

Chronology of the Exodus and the Israelite Conquest of Canaan

In this two part series biblical historian Richard Paige shows how the archaeological data can be explained.

by Richard H. Paige

[Part I 13th or 15th century?]

PART II The Conquest of Canaan

The problem of matching the biblical account and the available archaeological evidence is complicated by the fact that it has proved impossible to associate the destructions of Hazor, Bethel (if one accepts that it is Beitin) and Lachish (all of which were destroyed in the 13th century B.C.E.) with the work of one man (Joshua), as the Bible maintains.

Multiple-conquest theories

Albright originally dated the destruction of Beitin to 1299, while the date for the 13th-century destruction of Lachish was originally set at 1225, almost 75 years later! But supposedly both were destroyed by Joshua's invasion. The excavators at Lachish pressured Albright to lower his date for the destruction of Beitin. While Albright did later agree to a lowering of his date for the destruction of Beitin (a change he was never comfortable with) to 1250 B.C.E., this still left a gap of 25 years between the destruction of Beitin and Lachish, a gap that it was hoped later evidence would help to close. However, later evidence has made the gap *larger* and not smaller!

Lachish is still being excavated (and partially reconstructed). The latest evidence supports a date of about 1140 for the destruction of Lachish. This not only produces a gap of at least 110 years (160 years if one accepts Albright's original date) for the destruction of cities which, supposedly, were conquered by a coordinated campaign of conquest under the leadership of one

man, but it also places the destruction of one city (Beitin) far too early and the other (Lachish) far too late for the time of Joshua.

This has given rise to the theory (embraced by a fair number of scholars) that there were multiple conquests: separate groups of peoples moving into Canaan at different times, only later joining into a 12-tribe confederacy. It has even been suggested the 12 sons of Jacob were fictitious—that the story was made up because the people divided themselves into 12 groups, each to take care of the main religious shrine (the tabernacle at Shiloh) one month a year. There's no evidence for that, of course, but if you don't believe the Bible is historically reliable, any speculation is permitted.

Archaeologists have even had problems when they *do* find evidence that a city was destroyed at what they believe to be "the right time." For example, Yigael Yadin was able to demonstrate that the city of Hazor ([Joshua 11:11](#)) was destroyed about 1225 B.C.E. After remaining uninhabited for about 40 years, there was a settlement of tents and huts (which they conclude are Israelite), which existed *without interruption* until the time of Solomon. Thus, the archaeological evidence indicates that following its destruction in 1225, there was *no further Canaanite occupation* of the city. [Judges 4](#), however, tells us that after Hazor's destruction by Joshua, the Israelites, led by Deborah, fought against Jabin, the Canaanite king of Hazor. In order to reconcile this discrepancy, two Israeli scholars (Aharoni and Avi-Yonah) have gone so far as to suggest a separate invasion by Hebrews led by Deborah before the time of Joshua!

The Book of Judges

As if this is not confusion enough, one also needs to consider the implications of accepting a 13th century B.C.E. date for the Israelite Conquest on the chronology of the Book of Judges. This book contains narrative material from the time of Joshua's death to the time of Saul, about 1050. However, if the Conquest was in 1225 B.C.E., as most modern-critical scholars would have it, Joshua would have died about 1200, and all the events of Judges have to be squeezed into 150 years.

It is generally agreed that the Israelites' struggle with the Philistines began around 1100 or 1125. So everything before Samson would have to be compressed into 100 years *or less*. Such a "compression" of the events distorts the whole structure of the Book of Judges.

A modern-critical scholar might say that the figure of 300 years given by Jephthah ([Judges 11:26](#)) was achieved by rounding or was the unreliable guess of an ill-informed individual, but to reduce it to only 75-100 years (as is required by a 13th century B.C.E. date) makes it impossible to accommodate all the events contained in chapters 1-10 of the Book of Judges.

