11

Critical Issues: The Canaan Conquest

Thomas Kuhn observed that scientific revolutions do not always occur because new discoveries are unearthed. Instead, scientific enlightenment often emerges when we ask new questions about the old information that lead us to draw new conclusions and result in a "paradigm shift."[1] The reality of Kuhn's observation is readily demonstrated by the new questions our investigation has asked and the new conclusions that we have drawn. Kuhn's theory remains true when we apply these new conclusions to Scripture's history of the Conquest Era.

In the past, popular scholars nonchalantly dismissed the internal Scriptural evidence supporting a sixteenth-century exodus.[2] We have seen, Scripture supports the exodus at *c.* 1548 BCE (see chap. 9). We have also seen that substantial archaeological, epigraphic (*Ahmose Stele*), and even scientific evidence (archaeology and the date of Thera's eruption) link Israel's exodus with this same period. Yet, perhaps even more-compelling evidence exists in the archaeological record of ancient Israel–Palestine alongside Scripture's description of Canaan's cities during the Conquest Era. As we will soon discover, Scripture's straightforward chronology turns the old thirteenth-century exodus and Conquest model into a relic of paradigms past.[3] The known history and archaeology of Canaan falls precisely in place with Scripture's sixteenth-century Conquest.

I. CANAAN C. 1550 BCE

A. *Hazor*

Many scholars have observed that the Conquest account describes a much earlier era than is popularly accepted. In particular, some scholars note that the Book of Joshua reflects a

period that came to an abrupt end in the sixteenth-century, *c.* 1550/1530 BCE.[4] One clue that leads to this conclusion is Scripture's characterization of the city of Hazor as the powerhouse of the city-state federations that existed when Israel infiltrated Canaan:

> For Hazor formerly was the head of all those kingdoms. (Josh 11:10–11)

Scholars such as Egyptologist Donald Redford who accept a much later Conquest consider this reference to be a "dim memory" of Hazor's former "Middle Bronze Age importance."[5] Characterizing this account as a faint recollection is questionable. The context of Joshua's statement (Joshua 11) refers to Hazor as a powerful city that Joshua and Israel had very recently defeated. Scripture is not describing a bankrupt city that had ceased to exist some 300 years earlier, as Redford opines. Rather, the Book of Joshua reflects the fact that Hazor was suzerain of the city-states at the time when Israel defeated its king. This is the first indication in the historical record that the Canaan Conquest was at least three centuries earlier than is now generally accepted.

The second clue to a much earlier Conquest of Hazor, is Joshua's mention of a king "Jabin" (Josh 11:1). An Old Babylonian text recently excavated at Hazor that dates to between the eigthteenth and sixteenth centuries bears the name "Ibni."[6] Noted archaeologist William Dever observes that, not only was this a dynastic name; it was also the Hebrew equivalent of the name Jabin:

> Now it happens that Akkadian "Ibni" is the exact linguistic equivalent of Hebrew "Yabin," the name of the king of Hazor in Joshua 11:1.[7]

We have a situation in which not only was Hazor the head of all kingdoms during the sixteenth century but the ruling monarchy to which Joshua refers is attested by written evidence unearthed at Hazor: evidence, that appears to support a much earlier Exodus and Conquest.

The archaeology of Hazor also demonstrates a two-phase destruction (see Illustration 11.1). The first in the sixteenth century and the second in the thirteenth century (we will discuss this below). This basic chronology is also supported by Scripture, which cites one assault on Hazor by Joshua at the initial Conquest and another by Deborah and Barak several centuries later, during an era when Israel adhered to the Covenant.

B. Jericho

The Book of Joshua unequivocally cites Jericho as the first city that Israel assaulted after crossing the Jordan (Joshua 5–6). This again presents an "early" view of Canaan. Archaeology reveals that the city was obliterated in the sixteenth century (see Illustration 11.2). Jericho is one of many cities that demonstrate destruction between 1550 and 1500 BCE.[8] In fact, famed archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon wrote a painstakingly detailed report of the excavations at Jericho that is so convincing that very few academics challenge her conclusions.[9] Fascinatingly, Jericho was not rebuilt or inhabited during the traditional twelfth or thirteenth century Conquest dates.[10] There was no city of Jericho in the thirteenth century:

Illustration 11.1. Upper and Lower Hazor. Lower Hazor begins with the dark paving stones in the upper center of the photo.
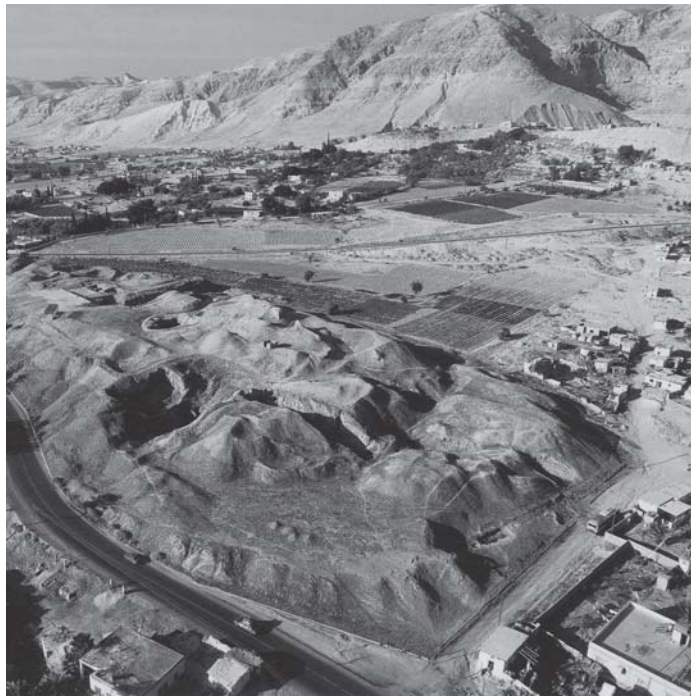

Illustration 11.2. Ancient Jericho was built on the top of a large hill or tell.

no walls to come tumbling down. This destruction had already occurred 300 years prior. Hence, the picture presented by the Deutero-Joshua narratives reflects an earlier, sixteenth century era, which agrees both with the archaeological evidence and with recent carbon-14 dating in a disputed destruction layer at Jericho.[11]

C. Knowing the Lay of the Land

We have seen that Scripture presents a very early date for both Jericho and Hazor. This early era is also evidenced by the general topography (layout of the land) Scripture describes. What we know about the archaeology of Canaan during later eras (when scholars are apt to date the Conquest) is again quite at odds with the Scriptural account. Archaeologist William Dever, who specializes in the archaeology of this era observes: "Certainly the biblical writers and editors show little familiarity with the topography and settlement patterns of the early Iron Age."[12] Dever's statement is made in the context of cities that were on the eastern side of Jordan (i.g., Heshbon). And he is wholly correct in concluding that Scriptures' description of the topography does not reflect the early Iron Age. As we will see, however, the situation that Scripture describes perfectly reflects a Middle Bronze Age topography.

