

3) Israel has “taken” some of the *cherem*. Note that the Lord speaks of the nation as a whole, not the as unnamed person or persons which certainly he knows but won't reveal it to Joshua.

4) Israel has “stolen, again, the object being the *cherem* with *ganav* as the verb meaning to steal. “But why did you steal my gods” [Gn 31.30]?

5) Israel has “lied” or *kachash* which connotes deceiving. “Lest you deny falsely with your God” [24.27].

All in all, the Lord is incensed that someone had taken the *cherem* and put them among their own “stuff,” *kely* meaning a vessel or container as well as weapon. “But all silver and gold and vessels of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord.” Note that these are *kely* which Achan has stolen, again most likely inadvertently, and put them in his own *kely*.

Because of this fivefold disobedience to the Lord, the people can't overcome their enemies (cf. vs. 12), Ai being a humiliating experience compared with the much larger Jericho. Instead, Israel seems destined to the same “destruction” or *cherem*. However, this is one more chance, that the people “destroy” this *cherem*, *shamad* being the verb which connotes cutting off. “And I destroyed them before you” [24.8]. The Lord sees the object to be removed as “in the midst” of the people, *qerev* (cf. 4.8) suggestive of the very center of Israel. If Joshua, the elders and the entire nation fail in this, the Lord says that “I will be with you no more,” a fate equivalent to the *shamad* just mentioned. In other words, the Lord will destroy the ark of his residence which had accompanied the people since Mount Sinai.

In vs. 13 the Lord suddenly shifts from speaking his mind to commanding Joshua to get moving. While such harsh words were necessary, he doesn't want this successor

to Moses to be dismayed. *Qum* (cf. 6.26) is the verb for “up” which here is understood in the literal sense, that is, Joshua and the elders who had been flat out upon the ground. The first step towards resolving the crisis is for Joshua to “sanctify” the people, *qadash*, the same injunction in 3.5 just before crossing the Jordan River. That *qadash* takes place on the western bank whereas the one at hand is for the first time in Canaan. As noted there, *qadash* assumed a ritual performance, the washing of garments and bodies as well as abstaining from sexual intercourse, this following the prescription laid down before the theophany at Mount Sinai in Ex 19.10-15.

Once this ritual purity takes place and has an effect on the people, they will be in a position to discern the *cherem* or devoted things in their midst, *qerev* being used as in vs. 12. In other words, it is so close to the people that they can't see it. *Sur* is the verb for “take away” which connotes a withdrawal or departing and first noted in 1.7: “turn not from it to the right hand or to the left.” Once the *cherem* are removed—and at this point the Lord doesn't seem to intimate their destruction nor the person(s) involved—Israel as a nation will be able to “stand” before her enemies, the second use of *qum*. In other words, Israel was laying prostrate like Joshua on the ground and needs a divine urging to *qum*.

So upon completion of the ritual *qadash*, the Israelites went to bed anxiously that night knowing that on the morrow the reason for their purification would become manifest. As to be expected, very few slept soundly, including Joshua and the leaders. Vs. 14 begins with the verb *qarav* which is the root for *qerev* or “from among you” in the previous verse [cf. 3.4]. This is to happen in the “morning” or *boqer* or at daybreak [cf. 6.12] and in accord with a given order, that is, by tribes. And so each of the twelve tribes of Israel are lined up not only before Joshua but before the ark of the Lord which isn't mentioned but presumed. Once this vast assembly has gathered...and it must have started in the pre-dawn darkness...the Lord himself will take each individual which probably involves proceeding before the ark.

During this process, not unlike a parade or battle formation before the ark, each Israelite must have felt a certain dread. Would the Lord send forth a bolt of lightning and destroy the guilty party? Would he wipe out not just the guilty person(s) but one if not more of the tribes? Chances are the victorious inhabitants of Ai were watching, not quite figuring out what was transpiring before their eyes.

This process of selection started off with each tribe and whittled down to families, then households and finally individuals. It was not unlike a funneling where each member passed individually before the ark. The common verb *laqad* is used for taking by the Lord, a kind of in-depth examination which must have taken the bulk of the day. A footnote in the **RSV** says it could involve the casting of lots which may be true, but the important point is that each and every Israelite was scrutinized thoroughly.

The last instruction by the Lord to Joshua in vs. 15 is that once this *laqad* has run its slow, painful course, the guilty party or parties will be “burned” because they had “transgressed” the Lord's covenant. *Saraph* is the verb for the former and connotes a consuming as total as the noun *cherem*. In other words, a total solution for a total abomination. Such totality is reflected by *saraph* as applied to Ai after Israel has successfully conquered it: “So Joshua burned Ai and made it forever a heap of ruins as it is to this day” [8.28]. *Havar* is the verb for the latter meaning to cross and used here as it is in vs. 10.

Equivalent to this *havar* or crossing in the negative sense is that the guilty person had done a “shameful thing” or *nevalah* which more precisely means something deserving of folly. “Nabal is his name, and folly is with him” (the proper name being derived from the verbal root, 1Sam 25.25). Note that such folly—and the person is yet to be identified although the Lord knows who it is—“in (*b-*) Israel” or in its very heart, enabling the whole body to become infected. As noted earlier, the person responsible...Achan...didn't act out of malice but impulse. As soon as he stole the *cherem* and hid it, desperately he wanted to get rid of it but unfortunately now was contaminated. Perhaps at this point secretly he informed some of his family members. If Achan brought his theft to Joshua's attention then and there, they might be spared.

After the Lord had bade Joshua to get up in vs. 13 from laying prostrate along with the elders before the ark and had made known the plan to learn who brought such calamity upon Israel, Joshua went to sleep. Obviously it was a fitful sleep but better than nothing because the next day he “rose early” or *shakam* (cf. 6.12) which was well before daybreak. He made his way through the camp being careful not to disturb anyone who might be sleeping. No one yet knew what was next, for they were reeling from the defeat at Ai and fear of being subject to further attacks. Without apparently giving much details, in vs. 26 Joshua waits before rousing the

people. Everyone was fully aware of what had just happened (the defeat at the hands of the Ai-ites) but didn't know the reason why. Fortunately for Joshua there were no intimations of rebellion nor rumors of rebellion, just a desire to settle the matter and move on. What, after all, was their choice now that they had crossed the Jordan River into Canaan? This thought went through the minds of each and every Israelite.