The infiltration theory

Finally, the Bible states that the Canaanites lived in impressive walled cities ([Numbers 13:28](#)). Rifka Gonen (of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem), however, has demonstrated that the Late Bronze Age was one of the *least* urbanized in the history of Canaan. Following the destruction of the cities at the end of the Middle Bronze Age (and some destruction at the end of the Late Bronze 1), 63 *percent* of the cities remained uninhabited for at least part of the Late Bronze period. In the hill country, where Joshua's campaign centered, 95 *percent* of the cities existing at the end of the Middle Bronze Age were uninhabited. Of the few cities that were resettled, *most were unfortified*: without any walls at all!

How can we reconcile that archaeological finding, - which we have no reason to doubt, with the spies' mention of the heavily fortified cities?

Yadin wrote about the "basic historicity" of the biblical accounts of the Conquest. How can one suggest any kind of historicity for the biblical accounts with all of these major discrepancies with the archaeological evidence? How can one attempt to maintain that there is an agreement between the biblical accounts and the archaeological evidence if the specifics of the biblical accounts are discounted? The truth is, there is *no agreement between the two at all!*

So where do we stand with the attempt to reconcile the archaeological evidence and the biblical record? James Pritchard, in a book about his excavation at Gibeon, looked at the archaeological evidence of Jericho, Ai and Gibeon, and commented: "It suggests that we have reached an impasse on the question of supporting the...conquest with archaeological under girding."

Yes, the archaeologists are at an impasse. They concluded that there is no archaeological support for a Conquest in the 15th century. They then claimed that the archaeological evidence was better for a 13th-century date. However, on closer examination, the evidence for the 13th-century date is not any better. These problems have led some archaeologists and biblical historians to state that there is no support for the biblical accounts of the Conquest anywhere between the 15th and the 12th century B.C.E.!

As a result, there has been a major movement away from the theories about a military conquest of Canaan by a large number of outsiders in favor of a modification of a theory originally presented by George Mendenhall about 30 years ago. Largely the work of Norman Gottwald (a sociologist who is neither an archaeologist nor a biblical scholar), this theory postulates that before, or about the same time as, the Israelite incursion into Canaan, there was a revolt

by Canaanite peasants against their feudal Canaanite overlords that resulted in the destruction of most of the cities in Canaan (especially in the central hill country). The cities that remained (or revived) were primarily in the coastal plain, the Shephelah, the borders of the Jezreel Valley and the northern Galilee.

According to the theory, the liberated peasants, after their successful revolt, not willing to risk being forced back into serfdom by their former overlords, fled to the central hill country, where they amalgamated with the *small number* of Hebrews who had *peacefully* infiltrated that region after the destruction of the strong Canaanite centers by the rebels. Although they outnumbered the Hebrew newcomers, these Canaanite rebels, outcasts from their own political and social system, pledged themselves to accept the Hebrew God when they joined with the Hebrew newcomers to become a new "nation."

According to this theory, the ceremony at Shechem ([Joshua 24:1-15](#)), where all those present pledged themselves to forswear the "gods of the Amorites" (as well as all other gods), although it has been "reworked" by later editors to reflect the traditional national "mythology" of the Exodus from Egypt, still preserves the memory of the pact made between the Canaanite peasants and the Hebrew immigrants.

After several hundred years of settling down in the largely unoccupied hill country, the expanding population of this "mixed nation" (Canaanite in culture and Hebrew in religion) again came into conflict with the Canaanites living in the remaining urban centers and, in the process of warring against them, destroyed their cities. It is these later battles (according to Gottwald and his adherents) that serve as the raw material for the "battle accounts" that form the core of the Book of Joshua.

Examining this theory

Indeed, Rifka Gonen's evidence seems to support this. Between 1400 and 1200, there was a gradual increase in the number of settlements, accelerating in the period between 1200 and 1000. For example, in the southern hills of Samaria, there were five settlements at the end of the Late Bronze Age. At the end of the Iron I period, around the year 1000, there were 103. They share the same kind of pottery and architecture, which we identify as Israelite. The first settlements are clustered between Shechem and Shiloh, then they spread into the Galilee and Judah, then Beersheba and the Shephelah region (the southwestern foothills).