D. Walled and Heavily Fortified

Another anomaly found in the popular, thirteenth-century Conquest model arises from Scripture's accounts of vastly walled and fortified cities, such as Hazor. There is no doubt that the Pentateuch portrays Canaan as a network of heavily fortified federations. Shortly before Israel entered the Promised Land, the Children of Israel recognized these fortification systems as being obstacles to conquering the land.

> Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and *the cities are walled, and very great*. (Num 13:27–28)
>
> Where shall we go up? our brothers have discouraged our heart, saying, The people is greater and taller than we; *the cities are great and walled up to heaven*. (Deut 1:28)

Israel's spies had scouted Canaan shortly after the exodus in 1548. The congregation rebelled when they heard the spies' report, doubting YHWH's ability to deliver these strong, impregnable cities into their hand. The rebellion cost Israel 40 years of wilderness exile, until all the seditionists of that generation had died. When the nation began the conquest of the land 39 years later, walls were still standing around the settlements in central Canaan and in the Amorite territory east of the Jordan River (Heshbon). This is the very territory that Jacob had bequeathed to the Joseph tribes shortly before his death (Genesis 48–49).

Remember that, when Jacob distributed the birthright and the blessing among his sons, he ordained that the Joseph tribes should have one portion of land more than the other tribes.

> I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took out of the hand of the *Amorite* with my sword and with my bow. (Gen 48:22)

Jacob's birthright to the Joseph tribes indicates that Israel would conquer a particular Amorite territory through warfare. Israel claimed this portion on the eastern side of the Jordan after the exile. Moses himself attests to the vast walled defenses that these cities maintained at the time of the Conquest.

> So YHWH our God delivered into our hands Og also, the king of Bashan, and all his people: and we smote him until none was left to him remaining. And we took all his cities at that time, there was not a city which we took not from them, threescore (60) cities, all the region of Argob, the kingdom of Og in Bashan. *All these cities were fenced with high walls, gates, and bars; beside unwalled towns a great many*. (Deut 3:3–5)

These heavily fortified cities remained in Canaan and its periphery 40 years after Israel exited Egypt (*c.* 1508 BCE).[13] A month after Moses made this speech, Jericho's heavily walled fortress fell flat before Israel's peaceful assault.

> The people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the *wall fell down flat*, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. (Josh 6:5)

Every evening, the city of Jericho closed the city gate (Josh 2:5). Rahab had permitted the spies to escape over the city wall (Josh 2:15), probably part of the lower-level fortifications. Thus, there is no denying that Scripture supports the perception that Canaan's vast fortification systems "reached up to heaven."[14]

E. Lightning campaign

Many scholars interpret the biblical account as supporting a *blitzkrieg* campaign that destroyed the most impregnable cities, a situation quite unsupportable in any later era. Israeli archaeologists Israel Finkelstein and Neil Silberman observe, "The Book of Joshua tells the story of a lightning military campaign during which the powerful kings of Canaan were defeated in battle and the Israelite tribes inherited their land."[15] Donald Redford also observes that cities fell quickly in the Conquest accounts. Summarizing the Scriptural record, Redford opines, "Cities with massive fortifications fall easily to rustic nomads fresh off the desert (mighty Lachish in only two days according to Josh 10:31), a feat Pharaoh's armies had great difficulty in accomplishing."[16]

Indeed, Scripture does support a sudden demise of the cities that Israel assaulted.

> YHWH your God is he which goes over before you; as a consuming fire he
> shall destroy them, and he shall bring them down before your face: so shall you
> drive them out, and *destroy them quickly*, as YHWH has said to you. (Deut 9:3)

The archaeology of later periods demonstrates a gradual overthrow of Canaan's cities (see
below). The only massive wave of destruction that quickly swept across Canaan occurred in
the sixteenth century, once again causing one to question the credibility of the thirteenth-
century Conquest model.

F. Destruction

Another text indicates that Joshua's army had a policy of razing the battlements and other
fortifications of nearly every city that Israel conquered. After Joshua had razed Jericho, he
cursed anyone who would rebuild or refortify the city.

> Cursed of YHWH be the man who shall *undertake to fortify* this city of Jericho:
> he shall lay its foundations at the cost of his firstborn, and set up its gates at the
> cost of his youngest. (Josh 6:26)[17]

At the least, this text indicates a policy of defortifying towns. Scripture provides a clear
sixteenth-century account of the Conquest. This sweeping destruction is attested archaeo-
logically only in the sixteenth century. Canaan consisted of a federation of well-fortified
city-states, of which Hazor was a major capital. Jericho, another kingdom-state, also attests
walls and destruction only in the sixteenth century. When Israel attacked these impregnable
fortresses, they fell before her quickly. Cities such as Ai remained "ruinous heaps" through-
out Israel's history. The critical issue at this juncture is whether or not these accounts are
real. Did a conquest of Canaan take place in the manner described by Scripture?

II. THE THIRTEENTH-CENTURY MIRAGE

When archaeologists began digging up the Holy Land at the turn of twentieth century, they
believed that they had found vast evidence supporting Joshua's conquest of Canaan. This
euphoria did not last long. As the science of archaeology gained precision, these discoveries
were dated so much earlier that no reasonable scholar would believe Israel's history could
be so ancient. The debate over historicity has continued into the modern era, but now, the
accounts themselves are deemed to be fuel for debate.

