COMPLETE v. INCOMPLETE CONQUEST

A Re-examination of Three Passages in Joshua

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Summary

Most commentaries and articles regarding the book of Joshua take as a starting point an apparent contradiction between a complete and an incomplete conquest. Surprisingly, as Kitchen observes, there has not been a 'careful and close' reading of the passages taken as evidence of a complete conquest (i.e. Josh. 10:40-43; 11:16-23; 21:43-45). This article seeks to fill that gap in the literature. A close reading of these passages suggests that the author carefully describes the extent of the conquest. It seems the apparent contradiction regarding these passages has been overstated.

1. Introduction

Joshua apparently speaks of a complete conquest in three summary statements within the book (Josh. 10:40-43; 11:16-23; 21:43-45). Then in the immediate context the reader finds statements regarding an incomplete conquest (cf. 11:19, 22; 13:1-7 etc.). Given the scholarly consensus on this issue, the only thing that remains is how one deals with this tension if not outright contradiction. Weinfeld, among others, explains the tension along diachronic lines. Statements of complete conquest represent the idealistic language of a Deuteronomistic editor, who recounts events that never happened.[1] Recent synchronic studies take a more nuanced approach to the issue. Polzin says of the conquest

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[1] Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1991): 365. Others who take a similar view are Robert G. Boling, *Joshua* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1991): 316-17; Alberto Soggin, *Joshua* (OTL; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972): 132, 141; Trent C. Butler, *Joshua* (WBC; Waco: Word Books, 1983): 235; Richard D. Nelson, *Joshua: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 1997): 242.

summary in 21:41-43, 'The book of Joshua is scarcely intelligible if [it] is not read in an ironic sense.'[2] Mitchell believes that the statements of complete conquest refer to nations, while the statements of incomplete conquest deal with the '*isolated* groups which are no longer part of a united opposition'.[3] Hawk, however, abandons all hope and declares that if coherence is to be made of this tension then it must happen in the mind of the reader since it is not inherent in the text.[4]

Others seem unwilling to acknowledge the majority position based upon irreconcilable sources. Still, Howard and Woudstra state as fact that some passages speak of a complete conquest and others report the unfinished conquest and settlement, but neither author attempts to reconcile the contradiction.[5] While recognising that, at face value, the text apparently speaks of complete and incomplete conquest, others are unwilling to accept a contradiction within Scripture. Younger compares the conquest account in Joshua 9–12 with Assyrian, Hittite and Egyptian military records. He then concludes that the biblical writer modelled his account on Ancient Near Eastern records, which contain numerous examples of hyperbolic language.[6] Kitchen directly con-fronts the issue:

> It is the careless reading of such verses as these, without a careful and close reading of the narratives proper, that has encouraged Old Testament scholars to read into the entire book *a whole myth of their own making*, to the effect that the book of Joshua presents a sweeping, total conquest and occupation of Canaan by Joshua, which can then be falsely pitted against the narratives in Judges.[7]

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2   Robert Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980): 132; Also see Gerhard Hauch, 'Text and Context: A Literary Reading of the Conquest Narrative (Joshua 1–11)' (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1991): 137-61.

3   Gordon Mitchell, *Together in the Land: A Reading of the Book of Joshua* (JSOTSupp 134; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993): 134.

4   L. Daniel Hawk, *Every Promise Fulfilled* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991): 24, 140. Hawk also comes to a similar conclusion in his commentary: *Joshua* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2000): xviii, xxii.

5   David M. Howard Jr., *Joshua* (NAB; Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998): 397-98. Marten H. Woudstra, *Joshua*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: William D. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981): 314. Woudstra states this about as clearly as anyone can say it. 'The book of Joshua views the conquest of Canaan as both complete and incomplete' (314).

6   K. Lawson Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990): 227-28.

7   K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003): 173-74.

Unfortunately, Kitchen only briefly notes that the text of Joshua clearly qualifies its own statements of complete conquest with others that state the extent of the conquest. He then goes on to say that Joshua's battle accounts use hyperbole in the same way that Younger observed in his comparison of Joshua with ANE battle accounts. Since Kitchen has not given us a close reading of the passages in question, this study will undertake what he left undone.[8] As a preview of what follows, I will attempt to show that the writer of Joshua does not assert that the Israelites killed all the people of the land or claim that they captured and occupied every city or parcel of land in Canaan.