Although many scholars have become fascinated with Gottwald's theory, it has not won universal acceptance by any means. This is largely because of the numerous details preserved in the biblical account—details that simply could not, and would not, have been made up hundreds of years later. The Bible records some of the battles of Joshua, battles in which the Israelites won through divine assistance or by utilizing clever strategies, not by superior force.

If the Canaanite cities were destroyed only after several hundred years of "Israelite" settlement, as Gottwald has suggested, the Israelites would have been so numerous that they would have overwhelmed the walled cities by virtue of numerical strength. They wouldn't have invented stories that showed *a need* to rely on "tricks." [For details of the military stratagems used, see the excerpts from the article by Abraham Malamat from the March-April 1982 *Biblical Archaeology Review* in the box below.]

Details of a Military Conquest

An interesting article by Abraham Malamat entitled "How Inferior Israelite Forces Conquered Fortified Canaanite Cities," appeared in the March-April 1982 *Biblical Archaeology Review* ([Malamat 1982](#)). Malamat's primary expertise is with the period of the monarchy, with the relationships between the Israelite kingdoms and Egypt, Assyria and Babylonia. But he turned his attention to the Israelite Conquest in this article, "How Inferior Forces Conquered Fortified Canaanite Cities." His observations suggest that the Israelites were less numerous than the Canaanites.

"Both the 'infiltration' model and the 'revolt' model hold some truth. No doubt some peaceful infiltration and settlement occurred. No doubt there was dissension and some insurgency in the Canaanite cities, with some Canaanites even joining forces with the invading Israelites. Consider, for example, Rahab, the harlot, who let the Israelites into Jericho...and the informer from Bethel who showed the Israelites the way into that city (Judges 1:24-25).

"But there is a third 'model'—the Biblical tradition, *per se*—that describes an outright military conquest of Canaan, and this third model cannot simply be discarded. Without accepting every detail of the Biblical account, it is nevertheless clear that alongside a peaceful settlement ... and some unrest and revolt in the Canaanite cities ...

We also find that the Israelites conquered the hill country first; they did not conquer the lands where chariots could be used (Joshua 17:16, Judges 1:19). If the account had been written hundreds of years later, when Israel had already conquered those areas, it never would have occurred to the writer that they had ever had such a difficulty; thus, the account reflects historical reality.

Notice also the importance of Gilgal, where the Israelites camped after crossing the Jordan (Joshua 4:19). After defending Gibeon, they returned to Gilgal (Joshua 10:15). After conquering the southern cities, they returned to the camp at Gilgal (verse 43). Gilgal is a logical place for a base camp - near the Jordan, near the women and children who lived in the areas the Israelites had conquered east of the Jordan.

The Bible also mentions military stratagems. For example, the use of spies for the whole land (Numbers 13), for Jazer (Numbers 21:32), Jericho (Joshua 2:1) and Ai (Joshua 7:2). "Even if Israel was not unique in its employment of stratagems in warfare, no other literature of the ancient Near East equals the books of Joshua and Judges in the number and variety of battle stratagems described."

There are only two cases where Israel directly faced a large number of Canaanites. Other cities either had no troops left to defend them or a stratagem was used. For example, in the case of Ai the Israelites fled, pretending to be afraid. The men of Ai chased the Israelites down a narrow

there was Israelite military action which achieved forceful penetration into Canaan....

"A basic element of Israelite consciousness is that Canaan was 'inherited' by force, whether this force was an act of God or of man. This tenet is like a leitmotif that runs through the Biblical sources." This theme is not just in Judges and Joshua but elsewhere in the Bible. He says, "at the core, a military conquest remains." You have to accept the fact there was some sort of military conquest.

The biblical account "reflects an intimate and authentic knowledge of the land, and a knowledge of its topography ... and ... military strategy - which strongly support the conclusion that the settlement of the Israelites in Canaan was accompanied by substantial military operations."