In vs. 16 Joshua brings Israel near [*qarav*, cf. vs. 14] to relieve the people of that cancer *qerev* or “from among” them [vs. 13] or more specifically, *qarav* to the ark of the Lord. In many ways Joshua is simply the agent with the Lord watching carefully from within his ark. Vs. 17 begins the process going from a larger group to small ones and then to individuals. For example, he begins with the families of Judah to the family of the Zerahites and then to Zabdi. In vs. 18 Joshua narrows this down to the household of Zabdi “man by man” until he reaches Achan, son of Carmi. Fortunately for the nation of Israel this process of judgment resolved itself early on instead of going through the entire twelve tribes. All the other Israelites were looking on and breathed a collective sigh of relief when it was over. Still, it wasn't clear to them what was transpiring on since Joshua preferred to do the selection process out of everyone's sight.

Throughout this narrowing down in vss. 16-19 the conjunctive *v-* begins each sentence which adds to both the drama and relative swiftness of the choosing. The final *v-*, if you will, of vs. 19 as “then” consists of a one-on-one dialogue between Joshua and Achan, the former calling the latter by a term of endearment loaded with a threat, “my son.” Joshua knew that all signs pointed to Achan's guilt, but he had to make sure.

Although Achan acted impulsively and immaturely, a fact Joshua was clearly aware of, he had to go ahead with the Lord's command to rid this cancer from the midst (*qerev*) of Israel. And so Joshua was faced with making one of the hardest personal decision of his life, to put Achan and his family members to death. First Joshua bids Achan two things: 1) to “give glory” to God (*kavod*) which spatially speaking is easy since all were right in front of the ark itself. “The heavens declare the glory of God” [Ps 19.1]. 2) To give God “praise” or *todah* which also means thanksgiving and a confession or acknowledgment. “Offer unto God thanksgiving” [Ps 50.14].

In his surprise at having been singled out so quickly and with every eye of Israel

upon him, Achan was caught off guard and didn't know what to do. Without missing a beat, Achan blurted out to Joshua his guilt by using the word “of a truth” or *'amnah* (from the verbal root *'aman* from which 'amen' is derived) which has one other biblical reference: “Besides she is indeed my sister” [Gn 20.12]. to his credit, Achan speaks forthrightly of how he has “sinned” not just against the Lord but the Lord God of Israel meaning the entire community. It seems he wasn't looking for mercy (he was too naive for that, really), just stating the facts as best and accurately as he could. Next in vs. 20 he begins his account which continues into the verse after that. “And this is what I did.” At first glance such words seem to merit pardon, but given the situation of Israel's defeat at the hands of the Ai-ites right after the victory of Jericho, a precedent had to be set if Ai is to be taken. And if Ai isn't taken, forget about Canaan; might as well return to Egypt which most likely meant a return to slavery or something even worse.

In vs. 21 Achan gives all the details of that *cherem* for which he was responsible and consists of three items he had seen among the “spoil” or *shalal*. Apparently those engaged in plundering Jericho heaped the booty into one great pile. Amid the confusion Achan simply reached down and pulled out what had caught his eye. “Only its spoil and its cattle you shall take as boot for yourselves” [8.2]. Amid this *shalal* Achan took three items: a mantle from Shinar or Babylon, site of the infamous tower [cf. Gn 11.2] which means a valuable import, two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels. Under ordinary circumstances it'd be difficult to conceal these items but not so amid the confusion of Jericho being plundered. Note the simplicity which which Achan described his experience: “I coveted them” or *chamad* or to desire. Prov 6.25 captures the negative side of this verb which reflects Achan's experience: “Do not desire her beauty in your heart and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes.”

Joshua was astounded at the straightforward way Achan described his actions, wishing somehow to get this simple man off the hook, but he was bound to fulfill divine justice for the greater good of Israel. So right after this statement Joshua sends messengers to Achan's tent who find everything buried there as he had said. While this was going on Joshua tried to take his eyes off Achan but couldn't. Achan himself knew what was in store for him as well as his family who also must have been there dreading their fate. The opportunity for Achan to have turned himself in had passed. Now the entire clan and its possessions must suffer his fate. In a situation such as this in a new land they could expect no mercy and perhaps had resigned

themselves to this fact. Once the messengers got the mantle, silver and gold bar they rushed it back to Joshua with the entire nation of Israel looking on. No one uttered a word of condemnation but were relieved that the problem was solved. As for any Ai-ites trying to get a glimpse of this activity as best they could, they were quite fearful knowing that the problem affecting Israel initially working on their behalf would be resolved and turn against them.

As pointed out frequently, many verses in the Book of Joshua begin with the conjunctive *v-*. Again it plays an important role in the Achan incident to show the swiftness of action and the need to resolve a situation affecting the entire nation of Israel. Once the evidence was presented to everyone no further words were needed. Promptly Joshua led away not just Achan but his entire household, possessions and yes, the stolen items to the Valley of Achor [cf. vs. 24]. The verbal root to this proper name is to cause trouble and thus is named aptly. Apart from the Book of Joshua, Valley of Achor is mentioned twice in a positive sense, Is 65.10 and Hs 2.15, the latter being cited here: “And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.”

Joshua is in the forefront as he leads this gloomy procession, telling the Israelites to follow along to witness this example. Achan's example had to be burned into their collective memory, else more trouble lay in store. Once Joshua had led this somber procession to the valley, he couldn't help but say “Why did you bring this trouble upon us” [vs. 25]? *Hakar*, of course, is the verbal root. “My father has troubled the land” [1Sam 14.29]. Joshua wasn't expecting an answer nor could Achan give one, being stunned at where his greed got him. Immediately after Joshua asked the question and brought down a curse by the Lord with regard to *hakar*, Achan glanced at his relatives—and there must have been many, let alone his livestock and other possession—for the very last time.