2. Joshua 10:40-43: Summary of the Southern Campaign

Joshua took the land in three military campaigns, which took place over the course of seven years (cf. Josh. 14:10). At the conclusion of the southern and northern operations, there are summaries that describe the extent of the Israelite victories (cf. Josh. 10:40-43; 11:16-23). Then after the allocation of the land and prior to Joshua's farewell speeches, the author gives a sweeping summary of the conquest to this point (cf. Josh. 21:43-45). In each case, a cursory reading leaves the reader with the impression of complete victory. Taking them in order, we will start with the southern campaign.

In Joshua 10:40-43, the author presents us with four descriptions of the extent of Israel's victories. Verse 40a says that Joshua struck (נכה) the whole land, which the author clarifies with a list of the territories implied. Then we read that no one remained alive at the end of the campaign. Verse 41 describes the geographical extent of Israel's victory, and verse 42 tells us that Joshua captured (לכד) all the kings. Finally, Joshua and all the Israelites returned to Gilgal (v. 43).

2:1 Joshua's Blow to the Whole Land (v. 40)

Soggin says of vv. 40-43 that 'it describes as having been conquered territories which the previous texts only show as the object of raids'.[9] While neither Soggin nor Butler gives an argument for this conclusion,

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[8]   Somewhat surprisingly, a survey of the available literature reveals no in-depth study of this question.

[9]   Soggin, *Joshua*, 131. Also see Butler, *Joshua*, 119.

they apparently follow Nelson, who sees a generalised list of
'topographic zones … [given with the intent of producing] an all-
inclusive description'.[10] A closer look at the list of territories suggests a
qualified victory. Immediately following the statement that Joshua
smote the whole land, we find a list of the geographic areas taken,
which stand in apposition to the phrase, 'the whole land'. These
regions are 'the hill country', 'the Negev', 'the lowland', and 'the
slopes'. As Beitzel says, 'Israel is best described in terms of four
parallel longitudinal zones. From west to east, these are the coastal
plain, the central mountain spine, the Jordan Rift Valley, and the
Transjordanian plateau.'[11] According to Moses, the Promised Land
included the 'hill country, and … the lowland, and … the Negeb, and
… the seacoast' (Deut. 1:7, ESV). By comparing these lists, it becomes
clear that the coastal plain does not appear in Joshua 10:40.[12] In other
words, the list of conquered territories does not include all the
geographic regions of the southern part of Canaan. Surprisingly, Butler
says, 'the traditions at hand do not include all the land involved, but the
editor draws from the available traditions the conclusion that God …
[had] given all the southern territory to his people'.[13] Butler's view
finds no basis in v. 40a, but he may come to his conclusion based upon
v. 40b, which will be examined below.

Moving from a description of the territory captured by Joshua, the
writer says, וַיַּכֶּה יְהוֹשֻׁעַ ... כָּל־מַלְכֵיהֶם לֹא הִשְׁאִיר שָׂרִיד
וְאֵת כָּל־הַנְּשָׁמָה הֶחֱרִים 'Joshua smote … all their kings. He left no
survivors. He devoted to destruction everything that breathed', v. 40b.
Again, it seems that the writer wants the reader to believe in a complete
destruction of every individual in the conquered territory. Two things
suggest otherwise. First, the third person pronominal suffix in the
expression כל־מלכיהם ('all their kings') could refer to the five
kings mentioned in Joshua 10:1-22 or to the kings of the territory
mentioned in v. 40a, which involves only a subset of the southern part
of Canaan.[14] In either case, the Philistine kings are not included. Then,

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[10] Nelson, *Joshua*, 148.
[11] Barry J. Beitzel, *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985): 27.
[12] Howard, *Joshua*, 261.
[13] Butler, *Joshua*, 119.
[14] The kings implied would then be the five kings mentioned in vv. 1-5 and the kings of Makkedah, Libnah, Gezer (see vv. 29-39).

there is no mention of the capture of Jerusalem even if Joshua did kill Adoni-Zedek the king of Jerusalem.[15] Furthermore, Gezer, the land of Horam, was apparently not attacked during this campaign even though King Horam was reportedly killed (cf. Josh. 10:33).[16] Second, the reference to כל־הנשׁמה ('everything that breathed') would only include the people and kings from the territories listed in v. 40a. Consequently, the hyperbole theory of Younger and Kitchen is unnecessary as an explanation of this passage.[17]

2:2 The boundaries of Joshua's Conquest in the South (v. 41)