These polemics are strengthened by scholars who support a thirteenth-century Con-
quest. The archaeological evidence does not demonstrate a vastly fortified Canaan during
either the fourteenth or thirteenth centuries.[18] Nor are large-scale settlements between the
fifteenth and thirteenth centuries attested.[19] Thus many academics deduce that the Conquest
never occurred (Finkelstein, Dever, Van Seters, Alt, and Noth).

In their best-selling book *The Bible Unearthed*, Israel Finkelstein and Neil Silberman cite archaeological anachronisms that challenge Scripture's accounts of walled cities and strong fortifications during the Canaan Conquest.

> The cities of Canaan were unfortified and there were no walls that could have come tumbling down. In the case of Jericho, there was no trace of a settlement of any kind in the 13th century BCE and the earlier Late Bronze settlement, dating to the 14th century BCE was small and poor, almost insignificant, and unfortified. There was also no sign of destruction. Thus the famous scene of the Israelite forces marching around the walled town with the Ark of the Covenant, causing Jericho's mighty walls to collapse by the blowing of their war trumpets was, to put it simply, a romantic mirage.[20]

This assessment is wholly *accurate* if one is looking for archaeological evidence of the Conquest in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. Even the fourteenth century lacks evidence of "hordes of uprooted people leaving their villages."[21] This leads Silberman and Finkelstein to conclude that:

> It is also noteworthy—in contrast to the Bible's accounts of almost continual warfare between the Israelites and their neighbors—that the villages were not fortified. . . . No weapons, such as swords or lances, were uncovered—although such finds are typical of the cities in the lowlands. Nor were there signs of burning or sudden destruction that might indicate a violent attack.[22]

No archaeological evidence demonstrates that a *blitzkrieg* campaign decimated towns and cities across Canaan during the twelfth through fourteenth centuries.[23] However, an entirely different picture emerges in the previous, sixteenth century, when nearly every city was indeed walled and heavily fortified, only to be destroyed at the end of the Hyksos Era (1550–1500 BCE).[24]

III. ARCHAEOLOGY OF CANAAN AT THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY CONQUEST

A. First Conquest Campaign

While the late-twelfth to fifteenth-century dates for the Conquest are historically, archaeologically, and Scripturally untenable, a sixteenth-century Conquest is not. In fact, the period marked by the end of the Hyksos period in Egypt, *c.* 1530, coincides with every detail of Scripture's account of the Conquest in Canaan.

During the Hyksos' control over Lower Egypt, Hazor had indeed emerged as the head of the nations in the Jordan Valley, just as the Scripture records.

> Hazor in the north Jordan Valley had been a major power center, presumably exercising control over much of northern Palestine and the Golan. . . . Hazor would have maintained its powerful position through most, if not all, the Hyksos period.[25]

Illustration 11.3. City walls dating to the 12th century CE. Walls in Canaan, which were built on top of hills, or were fortified to greater hights would have been many times higher. For perspective, notice the Bedouin in the lower right of the photo.

Not only was Hazor a major power-player, but the last phase of this era demonstrates that Canaan's cities were walled and heavily fortified.[26] Many cities had not exhibited walls in the previous centuries prior to 1650 BCE.[27] As the Hyksos Era in Egypt ended, Canaanite fortifications rapidly increased. Archaeologist William Dever observes that at the end of the MB II phase (1650–1530 BCE) nearly every city in Canaan had become heavily fortified.

> First, the fact that now (and only now) nearly *every* site in Palestine is heavily fortified—even sites as small as Tel Mevorakh, less than four acres. The rest of the later sites that had not been previously fortified, like Shechem and Gezer, now boast multiphase, truly monumental fortifications exactly contemporary with the Fifteenth Dynasty/"Hyksos" interregnum in Egypt.[28]

These fortifications were massive, some 70 feet or more in height (see Illustration 11.3).

The impressive fortifications of the Middle Bronze Age were based largely on glacis systems and huge earthen embankments. In the course of the Middle Bronze Age, and even more so with the destruction of the cities, occupation levels within the fortified enclosures rose nearly to the height of the ramparts.[29]

Archaeological discoveries dating to the Middle Bronze Age (III) very accurately reflect the accounts of Israel's spies. Scholars date this era to 1550/1530 BCE.[30] This means that Israel's spies were scouting Canaan at the very zenith of Canaan's impregnable fortifications. Yet, at the height of the dominion by Canaan's ostensibly invincible fortresses, the cities were, at least from an archaeological account, "mysteriously" obliterated. Archaeology demonstrates that in a very short time these fortifications had either fallen out of use or provided little shelter to refugees inside the city because destruction claimed almost every city.[31] Once again, archaeological evidence reinforces the same scenario that is presented by the Hebrew Scriptures.

In fact, of 337 known Middle Bronze Age Canaanite cities, scholars estimate that 204 were still functioning as late as 1800–1530 BCE (MB III).[32] At the end of the era, however, almost every city was overthrown.[33] Most were left uninhabited for centuries (see Table 11.1).[34] William Dever observes,

> It is generally accepted that it (MB III) is closely related both chronologically and culturally to the Asiatic 15th Dynasty in Egypt, which is quite well dated to about 1650–1540/1530 BCE (parallel to the 17th Dynasty). The end of the period, in particular, can be dated closely *by the destructions at nearly every site in Palestine*.[35]

In order for almost every site to have been "mysteriously" decimated during this period, a very quick campaign that lasted perhaps as little as 5–7 years must have preceded this destruction. (The cities listed in bold in Table 11.1. are specifically listed in Scripture's account of the Canaan Conquest)

This evidence seems to be a remarkable confirmation of Manetho's Hyksos-Israel equation (at least from an Egyptian perspective). Many scholars, such as Dever attribute this massive wave of destruction to the retreating Hyksos or Egypt's pursuing armies.[36] Egyptologist Donald Redford draws attention to the *implausibility* of this scenario. He points out that Egypt's traditional Theban kings were incapable of effecting the destruction that swept across Canaan.