Let's look at a few examples of how the topography affected the battles. The way of Atharim (the Scorpion's Pass), the way that the spies went up to investigate Canaan, is a significant route into the southern region. The Israelites' presence near southern Canaan upset the king of Arad, since his job was, so to speak, to guard the southern portions of the country. So he attacked and was defeated. The Israelites then went east, passing around the land of Edom and Moab.

The Canaanites did not try to stop the Israelites from crossing the Jordan River, despite the fact that it could be crossed in only a few places. These fords were guarded at other times, such as in the time of Gideon or the time of Jephthah. But the Canaanites took no such action. That's because the Canaanites were divided into mutually suspicious city-states. They were not in the habit of taking joint action.

valley, leaving Ai defenseless. A small force destroyed the city. Then the Israelites who were pretending to flee stopped running away and began to fight; so the men of Ai ended up being trapped in the valley between the two Israelite forces.

However, when Israel defended Gibeon against its Canaanite neighbors, the Israelites faced a numerically superior force. They won largely because they used a surprise attack. "Joshua therefore came upon them suddenly, having marched all night from Gilgal" (Joshua 10:9). This was about 20 miles and about 3,000 feet higher in elevation. They arrived near daybreak. Verse 12 tells us that the sun was over Gibeon, to their east. The Canaanites, not mentally prepared for this, panicked and fled.

They were helpless as long as they were in a state of panic. God not only lengthened the day, he also sent down huge hailstones to kill the fleeing Canaanites. Success came through the combination of valid military tactics and divine intervention.

Another frontal assault against a larger Canaanite force took place at the waters of Merom in northern Canaan (Joshua 11). Again, the account mentions the matter of surprise. "Joshua and all the people of war with him came against them suddenly by the waters of Merom, and they attacked them" (verse 7). Again, the Israelites pursued the panic-stricken enemy relentlessly. The numerically superior Canaanite force was defeated - in a state of panic, even a large army is helpless.

If archaeologists and biblical historians have reached an impasse that is so great as to prompt many to accept the kind of theory proposed by Norman Gottwald (which makes a "hash" out of the Book of Joshua, the patriarchal narratives, the Exodus and the wilderness wanderings), where does it leave us?

We still believe in the historical accuracy of the biblical account. But can this belief be defended in a rational way, or do we simply have to say it's just a matter of faith? I think it can be defended in a rational way.

Can a 15th century B.C.E. date be defended?

What has been the response of conservative scholars to this "flood" of archaeological evidence that seems to contradict the biblical accounts of the Exodus and the Israelite Conquest? Have they simply chosen to ignore this "evidence" and maintain a simplistic faith in the integrity of [I Kings 6:1](#)? No. They have been very active in defense of the traditional 15th-century date of the Exodus and the Israelite Conquest. Let's take another look at the claims of the modern-critical scholars and consider how they can be satisfactorily answered.

First, let's consider [I Kings 6:1](#). The modern-critical scholars claim that the number 480, while reflecting that there were 12 generations between the Exodus and Solomon, is in error because the presumed 40 years per generation is unrealistic. I think we can admit that 25 years is a more realistic number for the time between the birth of one generation and the next. However, that need not lead inevitably to the conclusion reached by many modern-critical scholars.

The modern-critical scholars suggest that the writer of I Kings knew there had been 12 generations between the Exodus and Solomon on the basis of [I Chronicles 6:4-10](#), which they say indicates that there were 12 generations of priests from the time of the Exodus generation (Eleazar) until the time of Zadok's *grandson* (not great great-grandson) Azariah, who, along with his grandfather and father, began to serve in Solomon's temple.

However, if we look at the genealogy of Heman the singer in [I Chronicles 6:33-37](#), we find that it lists *not 12, but 19 generations* from the time of Solomon back to the Exodus generation. Apparently the genealogy of the priests has been shortened; some names have been omitted. Perhaps it was done to present a symmetrical pattern of two sets of 12 generations. The first set runs from Eleazar, the Exodus generation, through Azariah, the generation that saw the foundation of Solomon's temple. Then there are 12 generations from Azariah to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, who saw the founding of the Second Temple.