While v. 40 speaks of regions and kings defeated by Joshua, v. 41 speaks of the southern border and the land of Goshen. Joshua smote them מִקָּדֵשׁ בַּרְנֵעַ וְעַד־עַזָּה וְאֵת כָּל־אֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן וְעַד־גִּבְעוֹן 'from Kadesh Barnea up to Gaza and all the land of Goshen up to Gibeon'. The line from Kadesh Barnea to Gaza marks the southwestern border of the land. What is not immediately clear is if the expression 'from' (מן) … 'and up to' (ועד) is meant to include the beginning and end points (i.e. Kadesh Barnea and Gaza). In some cases, these two prepositions are used inclusively; and in other cases, they are used exclusively.[18] Then to complicate the matter, the Hebrew Bible has examples where the writer uses one preposition inclusively and the other exclusively.[19] Since, v. 40 clearly excludes the coastal plain there is little reason to believe that Gaza is included in the territory taken by Israel. The exclusion of Gaza from the conquered territory described in Joshua 11:22 further supports this conclusion.[20]

Finally, v. 41 tells the reader that all the land of Goshen was taken up to Gibeon. In this context, the writer certainly does not want the

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[15] J. Maxwell Miller and Gene M. Tucker, *The Book of Joshua* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974): 88; Hawk, *Joshua*, 168; cf. Josh. 10:1-5, 16-19, 26.

[16] Also see Josh. 16:10; Judg. 1:29; 2 Sam. 5:25; 1 Kgs 9:15-17; 1 Chr. 14:13-16.

[17] For instance, K. Lawson Younger Jr argues that Joshua 10:40-43 speaks of a complete conquest, but we should understand this as hyperbolic speech. *Ancient Conquests: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing* (JSOTSupp 98; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990): 227-28. Also see Howard, *Joshua*, 259. Woudstra calls this section a 'provisional conclusion' (183).

[18] Inclusively: Gen. 25:18; 31:24, 29; Exclusively: Exod. 21:24.

[19] Josh. 13:26, this verse describes the part of the boundary of Gad, which runs from Heshbon over to Ramath Mizpah. Heshbon is in the territory of Reuben (cf. Num. 32:37) and Ramath Mizpah is within the territory of Gad.

[20] Also see Judg. 1:19, where Philistine territory is excluded from the conquered territory.

reader to think of that portion of Egypt called Goshen. Only three
passages provide a clue to the location of this area (i.e. Josh. 10:40;
11:17; 15:51). In Joshua 15:51, Goshen occurs in a list of eleven towns,
which forms the first of five groups of towns in the hill country
allocated to Judah. If the district is named after this town, then because
of the association with other southern towns, Goshen is most likely in
the southern end of Judah's hill country.[21] Gibeon, on the other hand,
occurs in the southernmost part of Benjamin, and the implication is that
Joshua defeated the indigenous people all along the mountain ridge of
Judah all the way up to Gibeon. While the Gibeonite sites came under
Israelite control during the southern campaign, they were not struck
(נכה) by Joshua.[22] Verse 41, it seems, does not contradict the reality
portrayed in other parts of the book. Israel did not capture or subjugate
Gaza, and Joshua did not strike down the Gibeonites. Still, a problem
remains. Israel had to recapture some of the towns along this mountain
ridge later in the Biblical story (e.g. Debir, see Josh. 10:38-39 and
Judg. 1:11), which we will return to in consideration of Joshua 10:43.

2:3 A Quick Victory and Return to the Base Camp (vv. 42-43)

Having described the lands defeated by the Israelites, the author turns
to the issue of the kings and their lands. Two exegetical issues are of
concern in v. 42. First, in v. 42, we read that Joshua לכד (captured)
their kings and their land, which might suggest that Israel took
possession of the lands listed in v. 40.[23] While the verb נכה (vv. 40,
41) has the implication of a military attack, when the possession of the
land is in view, the verb ירש 'to possess' also accompanies the
statement that the land or its inhabitants were struck down.[24] Still, in
v. 42 we read that Joshua לכד 'took' all their land and all these kings,
a term that often denotes taking possession of something or someone.[25]
In some cases, however, a person or thing is taken (לכד), and the idea
is not so much that it was possessed in the sense of inhabited,[26] but in

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[21] Soggin, *Joshua*, 178.
[22] See Joshua 9.
[23] Hawk, *Joshua*, 173. Also see Josh. 8:21; 10:1, where possession may be implied.
[24] See Num. 21:24; Judg. 11:21.
[25] Cf. Amos 3:4; Ps. 35:8; Judg. 7:25; 15:4; Num. 21:32; also see Ludwig Koehler
and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*
(Leiden: Brill, 2001): 530. (*HALOT*)
[26] In Josh. 7:16-18 the verb לכד indicates that Achan was selected by the process of
lot casting.

v. 42 Joshua clearly did capture these lands and their kings.[27] This understanding of v. 42 creates a problem. Israel had to capture some of these towns a second time, according to Judges 1:9-29. Moreover, according to Judges 1:29, Gezer remains occupied by Canaanites even though Joshua defeated its king, and no one was left alive (cf. Josh. 10:33). A possible explanation of this problem will have to wait until our discussion below.

