

Joshua and Judges – Session Three Crossing the Jordan



Crossing the Jordan

The History of Research (Joshua 3:1 – 5:12) Wellhausen’s Untangling Map of the Jordan Crossing Notes on the Ban (ḥērem)

The History of Research (Joshua 3:1 – 5:12)

Joshua 3:1 – 5:12 contains two literary problems that indicate a history of composition. The first is literary structure. The story of the ark’s crossing at the Jordan has repetitions that lack a clear literary design. The introduction contains conflicting chronologies of a one-day and a three-day event for the crossing of the Jordan (3:1, 5, and 3:2 – 4). The selection of twelve men occurs twice, first in a speech by Joshua (3:12) and a second time as a divine command (4:20). The procession of the priests with the ark changed, so that they both lead and follow the people (3:16 – 17; 4:10, 18 – 19). The memorial stones are placed both in the middle of the Jordan (4:9) and on the west side in the camp of Israel (4:8) and at Gilgal (4:20). Joshua also provides two teachings on the meaning of the stones, one to the twelve men (4:6 – 7) and another to the entire nation (4:21 – 24).

The second problem is literary context. Joshua 3:1 – 5:12 includes themes from the Pentateuch, but it is not clear whether the narrative was originally part of the Hexateuchal sources or an independent story that is only loosely related to the Pentateuch. The setting of Shittim ties the narratives to the conclusion of the wilderness journey in Numbers 25. The theme of crossing water on dry ground

points back to a similar event at the Red Sea in Exodus 14, although the ark is absent from the story of the exodus. The observance of Passover and eating of unleavened bread further anchors the crossing of the Jordan in the central festivals of the exodus in Exodus 12 – 13, while the cessation of manna at the close of Joshua 5 ties the episode to Exodus 16, creating a frame to the wilderness period.

Interpreters offer two views of the history of composition to account for these internal repetitions and the relationship of the story to the Pentateuch. Source critics conclude that the present form of the crossing of the Jordan contains parallel accounts of the same story and that each version originally functioned as the conclusion to a source document, thus providing evidence for an original Hexateuch. The many repetitions in Joshua 3:1 – 5:12, reinforce the literary ties to the Pentateuch, since it too, is composed in a similar manner, with narratives that are filled with doublets that frequently disrupt the flow of the narrative. But other interpreters are less certain. The lack of correspondence between the language of Joshua 3:1 – 5:12 and the Pentateuchal sources and the difficulty in recovering complete parallel versions of the crossing of the Jordan suggest a single narrative, composed independently from the Pentateuchal sources.

Wellhausen illustrates an early source-critical solution to the composition of Joshua 3:1 – 5:12 and the problem that the method poses in accounting for the growth of the text and its relationship to the Pentateuch. He identified two parallel accounts of the Jordan River crossing based on internal repetitions: the JE source (3:1, 5, 12; 4:1, 3, 8; 5:2 – 9) and the Dtr (Deuteronomist) version (3:2 – 4, 6 – 8, 9 – 17 [minus 12]; 4:2, 4 – 7, 9, 11a, 12 – 14, 20 – 24). JE is a one-day event, that recounts the selection of twelve men (3:12), but the focus remains on the entire Israelite nation, whom Joshua commands to follow the ark, to pick up the twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan River, and to erect them in the camp on the west side of the Jordan (4:1, 3), which they do. (4:8). The circumcision of the Israelites at Gilgal immediately follows (5:2, 3, 8, 9; expanded within JE to include vv. 4, 5 – 7). JE is part of a hexateuchal source, according to Wellhausen. The setting of Shittim (3:1) follows from Numbers 25:1 – 5, the call for purification (3:5) repeats themes from Exodus 19:10ff and Numbers 11:18; and the circumcision of the Israelites (5:2, 3, 8,9) is tied to Exodus 4:22 – 24.