The fact that a similar thing was done in Matthew's genealogy of Christ lends support to this idea. We can't test the accuracy of the whole genealogy, but we do have a record of the kings of Judah, and we know that Matthew omitted four kings in his list of the ancestors of Joseph: Ahaziah, Joash, Amaziah and Jehoiachim. Generations were skipped, creating a symmetry: 14 generations from Abraham to David, 14 generations from David to the captivity and 14 generations from the captivity to Christ. It is without question a shortened genealogy, not a literal one. The list says one man begat another, but it wasn't meant to be taken literally; it simply meant he was an ancestor. While we

might not write history that way, they didn't see anything wrong with it. We have to accept the literature in the way they wrote *then*.

So we can see from this biblical example that genealogical lists aren't always complete. Some names might be missing.

What then about the 19 generations of singers mentioned in [I Chronicles 6](#)? Since the genealogy of the priests may have been shortened to create a symmetry, the genealogy of the singers is most likely the one that is complete. Isn't it interesting that if we use the modern critical scholars' figure of 25 years per generation, this gives us about 475 years between the Exodus and Solomon? Thus the Bible again indicates it was about 480 years between the Exodus and Solomon.

Re-examination of Egyptian evidence

Let's look at the matter of Moses' adoption. The critics suggest that Moses was born during the early years of the 19th dynasty. But all the throne princesses of that dynasty had an abundance of royal sons, making it very unlikely that a throne princess would risk the strong social disapproval involved in adopting a Hebrew child.

In contrast, Hatshepsut not only lacked a son, but she is also known to have had a very independent spirit, strong enough to make herself Pharaoh. Having an adopted son who could be the heir to the throne may explain why she seized the throne—to prevent Thutmose II from assuming power. Another fact that fits is that Thutmose III seized the throne from Hatshepsut about the time when Moses would have been 40. And since Thutmose III tried to destroy every mention of Hatshepsut on the monuments of Egypt (you can still see where he ordered her names erased on many of them today), we wouldn't expect to find any records of her adopted son.

The Amarna tablets don't support either date, since the *Apiru* could have been any group. If we, for other good reasons, know that the Israelites invaded Canaan about 1400 B.C.E., then the *Apiru* mentioned in the letters would probably refer to them. But by themselves the letters are not proof.

What about the capital of the 18th dynasty being 400 miles away? Though the capital may have been so far away, the pharaohs of the 18th dynasty did spend time in Lower Egypt, and began construction projects there. Thutmose III appointed a vizier for his capital at Thebes and one for the Delta, at the old northern capital, Memphis. So he could have been the pharaoh who put the Israelites to hard labor. Amenhotep II, whom various believe to be the Pharaoh of the Exodus, was born in Memphis, and seems to have had

extensive estates there. The pharaoh could have been close to Goshen occasionally, making Moses' communication job possible.

What about the fact that Seti I (1300 B.C.E.) and Rameses (1290) don't mention Israel even though they campaigned in Canaan? And that the Bible doesn't mention either of these campaigns? Well, the Bible doesn't mention Merneptah's campaign in the year 1225, either. The pharaohs didn't go into the hill country where the Israelites lived. The Book of Judges is a record of how God punished the Israelites when they forsook God. The pharaohs' campaigns were not mentioned by the author(s) of the Book of Judges because the Egyptians were not used by God as an instrument to punish Israel.

The land of Rameses

What about the lack of remains from the 15th century B.C.E. under the city built by Rameses II? It is true that there are no earlier remains under Rameses' city (modern Qantir). In the 17th century B.C.E., it was the capital of the Hyksos. They were thrown out of Egypt about 1550 by the pharaoh who may have begun the enslavement of the Israelites. The city then remained uninhabited from 1550 to the 1200s.

However, just south of Rameses' later city (at Tel el-Daba), there are remains from the 18th dynasty, the 15th century. The people who lived there were apparently Semitic and thus *could have been* Israelites. It would not be surprising that the area the Israelites had lived in would be referred to by the better-known name Rameses even if the new city wasn't built exactly on top of the old.