Secondly, the term פעם אחת, which is usually translated 'in one campaign' or 'at one time',[28] stands in contrast to the statement in Joshua 11:18 that Joshua was involved in a protracted military campaign for the land.[29] Caleb, who was from the tribe of Judah, claimed that he was still seeking his inheritance in Hebron some seven years after the beginning of the conquest, which suggests that the conquest was not a blitzkrieg style assault on the land (cf. Josh. 14:6-15). In all but one occurrence of the phrase פעם אחת, it clearly should be translated 'one time'. For instance, in Joshua 6:3, 11, 14 the idea is one circuit around the city of Jericho.[30] In Isaiah 66:8, however, Isaiah asks if a nation can be born 'one time' with the idea of 'suddenly'. The idea of the nation being born suddenly is probable given the parallel with the question 'will a country be born in one day [ביום אחד] … or a nation be born at once [פעם אחת]?' (v. 8). In this case, the preposition ב indicates the period within which the nation was born (i.e. 'in one day'), which may then suggest that פעם אחת means 'suddenly'.[31] Still, the numeral אחד 'is the most adjectival of the cardinals'.[32] So, when פעם אחת occurs in Joshua 10:42, the most natural implication is that Joshua captured the southern portion of Canaan 'one time' rather than 'suddenly'.

Joshua's conquest of the southern territory 'once' begs the question of why the narrator raises this issue if Israel settled the land at this

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[27] Cf. *HALOT*, 530; also see 2 Sam. 8:4 where David captured (לכד) several thousand enemy chariots, charioteers and foot soldiers.

[28] Hess, *Joshua*, 206; Polzin, *Moses*, 123; Boling, *Joshua*, 298; Nelson, *Joshua*, 136; Butler, *Joshua*, 109; Howard, *Joshua*, 262.

[29] Howard, *Joshua*, 262. Hess makes the point that this phrase demonstrates how quickly the southern campaign took place (*Joshua*, 206).

[30] Also see Judg. 20:31; 1 Sam. 26:8; 2 Sam. 23:8; 1 Chr. 11:11.

[31] Cf. Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winnoa Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990): 196. For a more complete discussion of this issue see Jeffrey Niehaus, 'Pa'am 'Eḥāt and the Israelite Conquest', *VT* 30, no 2 (April 1980): 236-38.

[32] Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction*, 273.

point. A closer look at verse 43 suggests a possible solution. Joshua
and the Israelites returned to their base camp in Gilgal at the conclusion
of the southern campaign, which should not be disturbing in light of the
pattern of military activity described so far in Joshua. After the first
defeat at Ai, Joshua sends the whole army out from Jericho to fight in
the second battle of Ai (cf. 8:1, 3). Then at each step in the conquest for
the southern territory all Israel is involved (cf. 10:29-39), which starts
with Israel moving out from Gilgal (cf. 10:9) and returning to Gilgal
(cf. 10:43). If all Israel moves from city to city in the battle for the
land, then apparently no one remained to occupy the conquered cities.
A similar distinction occurs in Joshua 12, where the narrator describes
the conquest of the eastern territories (vv. 1-6) and the western
territories (vv. 7-8). On the eastern side of the Jordan, Israel struck
down (נכה) Sihon and Og, and Israel took possession (ירשׁ) of the
land (v. 1). In the description of the battle for the western territories,
the narrator gives us the list of kings struck down (נכה) by Joshua and
the Israelites. There is, however, no mention of Israel taking possession
of the land of these kings. So as Mitchell says about Joshua 10:43,
'Although land has been conquered, there is no sense in which it is
occupied.'[33] Wright then asks the correct question, 'Is Joshua 10
wrong? Or was it necessary for these cities to be recaptured when the
tribes began the settlement?'[34] If Israel captured cities but did not
occupy them, then it is highly likely that the people who fled before
this invading army would have returned to their homes after Israel
returned to Gilgal (cf. Josh. 10:20). On this basis there is little reason to
see a contradiction with passages that say there is much work that
remains to be done (cf. Josh. 13:2-5 and Joshua 10:40-43).