In vs. 25 the entire congregation of Israel joins in stoning Achan and all that belonged to him. Note that the text brings this home with ruthless clarity: stone with stones and burn with fire; if this weren't enough it adds a second time stone with stones. Once this was done, everyone pitched in to raise a great “heap” or *gal* of stones, a word which alternately means a wave. “And raised over it a great heap of stones which stands there to this day” [8.29]. As soon as this mass execution is complete, the Lord's “burning anger” subsides; rather, it turns away, *shuv* being the verb [cf. 2.22]. *Charon* is the noun for “burning” and connotes fierceness: “He let

loose on them his fierce anger, wrath, indignation and distress, a company of destroying angels” [Ps 78.49]. 'Aph is the noun for “anger” and as in vs. 1, refers to the nose or the means by which this burning fire comes forth. And so Chapter Seven concludes with the naming of the Valley of Achor, the *hakar* of the Lord having been diverted. After this experience, the victory of Jericho followed at once by the defeat at Ai, Joshua and the people felt a serious need to reevaluate what they were doing. While everyone comported themselves as best they could, one bad apple such as Achan spoiled everything. And so for the first time since leaving Mount Sinai the Israelites felt a keen corporate sense of responsibility. From now on everyone was on high alert. They had to deal with Ai and then the rest of Canaan, a daunting task.

## Chapter Eight

1. And the Lord said to Joshua, "Do not fear or be dismayed; take all the fighting men with you and arise, go up to Ai; see, I have given into your hand the king of Ai and his people, his city and his land; 2. and you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king; only its spoil and its cattle you shall take as booty for yourselves; lay an ambush against the city, behind it." 3. So Joshua arose and all the fighting men to go up to Ai; and Joshua chose thirty thousand mighty men of valor and sent them forth by night. 4. And he commanded them, "Behold, you shall lie in ambush against the city, behind it; do not go very far from the city but hold yourselves all in readiness; 5. and I, and all the people who are with me will approach the city. And when they come out against us as before, we shall flee before them; 6. and they will come out after us till we have drawn them away from the city; for they will say, 'They are fleeing from us, as before.' So we will flee from them; 7. then you shall rise up from the ambush and seize the city; for the Lord your God will give it into your hand. 8. And when you have taken the city, you shall set the city on fire, doing as the Lord has bidden; see, I have commanded you." 9. So Joshua sent them forth; and they went to the place of ambush and lay between Bethel and Ai to the west of Ai; but Joshua spent that night among the people. 10. And Joshua arose early in the morning and mustered the people and went up with the elders of Israel before the people to Ai. 11. And all the fighting men who were with him went up and drew near before the city and encamped on the north side of Ai with a ravine between them and Ai. 12. And he took about five thousand men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai to the west of the city. 13. So they

stationed the forces, the main encampment which was north of the city and its rear guard west of the city. But Joshua spent that night in the valley. 14. And when the king of Ai saw this he and all his people, the men of the city, made haste and went out early to the descent toward the Arabah to meet Israel in battle; but he did not know that there was an ambush against him behind the city. 15. And Joshua and all Israel made a pretense of being beaten before them and fled in the direction of the wilderness. 16. So all the people who were in the city were called together to pursue them, and as they pursued Joshua they were drawn away from the city. 17. There was not a man left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel; they left the city open and pursued Israel. 18. Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Stretch out the javelin that is in your hand toward Ai; for I will give it into your hand." And Joshua stretched out the javelin that was in his hand toward the city. 19. And the ambush rose quickly out of their place, and as soon as he had stretched out his hand, they ran and entered the city and took it; and they made haste to set the city on fire. 20. So when the men of Ai looked back, behold, the smoke of the city went up to heaven; and they had no power to flee this way or that, for the people that fled to the wilderness turned back upon the pursuers. 21. And when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city and that the smoke of the city went up, then they turned back and smote the men of Ai. 22. And the others came forth from the city against them; so they were in the midst of Israel, some on this side, and some on that side; and Israel smote them until there was left none that survived or escaped. 23. But the king of Ai they took alive and brought him to Joshua. 24. When Israel had finished slaughtering all the inhabitants of Ai in the open wilderness where they pursued them and all of them to the very last had fallen by the edge of the sword, all Israel returned to Ai and smote it with the edge of the sword. 25. And all who fell that day, both men and women, were twelve thousand, all the people of Ai. 26. For Joshua did not draw back his hand with which he stretched out the javelin until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai. 27. Only the cattle and the spoil of that city Israel took as their booty according to the word of the Lord which he commanded Joshua. 28. So Joshua burned Ai and made it for ever a heap of ruins, as it is to this day. 29. And he hanged the king of Ai on a tree until evening; and at the going down of the sun Joshua commanded, and they took his body down from the tree and cast it at the entrance of the gate of the city and raised over it a great heap of stones which stands there to this day. 30. Then Joshua built an altar in Mount Ebal to the Lord, the God of Israel 31. as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded the people of Israel as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, "an altar of unhewn stones, upon which no man has lifted an iron tool;" and they

offered on it burnt offerings to the Lord, and sacrificed peace offerings. 32. And there in the presence of the people of Israel, he wrote upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses which he had written. 33. And all Israel, sojourner as well as home born, with their elders and officers and their judges, stood on opposite sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, half of them in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded at the first, that they should bless the people of Israel. 34. And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law. 35. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones and the sojourners who lived among them.