[Genesis 47:11](#) says that Joseph situated his family "in the land of Rameses." Joseph lived much earlier than the 13th century. So how could he mention the name of Rameses? Scholars agree that Joseph probably used another name, but the old name had fallen out of use after Rameses made the area famous with his own name. So an editor used the name that would have been understood. Another example of such editorial updating is the mention of Dan in [Genesis 14](#).

The attempt to associate the period of Israelite slavery in Egypt with the pharaohs of the 19th dynasty (13th century B.C.E.) presents other difficulties. The 13th century B.C.E. city of Rameses was a capital, not a store city ([Exodus 1:11](#)). Also, if Rameses II was the Pharaoh of the Oppression (the one who put the Israelites to forced labor on his building projects), the Pharaoh of the Exodus would have to have been his successor, Merneptah—but Merneptah found the Israelites living in Canaan in the fifth year of his reign! Thus there

are serious problems if one tries to associate the 13th century pharaohs and the biblical record.

Edom, Moab, Heshbon and Dibon

Let's look at the evidence presented by Nelson Glueck in his survey in Edom and Moab. Glueck wrote that the biblical account could not represent a 15th century reality because Edom and Moab were uninhabited at that time. While this conclusion still appears in the literature dealing with the question of the date of the Exodus (even in articles written in the 1980s by authors who chose not to include the latest evidence), Glueck himself wrote *in 1974* that his conclusion had been wrong.

Glueck examined surface finds; he did not excavate. You cannot prove *lack* of population from a survey. Many periods of occupation may be overlooked. In the 1960s and 1970s a number of other surveys, more thorough than Glueck's, were done in Edom and Moab. They found that *there was a* settled population there in the 15th century, although it was not a large one. Now modern-critical scholars write that the 15th-century population was too small to have forced Israel to have gone around their national territories as is described in the biblical accounts.

However, the Bible doesn't say that Israel went around because Edom and Moab were more populous. In fact, [Deuteronomy 2:4](#) comments that Edom and Moab would be afraid of Israel. God told the Israelites to go around them because the land belonged to Edom and Moab ([verses 5, 9, 19](#)). The implication is that the Israelites could have overwhelmed the people of Edom and Moab. So the archaeological evidence does not contradict the Bible.

[Numbers 21:21-30](#) mentions that the Israelites conquered the cities of Heshbon and Dibon. Archaeologists excavated at the villages of Diban and Hesban and found the ancient capital cities of Heshbon and Dibon. But those cities were founded on virgin soil in the ninth century B.C.E.; there was nothing there in the 15th century B.C.E. So the modern-critical scholars say the biblical text is wrong. What I find very interesting is that when these same scholars find evidence in secular historical records that seems to contradict the archaeological evidence, they don't say the historical records are wrong. They just say we don't have a complete archaeological picture yet.

The city of Dibon, as it turns out, is mentioned in secular history—in the 15th century and in the 13th. Thutmose III and Rameses II both recorded conquests of the city of Dibon. So archaeologists say the city, though not at the exact site of the modern Arab village of Diban, was nearby. Why can't we use the same standard when we are dealing with the biblical text? Why is it

unacceptable to state that the sites of the 15th-century cities of Dibon and Heshbon haven't been found yet?

The general point is this: There is nothing in the archaeological picture in Egypt or east of the Jordan that would forbid a 15th-century date. The evidence is not as damaging to the biblical account as it first seemed.

The problem of Ai

Now let's look at the cities that Joshua conquered and destroyed. How can we explain the archaeological evidence that says the cities were not destroyed in the 15th century? What about the non-existence of Ai? Ai is thought to be at a site known as et-Tell, which means "the ruin." It is near a site known as Beitin, which is presumed by most to be the site of Bethel.

Geographically, this makes very little sense. David Livingston has shown that the geographical information provided in the Bible about Ai and Bethel do not match the geographical factors of et-Tell and Beitin. Though most people still do not accept his conclusion, I think it is very well founded.