> The assumption (is) that . . . it was the Egyptian armies of Ahmose that effected this devastation in their pursuit of their fleeing enemy. Yet a moment's reflection will demonstrate the improbability of this view. The Egyptians of Ahmose's time were notoriously inept when it came to laying siege to, or assaulting, a fortified city: Avaris defied their attempts for more than one generation, and Sharuhen for more than three years.[37]

Redford's analysis adeptly describes the Theban forces' limited capabilities. If a small fortress such as Sharuhen took over three years to breach, how could Ahmose's forces sweep across Canaan, quickly penetrating and annihilating Canaan's 200 vastly fortified cities?

The dearth of written historiographical evidence for the end of this era has led Redford to conclude "that a most significant page is missing in the record."[38] Indeed, the thirteenth-century Conquest hypothesis misses the most significant testimony, which fills the gap of this intermediate era. Scripture's record not only fills in the missing record but is firmly buttressed by tangible archaeological and written evidence.

Table 11.1. Palestinian Middle Bronze Age Sites

2000–1800/1750 BCE		MBII(=IIB)	1650 BCE MB III(=IIC)	1550/1500 BCE LB IA
City	*Occupied*	*Growth*	*Continued Growth*	*Destruction*
Dan	Tomb	Embankment, domestic levels	Fortified	Gap?
Hazor	Tomb	Wall, embankment	Fortified	partial gap
Ginnosar	Tombs	Tombs	Fortified	Gap
Megiddo	Tombs	Wall, gate, glacis	Fortified	(continues)
Ta 'anach		Occupied	Walls, glacis	Gap?
Beth-shan	Tombs	Gap/Mound grows	Fortification- unknown, lost	Gap?
Rehov	Tomb	Continues previous occupation	Fortified	Gap?
Barqai	Tomb	Tomb	Continues previous occupation	?
Kabri	Palace	Occupied	Continues previous occupation	Gap
Naharivh	Early Sanctuary	Fortifications	Later phases of Sanctuary	Gap
Akko	Sherds	Embankment, Gate	Fortified	Gap
Achzib	Occupied	?	Embankment, Walls	Gap
Tel Nami	Occupied	Continues previous occupation	Embankment, Walls	Gap
Tell Far 'ah	Occupied	Continues previous occupation	Glacis, Embankment, Gate	Gap
Shechem	Occupied	Temenos/Occupied/Walls	Embankment, Walls, Growth	Gap
Tell el-Havvat	Occupied	Continues previous occupation	Continies previous occupation	Gap
Jericho	Occupied/tombs	Wall, gate, glacis	Fortified, Growth	Gap
Gibeon	Occupied	Continies previous occupation	Tombs, ?Fortified	Gap
Jerusalem	Occupied	Walled	Fortified	Gap
Bethel	Sherds	gap?	Wall, Gate, Domestic levels	Gap
Beth-shemesh	Occupied	Tombs	Wall, Gate	Gap?
Gezer	Occupied	fortifications	Growth	Gap
Bas el-Ain/Aphek	Occupied	Walls	Fortified	Gap
Tel-Aviv/Jaffa area	Occupied/tombs	Fortifications, domestic levels, tombs	Fortified	Gap
Lachish	sherds/occupied	Tombs, Glacis, Revetment	Fortified	Gap?
Ashkelon	Gate/Glacis	Continues previous occupation	Fortified	?
Tell el-Hesy	city	gap?	City, defenses	Gap?
Tell el-Ajjul (Sharuhen)	cemetery	city II, Palace II	Fortified	City Palace III/Gap
Tel el-Hammam (Bashan?)	Occupied	Growth, fortifications	Fortified	Gap

B. Israel's First Intermediate Period

The overall dating of the Second Intermediate Period in Egypt is a topic of heated academic debate. Scholars' chronology systems often differ from 50 to 100 years for this era.[39] As we saw in chap. 9, the Tanakh provides at least five internal proofs supporting a 1548 date for the exodus. Thus, the internal chronology of Scripture falls squarely in the range of accepted synchronisms and deviations for this era. The transition from the Exodus through Wilderness Exile, to period of the Conquest and Joshua's later administration, was truly an "Intermediate Period" in Israel's history.[40] Our chronology allowed 42 years for this intermediate era (1508–1460 = 42 yrs.). Josephus, however, suggested 112 years (*Antiquities* 8.3.1) to 134 years (*Against Apion* 2.2) for this period. While the latter figure would seem quite far-fetched, we cannot disregard the fact that our proposed 568-year chronology, which begins with Israel's walking out of Egypt and ends with King Solomon's 4th year, could indeed include another 20–40 years, bringing us back to Kenneth Kitchen's 596 years for the Exodus, Exile, Joshua–Judges, and early Monarchy Era.[41] Thus, the high and low chronologies presented here are in line with standard deviations in chronology studies for this era. Having established the timing of the Exodus and Conquest, we can turn our attention to the plausibility of the patriarchal accounts.

IV. THE PATRIARCH ACCOUNTS IN THEIR ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Ur stood as a commanding empire in southern Babylonia and Canaan in its sphere of influence. Abraham left Ur about 200 years before Ur fell. The tribes that migrated out of Ur spoke a West Semitic language that is generally dubbed "Amorite."[42] Egypt later recognized these people as Aamu or Asiatics, a classification into which Abraham's language would have fallen.[43] Egypt had recognized the approximate territorial boundaries that YHWH established in the Promised Land (Gen 15:18) as a single geographical area called Canaan from very early times and associated it with West-Semitic-(Amorite)-speaking peoples such as Abraham.[44]

During Abraham's days, Canaan had been dotted by small, unfortified cities.[45] This period of time is known as Early Bronze Age IV (2300–2000 BCE), otherwise known as a "Dark Age" in Canaan's history.[46] Farming and husbandry characterized this city-state society.[47] Around 2000 BCE, these small settlements, rural villages, and the surrounding pastoral nomadic sites were abandoned, most of them permanently.[48] This collapse of Canaanite society probably coincided with the famine that Canaan faced[49] when Abraham migrated to Egypt (Genesis 12) during the early First Intermediate Period (2180–2040 BCE).