Once again the opening verse to a new chapter shows the importance of the conjunctive *v-* translated here as “and.” That is to say, the execution of Achan, his family and possessions, traumatic as it was for Israel, had been necessary. The conjunctive is the Lord's way of telling Joshua to put that incident behind him and get on with the arduous process of conquering or re-taking the land of Canaan, Israel's heritage. Chances are the Lord spoke with Joshua while he was still in the Valley or Achor or at least on the way back to the camp. He tells him not to “be afraid” nor “be dismayed,” the former the common verb *yare'* and the latter the verb *chatat* which fundamentally means to break down with fear, to be confounded (cf. 1.9). In other words, the Lord is fully aware of Joshua having had to eliminate one of his own as well as his family from Israel. The best way to get out of this slump is to move forward; without a doubt, Israel can't return to the Sinai wilderness, let alone Egypt, a sure fire way of committing collective suicide. Thus in many ways Israel was caught in between two choices with potentially devastating consequences.

Now the Lord bids Joshua to “arise” or *qum* just as he had done in 7.10. He is to take the soldiers (literally 'men of war') and attack Ai because the Lord has given that city and its king into his possession. Joshua is to treat Ai just as he had treated Jericho but with one major exception, no *cherem* or things devoted to destruction. This concession is special after what had just transpired; the Lord is fully aware that someone like Achan just might steal from the booty set aside and repeat the trial the people had just come through. It consists in taking Ai's spoil and cattle which covers practically everything. The Lord tells Joshua to lay an “ambush”

against the city or *'arav* which means a laying in wait. “Now she had men lying in wait in an inner chamber” [Jdg 16.9].

With this divine injunction in mind, in vs. 3 Joshua chose thirty thousand “mighty men” or *givorey hachayl*, literally, men of “valor” or *chayl* (cf. 6.3) to approach Ai under the cover of darkness. Next (vs. 4) Joshua has these soldiers take up their ambush position behind the city, ordering them to “hold (themselves) in all readiness” or *kun* (cf. 1.11) which fundamentally means to be established. Both Joshua and the soldiers, along with the rest of the people, were of mixed feelings: the recent defeat by Ai's inhabitants, the distressing experience brought on by Achan followed his stoning as well as his entire family yet having a renewed sense of purpose much as they had with Jericho.

So while these picked men were waiting in ambush, Joshua tells them in vs. 5 that he and all the people will “approach” Ai, the verb being *qarav* meaning to draw near (cf. 7.16). The plan is to feign an attack in order to lure the Ai-ites out from behind the security of their walls which, they feared, might come tumbling down as had been the recent case with Jericho. By this drawing action or *nataq* (cf. 4.18 as 'were lifted up' but not mentioned there), Joshua hopes the Ai-ites will heap scorn upon the Israelites, at how foolish they are by making a second assault. This will make them over confident in their hope of wiping them out in vengeance for Jericho. Surely some in Ai must have had their doubts but were powerless to intervene. As soon as the Ai-ites leave their city, those laying in ambush will rise up and make an assault from the opposite direction. Such will be the taking of Ai, *taphas* (vs. 8; noted again in vs. 23). In this same verse Joshua is clear that the Lord has “bidden” the people to go ahead with the assault. Thus the people are to take the Lord and Joshua as acting as one and the same.

Vs. 9 has Joshua sending his crack troops to the place of ambush which is between Bethel and Ai, the former ('House of God') is close by, just a quarter mile away. The closeness of the two towns means that these troops had to be extremely careful in their approach to Ai, for sentries in both places were on sharp look-out after the recent events. Joshua had great trust in those chosen for the ambush as well as the officers over them. Perhaps due the first attack's failure, he didn't put in charge those who led it, but as things turned out, they weren't at fault. Now that everything was in place—this attack being in many ways more important than the one upon Jericho—Joshua felt relaxed enough to spend the night “among” the people, *betok*

(cf. 4.9) meaning more specifically in their very midst. Although everyone crowded around Joshua that night, nothing is said of the ark of the Lord which presumably was there with Joshua. Although Joshua was concerned about how things would turn out, this was the first time he got a good night's sleep.

*Shakam* [vs. 10] is the verb for “rose early in the morning” noted last in 7.16 only this time Joshua is ready and eager to get the job done of capturing Ai once and for all. Although confident of victory, he knew other struggles lay ahead, for the inhabitants of Canaan already got word of Jericho's destruction which means Joshua has to act quickly. Immediately he set about the business of mustering the people with regard to the ambush, intent upon allaying their fears. In fact, Joshua informed everyone to rise early, well before sunrise, so as to be ready. *Paqad* is the verb which connotes numbering as well as visiting. “And Saul numbered the people” [1Sam 13.15].

This second assault upon Ai was to test the nerves of everyone, memory of the previous failed attack fresh in mind. The same applied to the Ai-ites. They both marveled at the tenacity of the Israelites and began jeering at them from behind their walls, egging them on to a second and even more inglorious defeat. If it were the first attack, Ai's defenders would have kept look-out all around and would have detected any soldiers waiting in ambush. However, they were so astonished and enraged as well as confident at the failure of a second assault in so short a time that everyone's focus was straight at the Israelites marching up to them.

Now Joshua led the people up toward Ai, covering familiar territory from the first approach. Some of their comrades and armament may have been still laying there, for the first assault was so recent. The approach to Ai was slow and deliberate, intended to show determination. However, the attack didn't happen that day but the next, for Joshua decided to spend the night in a nearby valley (cf. vs. 13). Because Ai was on a hill and Joshua was in a valley, to the king of Ai it seemed an ideal time and place to make a sudden attack. Now it time for this king to get up early or *shakam* with the Israelites presumably still asleep below because for him this was the appointed time...the right occasion or *mohed*...to make good on the final destruction of Israel threatening to conquer Canaan (NB: the RSV translates *mohed* as “descent”).