The Bible indicates that Bethel and Ai were quite close, but Beitin and et-Tell are not that close. Eusebius mentions that Bethel was almost exactly at the 12th mile marker north of Jerusalem. But Beitin isn't 12 miles north of Jerusalem. Other geographical information seems to indicate that Bethel was on the main north-south route from Jerusalem to Shechem. Beitin is not. The Bible says that Bethel was on the border between Judah and Israel. But Beitin is north of the other border areas. Also, Abraham camped on a mountain between Bethel and Ai. There is no mountain between Beitin and et-Tell. The Bible says that Ai and Bethel were west of Michmash (not necessarily due west, since Hebrew has no word for northwest). Et-Tell is almost due north, only slightly west.

Bireh, though, does lie on the natural geographic border between Benjamin and Ephraim. It's on the main highway about 12 miles north of Jerusalem. There's a mountain near Bireh; on the other side of the mountain, 1 1/2 kilometers southeast, is a ruin at Khirbet Nisya. Khirbet Nisya is west, and only slightly north, of Michmash. The geography near Khirbet Nisya matches the details given in the battle of Ai, unlike et-Tell (though some scholars would make the claim that et-Tell does match satisfactorily).

Livingston is excavating at Khirbet Nisya. So far the evidence is encouraging but it is not yet conclusive. Even if Khirbet Nisya is not the correct site for Ai, it is clear that et-Tell is not.

What about the cultural break?

One of the most-often-used arguments in favor of a 13th-century Conquest is the cultural break between the Late Bronze II and the Iron Age. The cultural break is presumed to have come from a destruction of one people by the invasion of another. It is assumed that the Conquest would create a cultural break. However, it's becoming known that the cultural break was not abrupt—the Late Bronze culture simply tapered off and the Iron Age culture gradually replaced it, with some overlap between the two. This violates the concept of archaeological periods, that one ends and the next begins. The idea of overlap in the archaeological sequence has not been admitted before. But it is becoming apparent that it took place.

Moreover, just because a new culture is introduced does not mean that it was introduced by new ethnic groups. Most Iron Age forms are actually developments of Late Bronze ones it was an evolutionary change, not a revolutionary one.

The Iron Age inhabitants of Canaan are clearly Israelite. But they could have been there earlier and participated in the transition from Late Bronze to Iron Age. After all, the change to Iron Age happened throughout the eastern Mediterranean coast. "The shift from the richness of the Late Bronze Age to the apparent [notice the qualification] poverty of early Iron I is a phenomenon which extends into the whole of Canaanite and Eastern Mediterranean culture and not just that section affected by the Hebrews" ([Bikai 1980:214](#)).

Israel wasn't responsible for all the changes, so we can't presume they were uniquely responsible for it in Canaan. It makes more sense to view Israel as just one of many peoples in the area going through a cultural change. In fact, the Bible suggests that the Israelites were culturally behind the times—for a while, the only smiths were the Philistines ([Joshua 17:16](#), [I Samuel 14:19-20](#)).

What about the non-existent cities?

The Bible says many cities were destroyed in the Conquest; archaeology says most were not destroyed in the 13th *or* the 15th centuries. In many cases, the cities were uninhabited during the Late Bronze Age.

Perhaps, then, we are looking in the wrong time period. Let's look at the end of the *Middle* Bronze Age. Did Jericho exist? Yes. Gibeon yes, Hebron yes. Hormah yes, the smaller Arad yes. Debir, Lachish, Hazor, Beitin and Bireh all yes. Et-Tell, no, but Khirbet Nisya, yes.

Were these Middle Bronze cities surrounded by a wall? Yes for Jericho, Hebron, Hormah, the smaller Arad, Lachish and Hazor. We don't know yet for Birch and Khirbet Nisya. At Gibeon none was discovered. Were these cities destroyed at the end of the Middle Bronze? Yes, most were. Again, there's generally a good match.

Now, why are we looking at the end of the *Middle Bronze Age* isn't that too early for the Exodus? Isn't the 15th century in the *Late Bronze Age*? Perhaps the picture is more complicated than it appears.

Canaanite cities destroyed at end of Middle Bronze Age?