When the Asiatic society moved back to Canaan, they chose favorable sites with locations that were suitable for agriculture and where water was easily accessed.[50] Several hundred new cities popped up all over Palestine.[51] These early settlements eventually gave way to the large cities that Israel later destroyed.

Under Ur's influence, Canaan had been exposed to the Mesopotamian culture for a few hundred years.[52] Akkadian was the written language of early Mesopotamia. Toward the

end of this era, the first truly *alphabetic* script emerged in Canaan, marking the "zenith" of Middle Bronze Age Palestine.[53] This development would have enabled Abraham to write and record the promises and responsibilities associated with the patriarchal covenants.

Archaeological discoveries of this era demonstrate the presence of "monumental palaces," while the presence of weapons in tombs suggests that Canaan's cities had standing armies.[54] This evidence accommodates Scripture's description of Abimelek and his standing army quite well (Gen 21:22, 32). Abimelek was king of Gezer, a city that dates to the early resettlement phase in Canaan.[55] Abimelek's treaty with Abraham may have been occasioned by the fact that Gezer had only very recently secured its position as a city-state in the region, and a treaty with a powerful sheik such as Abraham was the next logical step.

According to Scripture's chronology, Israel's tribes migrated to Egypt around 1978 BCE, during Egypt's 11th or 12th Dynasty. While Israel sojourned in Egypt, Canaan continued to experience urbanization. At least 199 cities are attested in archaeological surveys, which demonstrate increasingly larger populations.[56] Flight to cities for refuge may have been motivated in part by Egypt's policy of plundering Canaan for slaves to support its monumental work force. Senusret I had captured 1,500 Canaanite prisoners of war, confiscating their weapons, ships, vast amounts of silver, copper, and other valuable commodities and food stores.[57] Threats such as these led citizens to seek shelter in impregnable fortified mountain defense posts. Dever estimates that as much as 80% of the population was now living in the 400 cities attested in the Middle Bronze Age (1785–1530 BCE).[58]

Large waves of immigration threaten the stability of any society. The immigration to Egypt of Abraham and the rest of the Amorites from Canaan during the First Intermediate Period induced social upheaval.[59] In an effort to secure Egypt's borders, the pharaohs established a defensive border called "The Wall of the Ruler" to keep Canaanites from immigrating *en mass* and causing the same sort of chaos as they had during the First Intermediate Period.[60] This defensive system that stretched into the Sinai did not eliminate immigration, but controlled it. This left Egypt's trade relations with northern Canaan (Byblos, Ebla, Ugarit) intact, although these relations were later usurped by the Hyksos.

By the end of this era (*c.* 1650), Canaan had rapidly developed into the cities familiar to us in Scripture: Hazor, Gezer, Kedesh, Dor, Ashkelon, Lachish, and Akko, became fortresses "walled up to heaven." Hazor's fortifications expanded to a whopping 200 acres.[61] Heavy fortifications hallmark the Canaanite city-states with an

> increasing pace and complexity of the defensive constructions. Not only are many more sites fortified in MB II, but the defenses now begin to incorporate elaborate *glacis* systems that are more technologically advanced than the earlier earthen embankments or ramparts. In addition, multiphase masonry and mudbrick city walls and standardized triple-entry-way gates now proliferate—probably influenced by the spread of Syro-Anatolian and Hittite prototypes as Palestine became more internationalized.[62]

These *glacis* were quite similar to those at Tell el-Yahudiyah in Egypt and compare to earthen ramps and moats that surrounded later European castles. The only entrance into the city

was guarded by a watch-tower gate.[63] These defenses were specifically designed to withstand siege engines, indicating that military aggression threatened the autonomy of Canaan's city-states.[64] These phenomenal defenses were "mysteriously" destroyed at the very same time when Scripture indicates Israel was entering Canaan. This dramatic destruction characterizes the end of this era, around 1530/1550 BCE (MB III).[65] Rounding out the evidence of a 16th-century Conquest is the fact that the "first well-documented, large-scale ethnic movements of foreign peoples into Canaan are attested archaeologically,"[66] because new populations displaced Canaan's native citizenry.

Toward the end of this phase, numerous Cypriot styles begin to appear in the archaeological record. Remember that this was the same situation presented in Avaris (Tell el Dab'a); trade and displacement of people occurred shortly before and subsequent to Thera's eruption (pp. 470–71, 481–84, 493, 498). Places such as Alalakh in southern Turkey suddenly boasted frescoes that demonstrate affinity with Santorini,[67] a similar development also seen at Avaris. Once again, sites along the Levant evidence the infiltration of people from the island of Thera. Many of these sites were destroyed 40 to 60 years later, during the period of the Israelite Conquest.

V. SCRIPTURAL ACCOUNT OF THE CANAAN CONQUEST

A. *"One Extra Portion"*

Central Canaan is not the only area that evidences destruction during the sixteenth century. Archaeology also attests a massive destruction on the eastern side of the Jordan. Quite uncoincidentally, Israel's first campaign targeted the corridor east of the Jordan River that belonged to the Amorites (Num 21:23–25). Israel conquered this land from "Dibon to Nophah, which reaches to Medeba" (Num 21:30) on the east side of Jordan. After these victories, Moses continued campaigning against the Amorites, turning his attention to the giant nephiyl Og, king of Bashan, whom Israel defeated in battle at Edrei (Num 21:31–33; see also pp. 52–56).

Like central Canaan, this region came to an abrupt and "mysterious" end according to archaeology, right at the very time when Scripture indicates that Israel was entering Canaan (1550/1530 BCE). One particularly interesting site is modern Tel el-Hammam, which sits opposite Jericho and rises above the Jordan plain. Not only does this summit allow a view of the Promised Land, but Tel el-Hammam like Tel Nimrin (another MBA city in east Jordan), was destroyed during this time. In fact the excavators of this site draw attention to the fact that many other "Jordan Disk" sites were destroyed about 1530 BCE, which was "followed by its own five-to seven-century occupational hiatus."[68] (An "Occupational hiatus" is an archaeological term used to describe the period a city lay vacant, thus no one lived in this area for 500–700 years.) There was no economic or military reason for Egypt, the Hurrians, or the Hittites to conquer the Jordan Disk area. It lay outside favorable trade routes. No explanation exists for this devastation other than the record preserved in the Hebrew Scriptures about Israel's Conquest.