So when the all-out frontal assault got underway, not only Joshua but “all Israel”

[vs. 14] “made a pretense” or *nagah* which means to reach, be smitten. That is to say, he ordered Israel to feign being beaten back in order to let the Ai-ites feel they were gaining the upper hand as before. “We have sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel, and now we may not touch them” [9.19]. Immediately the Israelites broke and ran toward the desert with the entire city of Ai after them as noted in vs. 16. The plan seemed to work, for they “were drawn” from the city, *nataq* (cf. vs. 6). Not only did the Ai-ites go after Israel but the inhabitants of nearby Bethel joined in the pursuit, eager to join in on the victory. Joshua got what he wished for. Ai was “left open” or *hazav* (cf. vs. 17), a strong verb noted in 1.5 as “forsake,” a premonition of what was to happen shortly.

Vs. 18 begins with a critical use of the conjunctive *v-* translated as “then” which puts into action Joshua's plan of ambush once the people of Ai and Bethel have “forsaken” (*hazav*) their cities. *V-* continues to play an important role in these verses since it both quickens the pace of action and tends toward getting the capture and destruction of Ai over and done with. All along the Lord was attentive to the plan he proposed in vs. 2 and unknown to Joshua, was ready to intervene in case something went wrong. Now the crucial gesture came. The Lord bids Joshua to “stretch out” or *natah* the javelin in his hand (cf. vs. 26). For another use of this verb, cf. 24.23: “Put away the foreign gods which are among you and incline your heart to the Lord your God.” In the verse at hand, *natah* pertains to Joshua’s “javelin” or *kydon*. “They lay hold on bow and spear, they are cruel and have no mercy” [Jr 6.23]. You’d think that Joshua would have armed himself with the more practical sword; instead he has this javelin meant for long-distance casting, perhaps having in mind to aim for the king of Ai or one of his commanders. Should he succeed, the battle would be over more quickly. Regardless, Joshua took this javelin before the battle knowing that it would have an important role that wasn’t clear to him then. The verb *natah* uses the preposition *b-* or “in” prefaced to the *kydon* which reads literally “extend in the javelin” suggesting that Joshua’s full might is to be transferred to this weapon as a signal to the Israelites for the ambush to begin. Thoughts of Moses on the hill with outstretched arms must have been running through his mind (cf. Ex 17.8-13) while he was below battling Amalek. If Joshua could *natah* the javelin as long as Moses (and this without the help of Aaron and Hur), Israel would prevail.

Now vs. 19 tells of the ambush which rose “quickly,” the verb *mahar* being used (cf. 4.10) suggesting that at once the heads of all those laying in wait behind Ai appeared

on the horizon and rushed toward the city unopposed. At this juncture the Ai-ites (and those from Bethel as well) who went after Joshua and the Israelites were unaware of this and kept up with their pursuit. Vs. 19 has these crack soldiers entering the city and then taking it, the two being effected at once since no one was there except women and children. This same verse uses *mahar* a second time with respect to setting Ai on fire. One can only imagine what was going through the minds of the Israelites engaged in this ambush as they slaughtered innocent people. The idea of *cherem* or devoted things to the Lord must have blotted out any idea of pity though that isn't mentioned in conjunction with Ai.

While the Ai-ites were totally focused upon pursuing the Israelites, one of them turned back and saw smoke rising from their city. Immediately he shouted this out to his fellow soldiers, and all realized they were trapped both from behind and in front. Then thoughts of wives and children flooded in. As vs. 20 puts it literally, "there was not in them sides (*yad* commonly means 'hand') to flee" implying that the Israelites had assaulted them from the left and right as well. As for those within Ai, they found themselves "in the midst" of Israel (*betok*, cf. vs. 9), this happening so quickly that they didn't realize it. And so the slaughter of the Ai-ites was done in one fell swoop with one major exception. By chance the Israelites capture the king of Ai (cf. vs. 23) whose name isn't given, possibly out of contempt.

The thoroughness with which Israel slaughtered the Ai-ites is revealed by the words of vs. 24, "all of them to the very last had fallen by the edge of the sword." Throughout it all Joshua kept the javelin in his hand, poised like a statute as a rallying point for the Israelites. He didn't have to say anything, just stand there with the javelin aimed at Ai. Thus Joshua imitated the above mentioned example of Moses whose hands were supported by Aaron and Hur. He was so determined to blot out Ai after Israel's humiliating defeat that he didn't require support to keep the javelin steady. After the battle, the people rummaged freely amid the ruins of Ai and took as much booty as they wanted without any restrictions as at nearby Jericho. This free-for-all was sanctioned by the Lord earlier and mentioned again in vs. 27, "according to the word (*davar*, cf. 5.4) of the Lord."

Although the Israelites involved in the ambush set Ai on fire (cf. vs. 19), Joshua burned it (cf. vs. 28), that is, he made sure the original fire spread throughout the entire city so as to consume it completely. When the fire was out, Joshua made Ai a "heap of ruins" [vs. 28], the first word being *gal* noted in 7.26 with regard to Achan,

his family and possessions. Obviously everyone couldn't help but make the parallel. In the verse at hand, this *gal* is associated with *shemamah* which connotes desolation, Is 1.7 echoing the situation at hand: "Your country lies desolate, your cities are burned with fire." And so Ai became a monument of sorts intended as a reminder not so much of the first assault but the reason for its failure, theft of *cherem* from Jericho. In other words, the heap is more for future generations of Israelites than for the current inhabitants of Canaan (cf 1Sam 6.18).

As for the hanging of Ai's king, most likely his body was impaled after having been executed. Joshua didn't impale him alive, for the reason of Israel's first attack on Ai lay elsewhere. Like Ai itself, Joshua piled a great "heap" or *gal* of stones to commemorate the king's burial (cf. vs. 29). Mention of "to this day" as with the *gal* for Ai also is intended for the Israelites, they knowing that despite the difficulties ahead, Canaan was already theirs.