The Dtr version is not a source from the Pentateuch; it represents the work of the author who inserted the Deuteronomic law within the Pentateuchal sources. The content of the Dtr version is a three-day event (3:2 – 4) that includes a more expanded account of the crossing (3:14 – 17). It also included the exaltation of Joshua (3:6 – 8), who instructs the Israelites about the power of Yahweh (3:9 – 11, 13) and the meaning of the stones (4:4 – 7, 20 – 24). The twelve men erect the stones (4:4 – 5) to represent the Israelite people, who include the eastern tribes (4:12 – 14), while Joshua also places stones in the middle of the Jordan (4:9). Wellhausen identified the Priestly source from the date for the crossing of the Jordan (4:19) and the inclusion of Passover, unleavened bread and manna to the ritual of circumcision (5:10 – 12). The combination of the parallel versions of JE and

Dtr results in the incoherent structure of the present form of Joshua 3:1 – 5:12, in which the two chronologies compete in the telling of the story (3:1, 5 and 3:2 – 4); the selection of the twelve men is hopelessly out of context (3:12); the crossing of the Jordan by the people and the priests lacks order (4:11); and the ceremony of the stones occurs twice in different locations (4:1; 3, 8; and 4:4 – 5, 9).

– Thomas B. Dozeman (from *Joshua 1 – 12: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (The Anchor Bible)*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2015

Wellhausen's Untangling

Using the structure Wellhausen proposed (above) the story of the crossing of the Jordan can be untangled into two narratives, each of which seems more coherent than the finished product we find in our current bibles. Wellhausen did not attempt to separate the J source from the E source but left them combined. His model also includes additions that he suggested came from a Priestly source.

JE Version

¹ Early in the morning Joshua rose and set out from Shittim with all the Israelites, and they came to the Jordan. They camped there before crossing over. ⁵ Then Joshua said to the people, "Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you." ¹² So now select twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. ¹ When the entire nation had finished crossing over the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, ³ and command them, "Take twelve stones from here out of the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the priests' feet stood, carry them over with you, and lay them down in the place where you camp tonight.' "

⁸ The Israelites did as Joshua commanded. They took up twelve stones out of the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the Lord had told Joshua, carried them over with them to the place where they camped, and laid them down there. ² At that time the Lord said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites a second time." ³ So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath-haaraloth. ⁴ This is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: all the males of the people who came out of Egypt, all the warriors, had died during the journey through the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt. ⁵ Although all the people who came out had been circumcised, yet all the people born on the journey through the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised. ⁶ For the Israelites traveled forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, the warriors who came out of Egypt, perished, not having listened to the voice of the Lord. To them the Lord swore that he would not

let them see the land that he had sworn to their ancestors to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey. ⁷ So it was their children, whom he raised up in their place, 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 until they were healed. ⁹ The Lord said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt." And so that place is called Gilgal to this day.

Deuteronomist Version

² At the end of three days, the officers went through the camp ³ and commanded the people, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God being carried by the Levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place. Follow it, ⁴ so that you may know the way you should go, for you have not passed this way before. Yet there shall be a space between you and it, a distance of about two thousand cubits; do not come any nearer to it." ⁶ To the priests Joshua said, "Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass on in front of the people." So they took up the ark of the covenant and went in front of the people.

⁷ The Lord said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses. ⁸ You are the one who shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, 'When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.'" ⁹ Joshua then said to the Israelites, "Draw near and hear the words of the Lord your God." ¹⁰ Joshua said, "By this you shall know that among you is the living God who without fail will drive out from before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites: ¹¹ the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is going to pass before you into the Jordan. ¹³ When the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, come to rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan flowing from above shall be cut off; they shall stand in a single heap."

¹⁴ When the people set out from their tents to cross over the Jordan, the priests bearing the ark of the covenant were in front of the people. ¹⁵ Now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest. So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, ¹⁶ the waters flowing from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, were wholly cut off. Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho. ¹⁷ While all Israel were crossing over on dry ground, the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firmly on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan.

² "Select twelve men from the people, one from each tribe. ⁴ Then Joshua summoned the twelve men whom he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each

tribe. ⁵ Joshua said to them, "Pass on before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan, and each of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, ⁶ so that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' ⁷ then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off in front of the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the Israelites a memorial forever."

⁹ (Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood, and they are there to this day.)¹¹ As soon as all the people had finished crossing over, ¹² The Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh crossed over armed before the Israelites, as Moses had ordered them. ¹³ About forty thousand armed for war crossed over before the Lord to the plains of Jericho for battle.