B. Canaan Conquest

The Amorites had been suzerain over Moab's territory (Num 21:26) at the time of the Conquest. Moses pacified this territory during the 40-year exile, and Israel set up camp on the Moab Plains opposite Jericho (Num 26:63) where she re-covenanted with YHWH. After Moses had spoken the words to Israel found in the Book of Deuteronomy, he numbered the men of war, who were 601,730 men strong (Num 26:51). With this army, YHWH would conquer Canaan's thriving but lawless city-states.

The record of Israel's Conquest in Canaan's interior appears in Joshua 5 through the summary of Judges 1. What is fascinating about these accounts is that almost every city mentioned in Scripture evidences destruction in the sixteenth century: Lachish, Shechem, and Jerusalem all the way down to Sharuhen and the "land of Goshen" (see bolded cities in Table 11.1, above). Archaeology soundly attests the destruction and abandonment to which Canaan's cities succumbed during the sixteenth century.

Previously, YHWH had used Joseph to bring his brothers into Egypt until the iniquity of the Amorites had "come to the full" (Gen 15:16). At the Conquest, YHWH did not judge and destroy a God-fearing people but a wantonly perverse and immoral people, who had no love for his Law or his healthy way of life.

C. Land of Goshen

The Hyksos Kingdom in Egypt stretched from Avaris to Sharuhen in southern Canaan.[69] The Book of Joshua offers tantalizing clues to the fact that the Hyksos had either not yet been driven out of Egypt at the time of the Conquest or they had been so recently expelled that Israel still recognized this territory as a Hyksos dependency during the initial Conquest. The "land of Goshen" was within Israel's tribal inheritance (Josh 11:16). This was the territory that YHWH had "severed" from Egypt during the plagues (Exod 8:22; 9:26). As we saw in chap. 10, this land lay on the eastern side of a now-defunct branch of the Nile (Josh 13:3; Isa 23:3; Jer 2:18). When YHWH had established Israel's borders, he gave the nation access to the two most powerful economic trading routes that existed in the ancient world: The Euphrates in the north and the Pelusiac branch of the Nile in the south (Gen 15:18; Num 34:5; Josh 15:4, 47–51).

Scripture lists the "land of Goshen" as part of the Negev (Josh 10:41). Both archaeology and satellite images demonstrate that the Negev during this era (MBA II–III) was not the vast desert that it is today.[70] A canal penetrated the district, allowing ships to travel into its ports and waterways.[71] This internal water supply sustained cultivation and a strong trade network. While Scripture's recognition of a southern "land of Goshen" does not make sense during a Thutmoses or Ramessid era, it fits the situation at the close of the Hyksos Era perfectly and should probably be equated with the Kingdom of Sharuhen, the Hyksos settlement that stretched to Gaza.[72]

Sharuhen had been the military and political headquarters of southern Canaan. Its city and palace were built during the later Hyksos Era (MB II–III). The area grew rapidly under highly supervised and organized urban planning.[73] It was here that the Hyksos took refuge when Ahmose expelled them from Egypt, besieging the city for three years.[74]
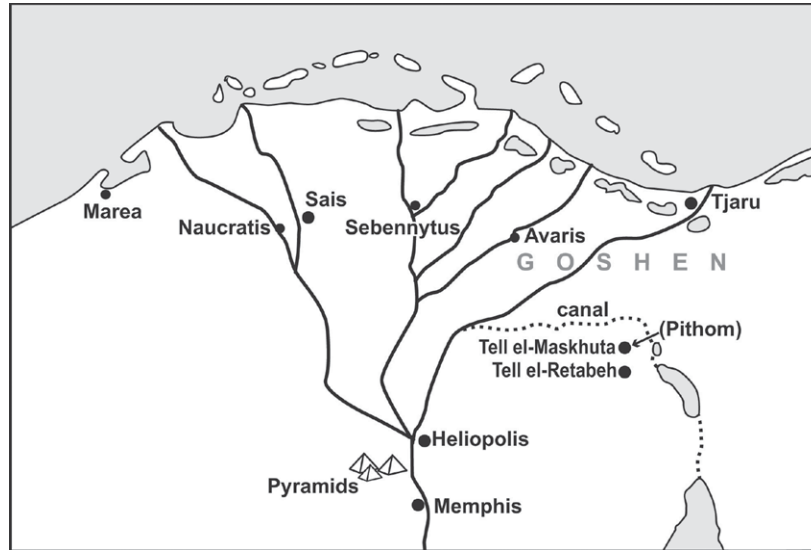
Map 11.1. Goshen

This political situation fits well with Scripture's account of Gaza and Ashkelon as being well equipped with chariots (Judg 1:18–19)—chariots that enabled the Hyksos colonies to withstand Israel's forces. Scripture also supports the scholarly consensus that the Hyksos' control over Canaan was limited: thwarted perhaps by Hazor's control of Canaan's interior.[75] These conclusions are supported by the fact that, after the Hyksos' expulsion, Egypt had placed garrisons in Sharuhen but shifted them to Gaza once Sharuhen ceased to be a region.[76]

Later in the Conquest, Goshen is listed along with 11 other cities (Josh 15:47–51) belonging to a southern city-state federation that Joshua and Israel subdued. Sharuhen is subsequently listed as the head of "thirteen cities and their villages" (Josh 19:6), a designation that probably replaced the earlier "land of Goshen" after the Hyksos had been expelled from Egypt. Israel's ability to conquer this region was no doubt aided by Ahmose's siege of Sharuhen. The scant evidence, however, does not permit specific dating of either Israel's conquest or Ahmose's siege, which may have occurred about 18 years apart from of each other.