The next step Joshua undertook was to build an altar "in" (*b-*) Mount Ebal, this preposition suggesting that the altar is to be rooted in the mountain itself and never to depart from there, far more important than the two *gal* just mentioned, especially the memorial of the twelve stones in the Jordan River (cf. 4.7). The source of this comes from Moses as found in Dt 27.4-5: "And when you have passed over the Jordan, you shall set up these stones concerning which I command you this day on Mount Ebal, and you shall plaster them with plaster. And there you shall build an altar to the Lord your God, an altar of stones; you shall lift up no iron tool upon them." Joshua isn't mentioned by name as present among the elders during this assembly which takes place at Shekem. The two verses just cited are followed by several more which speak of the sacrifices to be performed upon this altar as well as the law to be written on it. Although writing the Torah would take up considerable space, perhaps Moses has in mind the abbreviated form, if you will, the Ten Commandments.

What's important about this altar is that the stones are "unhewn" or *shalem* which is used a second time in this verse as "peace offerings." Thus the sense of the former suggests a suitability of stones which are whole and entire, not shaped by human hands. That means some hunting for stones that would fit together sufficiently well so as not to collapse over time. Furthermore, this altar has great significance because it is the first built in the promised land of stones from that land in well over four hundred years, the last one being by Jacob as recounted in Gn

35.7. And as noted in the Deuteronomy excerpt, Joshua is to inscribe a copy of the Torah given to Moses by the Lord albeit in abbreviated form.

Vs. 33 is quite extended, for it has the entire assembly of Israel gathered together. What's interesting is that the “sojourner” is included, *ger* perhaps referring not so much to Canaanites (Israel had only been in the land a short time; probably doesn't include Rahab's family from Jericho) but to those accompanied Israel from Egypt. “A mixed multitude also went up with them” [Ex 12.38]. Some may even have been Egyptians, aliens not unlike Israel while in Egypt as well as a mixed bag picked up while wandering in the Sinai wilderness. And so everyone stood on opposite sides of the Lord's ark while they brought it to Mount Ebal and once there, blessed the Lord in accord with Moses' command: “When you have passed over the Jordan, these shall stand upon Mount Gerizim to bless the people” [Dt 27.12]. Although the text at hand doesn't mention it, Moses continues with other tribes of Israel who are to utter a whole series of curses. Perhaps Joshua did some editorializing, if you will. Israel had come through enough harrowing experiences in a short period of time. Chapter Eight concludes with Joshua reading all that Moses had commanded him, not omitting a single “word” or *davar* (cf. vs. 27). Thus Mount Ebal became a second Sinai, and Joshua cemented his relationship with Israel as a veritable successor to Moses.

## Chapter Nine

1. When all the kings who were beyond the Jordan in the hill country and in the lowland all along the coast of the Great Sea toward Lebanon, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites heard of this, 2. they gathered together with one accord to fight Joshua and Israel. 3. But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, 4. they on their part acted with cunning and went and made ready provisions and took worn-out sacks upon their asses and wine skins, worn-out and torn and mended, 5. with worn-out, patched sandals on their feet and worn-out clothes; and all their provisions were dry and moldy. 6. And they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a far country; so now make a covenant with us." 7. But the men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you live among us; then how can we make a covenant with you?" 8. They said to Joshua, "We are your servants." And Joshua said to them, "Who are you? And where do you

come from?" 9. They said to him, "From a very far country your servants have come because of the name of the Lord your God; for we have heard a report of him, and all that he did in Egypt, 10. and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, Sihon the king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan who dwelt in Ashtaroth. 11. And our elders and all the inhabitants of our country said to us, `Take provisions in your hand for the journey and go to meet them and say to them, "We are your servants; come now, make a covenant with us.'" 12. Here is our bread; it was still warm when we took it from our houses as our food for the journey on the day we set forth to come to you, but now, behold, it is dry and moldy; 13. these wine skins were new when we filled them and behold, they are burst; and these garments and shoes of ours are worn out from the very long journey." 14. So the men partook of their provisions and did not ask direction from the Lord. 15. And Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them to let them live; and the leaders of the congregation swore to them. 16. At the end of three days after they had made a covenant with them, they heard that they were their neighbors, and that they dwelt among them. 17. And the people of Israel set out and reached their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon, Chephirah, Be-eroth and Kiriath-jearim. 18. But the people of Israel did not kill them because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel. Then all the congregation murmured against the leaders. 19. But all the leaders said to all the congregation, "We have sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel, and now we may not touch them. 20. This we will do to them and let them live, lest wrath be upon us because of the oath which we swore to them." 21. And the leaders said to them, "Let them live." So they became hewers of wood and drawers of water for all the congregation as the leaders had said of them. 22. Joshua summoned them, and he said to them, "Why did you deceive us, saying, `We are very far from you,' when you dwell among us? 23. Now therefore you are cursed, and some of you shall always be slaves, hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God." 24. They answered Joshua, "Because it was told to your servants for a certainty that the Lord your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you; so we feared greatly for our lives because of you and did this thing. 25. And now, behold, we are in your hand: do as it seems good and right in your sight to do to us." 26. So he did to them and delivered them out of the hand of the people of Israel; and they did not kill them. 27. But Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the Lord to continue to this day in the place which he should choose.

The conjunctive *v-* begins this new chapter translated here as “when” as applied to a confederation of sorts between the kings beyond the Jordan which perhaps included the Gibeonites. They assembled hastily after what had just transpired, namely, the destruction of both Jericho and Ai as well as the earlier miraculous crossing of the Jordan River. All along they had watched Joshua lead the Israelites in their bid to conquer their homeland, Ai’s destruction being the catalyst that brought them together as one kingdom, albeit temporary. The common verb *shamah* or “heard” is used not unlike as in 6.27: “his (Joshua) fame was in all the land.” That is to say, word of a dramatic event travels just as quickly as gossip and does so over a considerable distance regardless of obstacles. The example of the *shamah* at hand...its rapidity...is emphasized by two factors: “beyond the Jordan” and mention of the hill country. The latter implies difficult to reach places to which reports about Ai made their way just as swiftly as in more accessible areas. Then there are other places included or from north to south, east and west.