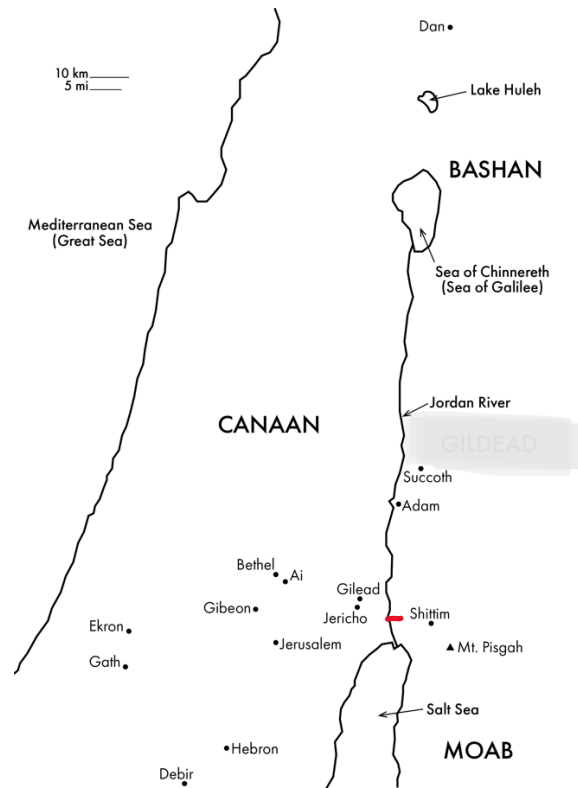
¹⁴ On that day the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel, and they stood in awe of him, as they had stood in awe of Moses all the days of his life.

²⁰ Those twelve stones that they had taken out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal, ²¹ saying to the Israelites, "When your children ask their parents in time to come, 'What do these stones mean?' ²² then you shall let your children know, 'Israel crossed over the Jordan here on dry ground.'²³ For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you crossed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we crossed over, ²⁴ so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty and so that you may fear the Lord your God forever."

Insertions from the Priestly Source

¹⁹ The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they camped in Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. ¹⁰ While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal, they kept the Passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. ¹¹ On the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and roasted grain. ¹² The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

Map of the Jordan Crossing



Joshua crossed the Jordan from near Shittim to Gilead where the Israelites first made camp.

Notes on the Ban (*ḥērem*)

Deuteronomy 20:17 names six groups who were subject to the ḥērem or ban. In the New Revised Standard Version – Updated Edition that we are using in this study the phrase used is “devoted to the Lord for destruction.” The ḥērem is discussed in chapter six with regard to the destruction of Jericho and again in chapter seven related to the theft of devoted things by Achan.

Things and people set off as Yahweh’s property could fall into the category of *ḥērem*. Although often presumed to be a category connected only with the practice of war, things and people could come into a state of *ḥērem* in other ways as well (Exodus 22:19; Leviticus 27:21). Nothing or no one in a state of *ḥērem* could be redeemed. The categorization of people and booty in warfare as *ḥērem* and thus subject to destruction could be the result of a vow. In Joshua, as in Deuteronomy, however, it results from God’s command (Deuteronomy 7:2, 20:17). *Hērem* implies total destruction as a means of rendering Yahweh’s property unavailable for human use and ownership. At least in this sense the incineration of *ḥērem* was a sort of whole burnt offering. However, this same end could also be achieved by putting such

things into Yahweh's treasury (Josh 6:19, 24) or turning them over to the priests . On the other hand, human beings in a state of *ḥērem* apparently had to be killed. *Hērem*, as a ritual state of something or someone in Yahweh's possession, correlates with the state of holiness, and like holiness, *ḥērem* was thought to be contagious. Thus Achan's appropriation of *ḥērem* was a most dangerous act because it transformed Israel and its camp into a state of *ḥērem*, subject to destruction.

– Richard D. Nelson (from *Joshua (The Old Testament Library)*, Westminster John Knox Press, 1997

Joshua 1 – 12: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (The Anchor Bible) – Thomas B. Dozeman, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2015

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