Similar to Avaris and many cities across Palestine, Sharuhen evidences contact with Cyprus and the Aegean during its final period since Cypriot bichrome Ware begins to appear in the archaeological context.[77] This is again evidence of a massive Aegean Diaspora, probably prompted by the threat of Thera's volcanic activity just before Israel's exodus.[78]

VI. PARADIGM SHIFT

A. Equine

It is not surprising to find that many earlier Canaanite customs ended abruptly with the massive wave of destruction that swept across Canaan. Ceremonial donkey burials are one such

custom. From Greece to Hyksos-occupied Egypt through Canaan and into Mesopotamia, equid (donkeys, asses, and horses) burials distinguished the Middle Bronze Age.[79] Scholars believe this ceremonial custom originated with the Mesopotamian cult of Shakkan and was later brought to the Aegean by the Amorites who migrated into Canaan.[80] Interestingly, it is evidence of this custom that most archaeologists use to identify "Hyksos" cities in both Egypt and Canaan.[81]

Equids played an important ceremonial role in Canaan's culture.[82] At Avaris, donkey burials were a hallmark of Hyksos society. Excavations have revealed the popularity of this custom throughout Canaan during the era (Late Bronze Age IIA thru LBA IA[83]). Places such as Jericho, Lachish, Azor, Tel Haror, and Tell el-Ajjul all exhibit the popularity of donkey burials.[84]

In Mari, a country on the Euphrates near northern Syria, covenants were ratified with the ritual slaying of a donkey's foal to make the ceremony binding (compare to p. 76).[85] Many equid burials were used in ceremonial foundation deposits.[86] In other instances donkeys were eaten as part of a sacrificial meal. More popular, however, were the donkey sacrifices associated with human funerary customs. The question that has perplexed archaeologists is: why did this practice suddenly come to an end?

> The survey of equid burials shows that the ritual inhumation of donkey. . . . was a region-wide phenomenon. While the incidences of the practice in Greece are the most distinctive, close attention to the specifics shows that there are no attributes that are regionally distinct. . . . An interesting question that remains is why, given its ubiquity in the late third and early second millennia, the phenomenon did not continue.[87]

The only explanation that reasonably satisfies the question why this custom suddenly ceased at the end of the Bronze Age (*c.* 1500 BCE) is Israel's Conquest of the region. Israel was the only entity whose religion forbade equid sacrifices altogether. There were at least three different laws in Israel's constitution that banned equid sacrifices, both as viable commodities for ratifying covenants and for funerary practices.

The first regulation that prevented equids' ritualistic use in Israel was YHWH's command that Israel consume only animals that chewed the cud or had a cleft foot (Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14). Since equids do not meet these criteria, they could not be used in sacrificial meals. Second, YHWH had banned funerary cults and offerings for the dead (Deut 26:12–14; 14:1; Lev 19:28). Third, YHWH had specifically singled out the donkey as not even fit for the normal "firstborn redemption" offering.

> When YHWH brings you into the land of the Canaanite. . . . you shall set apart to YHWH all that open the matrix, and every firstling that comes of a beast which you have; the males shall be YHWH's. And *every firstling of an ass you shall redeem with a lamb; and if you will not redeem it, then you shall break his neck*: and all the firstborn of man among your children shall you redeem. (Exod 13:11–13)

As the primary means of transportation, donkeys held particular value in the ancient world, similar to the modern value of cars and trucks. Because donkeys were worth so much, the contribution of a donkey indicated the great piety of an owner. Although YHWH required firstborn male animals to be given to him, he allowed donkeys to be redeemed with the less costly and more plentiful lambs. This allowed donkeys to play a strong role in Israel's society without obtrusive religious or ritualistic demands. These regulations also made it clear that equids were not viable sacrifices for Israel's God. The donkey was the only animal YHWH specifically rejected; all others were set aside for him.[88] Interestingly, the donkey was the only unclean animal that is even mentioned in all of Torah that had to be redeemed. Even if a person chose not to redeem a donkey's firstborn male offspring, it could not be offered as a sacrifice. Rather, its neck was broken.

Israel's extraordinary Conquest of Canaan was a type of "shot heard around the world,"[89] sending out ripples that affected normal customs. While donkey rituals would have naturally ceased in Canaan under Israelite occupation, Israel's impressive victory may also have affected ritual equid trends around the entire region.

B. Appropriating a Previous Era

One challenge that archaeologists face when excavating Canaan's remains is the lack of artifacts, house types, and pottery that are distinctively "Israelite." As frustrating as this may be for an archaeologist or scholar studying this era, Scripture indicates that we should not expect to find anything distinctively "Israelite" from the time of the Conquest. YHWH granted the small tribal federations the very houses, fields, furniture, pottery, and possessions previously owned by the land's dispossessed inhabitants:

> When YHWH your God has cut off the nations . . . and you succeed them, and (shall) *dwell in their cities, and in their houses*. (Deut 19:1; parenthesis added.)

Joshua attests that YHWH had fulfilled this promise during his lifetime since many Israelites had overtaken Canaan's houses, cities, and fields.

> I have given you a land for which you did not labor, and cities which you built not, and *you dwell in them*; of the vineyards and olive yards which you planted not do you eat. (Josh 24:13)

Israel had driven out Canaan's natives (Num 33:52–54) and claimed their houses, fields, and possessions as the spoils of war.[90] While Egyptologist Donald Redford is critical of other aspects of Israel's history, he acknowledges the limitations of archaeology.

> While the cultural continuum between the Canaanite LB II and Iron I is a fact, the origin and identity of the Iron I peoples of the highlands cannot be sought among the fugitive Canaanite peasantry of the lowlands. Egyptian texts describe the highlanders clearly as transhumant pastoralists, and the fact that they borrowed

Canaanite house types cannot be used to disprove this. (I myself have sat in houses on the Medeba plains that, by the same kind of reasoning, might be used to prove the presence there of people from Jaffa or Haifa, so closely do they conform to a Palestinian style; yet their occupants, my hosts, were recently settled bedu.) If Egyptian texts do describe any movement of people it is always hills-to-plains, not the other way around.[91]

When an ethnic group of people enter a new land, one of two things happens. The people either assert their dominance and maintain their identity, or they become assimilated with the culture of the land's natives. This is comparable to many cultural groups immigrating to the United States who adapt America's holidays, America's dress, America's language, and other social customs, which often include conversion to Christianity. The simple fact is that, if one is to be successful in a particular country, a family must adopt the customs, practices, and especially the language of the adopted nation. As the old saying (of St. Ambrose) goes, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do".