As for these kings beyond the Jordan, we don’t hear anything about them in this chapter; the same applies for the next one. Thus they serve as a background to the story of the Gibeonites, looming there all the while until they make their appearance in Chapter Eleven.

Both Jericho and Ai happened in rapid succession after Israel’s crossing of the Jordan River, their defeat and hence total annihilation having caused immediate alarm. Even the messengers who brought the reports urged themselves on by reason of this threat. Note that the two *shamahs* resemble Rahab’s words to the spies, “the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you” [2.9]. The two verbs “fallen upon” and “melt” thus tie in neatly with this rapid *shamah* about Ai’s defeat. Just as quickly as *shamah* extended throughout Canaan, so did *shamah* from them reach back to Joshua which gave him further confidence as what to expect, generally speaking.

Despite the ominous reports filtering in throughout Canaan, the six tribes (cf. Gn 15.19) mentioned in vs. 1 sent emissaries to each other (they were so alarmed they decided to forgo any preliminary counseling or bargaining) and assembled at once, *qavats* being the verb meaning to gather as in 10.6: “for all the kings of the Amorites that dwell in the hill country are gathered against us.” In the verse at hand, such *qavats* is twofold, against Joshua and against Israel. The text separates both, if you

will, and by doing so highlights the peril at hand. Perhaps some if not all the tribes agreed that if they could take out Joshua himself, Israel would simply dissolve. The place of this *qavats* isn't mentioned, deliberately so, in order to conceal it from Joshua and his spies. They wouldn't want a repeat of Jericho and Ai at this critical point.

However, there was one group of people called not so much by a tribal name but by their city, Gibeon, which is north of Jerusalem. They too got wind of what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai and did not go along with the six tribes now in the process of assembling with haste. They knew the power of the Lord who was with Israel and hence decided to act “with cunning” or *harmah* which isn't necessarily to behave in a deceitful manner. It has four other biblical references, three of which are in Proverbs. The following gives an alternate sense to this noun which is the first word in the verse [1.4] as follows: “that prudence may be given to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth.” Someone among the Gibeonites was shrewd enough to come up with this approach, perhaps garnered from careful observation of the Israelites from the time they had crossed the Red Sea and wandered in the Sinai for forty years. If a group of people could make good their miraculous escape from Egypt, the superpower of the time, and not only survive but flourish in the desert for an extended period of time (formerly they had no experience of this while in Egypt), there was little doubt that Israel could take on any foe.

The Gibeonites came up with an ingenious plan to save themselves from going the way of Jericho and Ai. They made every effort to disguise themselves (cf. vs. 4) by assuming worn-out clothes which meant not only rummaging around for such things but making existing clothes look old and worn. They did the same with their provisions, allowing them to go almost bad. The Gibeonites had to act quickly because they weren't terribly far from the Israelites. Also they wanted to avoid contact with the six tribes which meant they waited for that *qavats* or gathering so as to make their move, that is, with *harmah* or cunning. They approached the Israelites who were at Gilgal, the place where Joshua had the Israelites circumcised (cf. 5.9), another way of displaying their *harmah* because that was also where the Passover was celebrated the first time in Canaan, hence a sacred spot. In other words, the Israelites just might be better disposed to welcome them.

Note that in vs. 6 the Gibeonites spoke both with Joshua and the “man of Israel,” that is, Israel as a singular “man” or *'ysh*. In the meanwhile Joshua was keenly

aware of the six tribes meeting to adopt a strategy of defeating Israel, so naturally he was wary of any Canaanites coming to him. Do they have in mind a scheme not unlike his with Jericho, to spy them out and get back to the six tribes? And so the Gibeonites claimed to have come from a “far” country, *rachog* found last in 3.4: “Yet there shall be a space between you and it (the ark).” The problem is that they didn't specify the country from which they had come which naturally aroused Joshua's suspicion. Right away...too quickly...the Gibeonites want to make a “covenant” or *beryth* (cf. 3.17), the verb *karath* commonly used for such an occasion which means to cut (cf. vs. 16) thereby indicating something of permanence.

Vs. 7 identifies the people from Gibeon as Hivites, one of the six tribes now meeting to counter Israel. As in vs. 6 the singular 'ysh is used, literally as “man of Israel.” Most likely their identity was still concealed, Hivites being inserted to make the text clearer. The “man” of Israel first deals with these people followed by Joshua in their bid to cut a covenant and live among the Israelites claiming out right that they would be their servants which boils down to being their slaves. To Joshua's question as to who they are and from whence they came the Gibeonites responded not just from a “far” (*rachog*, cf. vs. 6) country but one which is “very” far, *me'od* being an adverb connoting excess.

The Gibeonites now proceed (vs. 9) to dig themselves deeper into their *harmah* or deception which means the more they elaborate, the quicker they will trip up and reveal their true identity. It's surprising they hadn't invented a country or identity, that being the first question asked. To their credit, however, these nearby people decided to stick with the same story, and everyone of them agreed because it was a matter of life or death, literally. Immediately the Gibeonites tried to deflect their growing unease with the predicament they got themselves into by bring up the “name of the Lord” *shem* being prefaced with the preposition *l-* which reads literally “to the name of the Lord.” Hopefully this appeal of coming to the Lord will stop Joshua from further questioning and get down to the business of incorporating their people into Israel even if it means some type of servitude. They embellish it with having heard a “report” or *shomah* (cf. 6.27) of the Lord, this word being derived from the verb at hand, *shamah* or to hear. It runs something literally as “we have heard a hearing.” Such a hearing goes way back to when Israel had been in Egypt...important as it was...but even more so, the encounter with the Lord on Mount Sinai. In other words, the Gibeonites tried their best to regurgitate

knowledge that had been common to most inhabitants of Canaan for many years as well as to the two kings of the Amorites.