Much of the chronological framework depends on the dating of various pottery forms. Some types of pottery are associated with a particular date based on an early excavation. Other researchers then applied that date to their own excavations. Even though the original work may have been faulty, the date has become widely used.

Kathleen Kenyon had concluded that Jericho was destroyed about 1550 (the end of the Middle Bronze Age), based on the absence of bichrome pottery in the destruction. John Bimson, an English scholar notes that bichromeware "was quite limited. It does not seem to have spread appreciably into the highland regions of central Palestine, let alone as far as the Jordan Valley.... If its use never extended appreciably beyond the coastal plain, then its non-appearance at Jericho can obviously not be taken to imply abandonment of the city.... I submit, therefore, that MBA Jericho actually came to an end in the second half of the 15th century BC, and that its attackers were the Israelites as recorded in Joshua 1:6" ([Bimson 1981:133-135](#)).

He notes that the city labeled by Kathleen Kenyon as Middle Bronze was heavily fortified, and destroyed by fire. "Kenyon writes: '...All the Middle Bronze Age buildings were violently destroyed by fire.... This destruction covers the whole area.... Walls and floors are hardened and blackened, burnt debris and beams from the upper storeys fill the rooms, and the whole is covered by a wash from burnt walls.'... We are forcibly reminded of the fact that Joshua had Jericho burnt to the ground after he had taken it (Joshua 6:24)" ([Bimson 1981:120-121](#)).

Although Bimson is almost certainly right about these matters, he does err (as far as I can see) by attempting to move the date for the end of the Middle Bronze Age down to the last part of the 15th century B.C.E. in order that it will more closely accord with the biblical chronology suggested by [I Kings 6:1](#) and [Judges 11:26](#). The answer, I believe, does not lie in this direction. Rather,

I believe the work done by Bryant Wood is more likely to have shown the correct answer to the problem.

Dr. Wood has (in my opinion) convincingly demonstrated at two conferences I have attended ("Who was the Pharaoh of the Exodus?"—Memphis, Tennessee, spring 1987, and the Society of Biblical Literature/ American Schools of Oriental Research annual meeting, Boston, November 1988) that Kathleen Kenyon erred in her conclusions and that John Garstang (who excavated at Jericho in the 1930s) was correct. The occupation level with the massive walls (so thoroughly destroyed that nothing but the stumps of the walls were left) that was subjected to the tremendous fire noted by Kenyon should be dated to about 1400 B.C.E. (the end of Late Bronze I) and not 1550 B.C.E. (the end of the Middle Bronze Age).

Dr. Wood demonstrated that with the exception of imported bichromeware, all the major pottery forms found in this massive destruction of Jericho *were identical to* forms found in the 15th century B.C.E. destruction level of Hazor. This destruction level of Hazor is well documented and its date (about 1400 B.C.E.) is accepted by all scholars. Since all local pottery forms were identical, it follows that the two cities were destroyed at the same time—the end of the Late Bronze I (about 1400 B.C.E.).

Conclusion

It's quite possible that when the Israelites came into Canaan, some cities were using only pottery typical of the end of the Middle Bronze Age while a few "trendsetters," especially cities on trade routes, were introducing the new imported bichromeware, which is currently still accepted as the hallmark of the Late Bronze Age.

Scholars have already admitted that the transition from Late Bronze to Iron had some overlap. And they've been forced to admit that eighth-century Samaria used a different kind of pottery than eighth-century Lachish.

In the time of Joshua, then, some cities may have been using pottery generally characterized as belonging to the Middle Bronze (since bichromeware is missing) at the same time other cities *may* have been using pottery characteristic of the Late Bronze Age. Archaeological dating methods are not as precise as scholars sometimes assume them to be. The evidence isn't conclusive enough; the scholars' conclusions aren't so airtight that they prove the biblical account wrong.

On the other hand, however, *we cannot prove the Bible by archaeology*—we don't have enough evidence. We can explain the evidence if we assume the

Bible to be true, but we can't use the evidence to prove the Bible. Nor do we need to.

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