Scripture shows that Israel struggled hard with these same issues. YHWH had commanded Israel to purge the land of all traces of idolatry and other negative social influences (Num 33:51–54). His command not only judged Canaan but established the Hebrews' independence in this region. Israel's religious and cultural "nationality" could only be established by replacing former perversions and governments with YHWH's righteous kingdom—something that the Israelites never achieved during their rebellious, post-Conquest Era. Although YHWH had given them all the tools to subjugate the land, many Israelites sought to integrate with the Canaanite culture instead. This affinity with local populations caused the entire Conquest to become a long, drawn-out process throughout the Judges Era.

VII. NOT BY HAND OR BOW

A. *The Hornet*

To attribute Canaan's destruction solely to Israel's invading armies is too eager an endeavor, which Scripture does not support. Although Joshua had conquered most of the cities in central and southern Canaan, YHWH sent foreign armies to devastate northern strongholds. At the exodus, 40 years before Israel entered Canaan, YHWH told Israel he would use other nations to drive the natives out of the Promised Land.

> Moreover *YHWH your God (a) will send the hornet among them*, until they that are left, and hide themselves from you, be destroyed. You shall not be frighted at them: for YHWH your God is among you, a mighty God and terrible. (b) *And YHWH your God will put out those nations before you by little and little*: you may not consume them at once, lest the beasts of the field increase on you. But YHWH your God shall deliver them to you, and shall destroy them with a mighty destruction, until they be destroyed. And he shall deliver their kings into your hand, and you shall destroy their name from under heaven: there shall no man be able to stand before you, until you have destroyed them. (Deut 7:20–24. See also Exod 23:28–30)

This text tells us at least two things. First, when Israel gathered on the Moab plains (before crossing the Jordan), YHWH had not yet sent the "hornet" to drive out Canaan's natives. Second, Israel would not destroy every city but inherit the land bit by bit, generation after righteous generation. This view is confirmed by the subsequent archaeological record.

> Many modern archaeologists point out that while Jericho and a few other towns were clearly sacked about this time, most other towns, although abandoned, do not show signs of violent destruction. Thus, many argue that this period is more complex than previously thought.[92]

Later in this chapter, we will see that the complexity of this era is easily explained by Israel's continuing Conquest surges, which coincided with Israel's cycles of obedience. The picture unearthed by archaeology illustrates that the Israelites indeed "drove out" many of the nations as YHWH had commanded (Num 33:50–54), appropriating houses and cities for themselves (Josh 24:13).

Scripture consistently uses the symbolism of hornets and bees to denote foreign armies. Seven hundred years later, Isaiah used the term "bee" to designate Assyria's armies that would sting and chase Israel from her heritage.

> YHWH shall bring upon you. . . . *the king of Assyria*. And it shall come to pass in that day, that YHWH shall hiss *for the fly* that is in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt, and *for the bee that is in the land of Assyria*. And they shall come, and shall rest all of them in the desolate valleys, and in the holes of the rocks, and on all thorns, and on all bushes. (Isa 7:17–19. See also Deut 1:44)

Isaiah uses "bees" as a metaphor for Assyria's invading armies. If Scripture is consistent (a concept of truth), then YHWH promised Israel that if she would obey his Law he would use other armies to drive out Canaan's inhabitants before her. Therefore, if we are to find historicity in Scripture's accounts, we should find "hornets" and "bees" invading, deporting, and weakening the Promised Land shortly after Israel's initial ingress into the Promised Land.

This view is bolstered by Joshua's claim that many victories over the nations mentioned in the Promised-Land Covenant (Gen 15:18–21) were won by the "hornet" that YHWH sent ahead of Israel. Joshua clarifies that neither Israel's sword nor her bow had gained the victory, but YHWH's forces had.[93]

> And you went over Jordan, and came to Jericho: and the men of Jericho fought against you, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I delivered them into your hand. And I sent the *hornet before you*, which *drove them out from before you, even the two kings of the Amorites; but not with your sword, nor with your bow*. (Josh 24:11–12)

Joshua begins this discourse by reciting Israel's campaigns chronologically. After Israel had conquered Jericho, YHWH sent "two Amorite kings" as a "hornet" before Israel to weaken and drive out Canaan's residents. This raises the question: just who were these two Amorite kings?

The first king may be identified with the Hittite King Hattusilis I, who was roughly contemporary with the later years of Pharaoh Ahmose (1570–1546/1552–1527 BCE).[94] He launched an attack against Alalakh, a dependency of Aleppo, a mighty city-state in North Syria, comparable to Hazor. Not only did Hattusilis destroy Alalakh; he also annihilated cities along the Euphrates just north of Carchemish.[95] Hattusilis' grandson, Mursilis I, completed the Hittite campaign by utterly destroying Aleppo itself and obliterating Canaan's northern federations. Even more importantly, the Hittites annihilated Babylon shortly before 1530 BCE, alleviating the entire Canaan region from any threat from Mesopotamia for several decades (see Illustration 11.4).[96]

Illustration 11.4. The great King Hattuşili III offering a libation to the weather god.

The significance of these campaigns for Israel cannot be overstated. The Hittites' home base lay in modern-day Turkey. Their decimation of Syria left a vacuum into which the Hurrians migrated, ultimately creating a protective buffer for Canaan.[97] The Hurrians claimed the territory around the Euphrates River, establishing the Mitannian Kingdom.[98] This buffer zone virtually isolated Canaan from outside threats by the Hittites or Mesopotamia (Babylon or Assyria). The northern hornets that YHWH promised to send against Canaan provided a protective covering, allowing the Israelites to fulfill the Promised-Land Covenant. However, when these invaders became too strong or began to infringe on Israel's inheritance,[99] YHWH sent Egyptian hornets from the south to prevent any further Hurrian ingress into the Promised Land until Israel grew strong enough to defend her own land. Thus, the only obstacle to stand in Israel's way was her rebellion against her covenant with God.