The Gibeonites continue with their *harmah* or cunning by playing out to Joshua their well-rehearsed lie of coming from a distance and by going into details about their worn out clothing, provisions and all the rest. Each of the Gibeonites had to present the same information if questioned separately or by collectively one of Joshua's lieutenants. Finally in vs. 14 the Israelites took from the "provisions" of the Gibeonites, *tsedah* referring to what one takes on a journey. "Prepare your provisions; for within three days you are to pass over this Jordan" [1.11].

Apparently this was a way of testing them, to see if they had not just recently prepared food or had been procured locally. However, the Israelites failed to ask "direction" from the Lord, *peh* meaning literally "mouth." So while they were filling their mouths with the provisions of the Gibeonites, they didn't ask of the Lord's mouth as to their true intent.

Without further ado, Joshua concluded an agreement with the Gibeonites which turned out to be the second big mistake he made since his recent entry into Canaan, the other having misjudged the first attack upon Ai. Basing his decision upon partaking of the food which deliberately had been made stale, Joshua makes "peace" or *shalom*. "All the people returned safe to Joshua in the camp at Makkedah" [10.21]. Furthermore, Joshua made a "covenant" or *beryth*, that is, he "cut" or *karath* one (cf. vs. 6). To ratify it, the leaders of Israel "swore" to the Gibeonites, *shavah* being found last in 6.26. Obviously a sigh of relief went up among the Gibeonites although their leaders forewarned them not to express too much outward joy lest their ruse be discovered and be put to death.

Now the Gibeonites eagerly awaited being adopted into the "congregation" [vs. 15] of Israel but faced a dilemma. They had to maintain their ruse indefinitely, a difficult if not impossible thing to do. Hopefully the covenant just cut would work in their favor even if they were discovered which was inevitable. Use of the word *hedah* for "congregation" implies being a witness and is found next in vs. 18 as well as frequently thereafter and intimates a decision of acceptance by all the people through their leaders.

It turned out that the deception by the Gibeonites lasted a mere three days for by them the Israelites heard they were "neighbors" or *qarov* who dwelt "among" them,

*qerev*. The two words are from the same verbal root meaning to be near or to approach. The verb “heard” is quite general in tone and can refer to overhearing some of the Gibeonites or chance encounters with nearby peoples. The question of language may have played a role in blowing the elaborate guise by the Gibeonites who until now employed some obscure dialect unfamiliar to the Israelites as well as native Canaanites. Then one of the Israelites by chance heard some of these people speaking in their native (local) dialect giving them away. Word about this clever deception was bound to leak out among the Canaanites ranged against the Israelites. After having overcome their anger at such a skillful betrayal, they may have hoped that the Gibeonites had in mind infiltrating their enemies and thus bring them down from within.

Without mention of exchanging words with the Gibeonites, the Israelites set out at once to their four cities in the Jerusalem area who got word of what had just transpired and were expecting to be punished severely. However, Joshua decided not to “kill” them, a rather blunt way of putting it, the verb being *nakah* meaning to strike which is just as brutal (cf. 7.3). Again *hedah* or “congregation” is used as in vs. 15 to show the collective attitude of the Israelites. Although bound by this covenant, certainly Joshua and his people were entertaining dark thoughts as how to best get at the Gibeonites, to subject them to the meanest subservience possible. This is evident by some of the *hedah* murmuring against their leads (cf. vs. 18) even though the oath and covenant with these people had been done “by the Lord, the God of Israel.” Putting it in this context makes the murmuring all the more dangerous for all parties, the verb being *lun* noted in 3.1 as “lodged.” The idea seems to be that murmuring is a way of remaining...lodging...in a negative attitude, especially since it involves not just some but “all the congregation.”

The leaders (note that Joshua isn’t mentioned, perhaps taken up with the after effects of the victory at Ai) responded to this grumbling that they had sworn an oath to the Gibeonites so as not to “touch” them, *nagah* meaning to smite and mentioned last in 8.15 as “made a pretense.” The leaders held their ground against both a possible mutiny and divine wrath coming upon not just them but upon Israel as a whole. Such words are reminiscent of what happened recently with Achan whose behavior after the fall of Jericho incurred divine “wrath” or *qetseph* which connotes altercation. “And wrath fell upon the congregation of Israel” [22.20]. This worked and did so in a nick of time. Still, the Gibeonites had to be dealt with right away, so the leaders (again, without mention of Joshua) made them hewers of good and

drawers of water (cf. vs. 21) for the congregation.

Once word of this potential slaughter of the Gibeonites reached Joshua's ears, he wasted not time in summoning them. He asked the reason for their deception, *ramah* being the verb which fundamentally means to cast or to throw. Of course, Joshua knew the reason but wanted to have it out in the open. "Why then have you deceived me" [Gn 29.25]? Joshua puts his question more or less in rhetorical fashion, to which the Gibeonites can't respond but just stand there taking in his words. He next pronounces what amounts to a judgment, namely, to be "cursed" or 'arar (cf. 6.26) meaning that some...not all...will be slaves while others will doing the hewing and drawing of water. Note that Joshua puts this in terms that are somewhat softened: "for the house of my God."

The Gibeonites were on the spot. However, they responded immediately by referring to Moses' injunction which hearkens back to the opening words of this book where the Lord himself says that he will be with Joshua as he was with Moses and give to him the land of Canaan (cf. 1.5). In the verse at hand, this involves destroying the native inhabitants, *shamad* being the verb as in 7.12. This cause fear for the Gibeonites, more precisely, for their "lives" where the noun *nepesh* or soul is used (cf. 2.14). So they resign themselves, not so much seeking mercy, but by saying that they are in Joshua's hands. Joshua was impressed at their boldness and honesty which made him stick by his oath lest anything befall Israel and prevent them from conquest of the land. In addition to the twice mentioned menial tasks of being hewers and drawers, Joshua adds that the Gibeonites will do it for the altar of the Lord. That is to say, they will serve as functionaries to sacrificial offerings which turned out to be a better fate than anticipated. While it sounds like a bargain now—their lives are spared, to be sure—some may wonder if they could persist in these tasks, let alone having their children and childrens' children be in such a subservient condition.