3. Joshua 11:16-23: Summary of the Conquest

At the end of the northern campaign, we find another summary of the
conquest, but while the prior summary describes the southern campaign
this passage summarises the whole conquest.[35] Like the earlier
summary, most scholars see a statement of unequivocal conquest to

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[33] Mitchell, *Together*, 92.
[34] G. Ernest Wright, 'The Literary and Historical Problem of Joshua 10 and Judges 1',
108. (The cities in question include Hebron and Debir, which are recaptured in Judg.
1:9-10.)
[35] Keil and Delitzsch, *Joshua*, 122; Nelson, *Joshua*, 154.

which others have added material that undercuts the idea of a complete annihilation of all Israel's enemies.[36] Still, our task is a close reading of the MT as it stands.

3:1 Summary of the Conquest (vv. 16-18)

Once more, the text starts with an apparently unequivocal statement of complete conquest: וַיִּקַּח יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶת־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת 'Joshua took all this land' (v. 16a).[37] To this clause, we find appended in an appositional relationship a list of seven territories within Canaan that describe the extent of the phrase 'this land'. These territories are the hill country, all the Negev, the whole region of Goshen, the western foothills, the Arabah, the hill country of Israel and its lowland. As in Joshua 10:40, this list has been taken as evidence of the conquest of the whole land of Canaan.[38] The adjective הזאת 'this' modifies the phrase כל־הארץ 'all the land', and as a near demonstrative suggests that the referent for 'all this land' must be determined from the immediate context.[39] In which case, the extent of 'all this land' is determined by the appositional list of territories which follows rather than from the sense of completeness suggested by the words כל־הארץ 'all the land'.[40]

A close examination of the seven territories reveals that the list can be divided into southern and northern geographical areas. The first five (i.e. the hill country, all the Negev, the whole region of Goshen, the lowlands, and the Arabah) belong to the southern end of Canaan. The last two areas belong to northern Canaan (i.e. the hill country of Israel and the lowlands). While the writer adds the 'whole region of Goshen' to the list of southern territories, he once again fails to mention the seacoast in either the southern or the northern territories.

Verse 17 adds that Joshua took the land from Mount Halak up to Baal Gad, which is in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon. While the exact location of Baal Gad is uncertain, its approximate location is clear enough.[41] It is at the northern end of the mountain range running down the eastern side of Canaan roughly parallel with

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[36] Boling, *Joshua*, 314, 316-17; Miller and Tucker, *Joshua*, 96; Soggin, *Joshua*, 141.

[37] Hawk, *Every Promise*, 48.

[38] Howard, *Joshua*, 272; Woudstra, *Joshua*, 194; Keil and Delitzsch, *Joshua*, 122.

[39] Cf. Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction*, 310.

[40] e.g. Mitchell, *Together*, 102.

[41] Boling, *Joshua*, 314.

and west of the Jordan Valley. Mount Halak is located near the southern end of the same mountain range. Consequently, these two points indicate the upper and lower limits of Israel's conquest up to this point. Once again, the author clearly indicated a conquest that fails to include all the land promised in Deuteronomy 1:6-8 and Genesis 15:18-21. According to both passages, Israel's territory should have extended beyond the Valley of Lebanon all the way up to the Euphrates, which is located about 300 kilometres northeast of Mount Hermon. Neither Joshua 11:16-18 nor Joshua 10:40 imply a complete conquest. Rather Israel took all the lands listed in both passages. At this point in the story, the text clearly indicates that Israel had not taken the promised land or the smaller but included parcel called Canaan.

3:2 Additional Qualifications (vv. 19-22)

Passing from the description of conquered territories, the writer now moves to a description of people groups destroyed along with two exceptions. Hawk sees a fundamental tension between verses 16 to 18 and what follows in verses 19 to 22, which 'undercuts' the statements of complete conquest and 'weakens the narrator's claim of a comprehensive victory in Canaan'.[42] This view would have some plausibility if verses 16 to 18 made the unequivocal claim of a comprehensive victory in the way asserted by Hawk. More importantly, this view fails to recognise that the writers of Hebrew Scripture not only know how to qualify a statement, but there is a pattern by which substantially complete actions are stated which sheds light on the coherence of Joshua 11:16-23.

   Absolute statements can be made with or without כל 'all', and then qualified with either רק 'only' or with בלתי 'except' for the purpose of describing something as substantially complete. Several examples occur in Israel's primary history.[43] For example, in 1 Kings 3:3 Solomon is described as obedient to the statutes of his father David

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[42]   Hawk, *Every Promise*, 48, 49.
[43]   Exception clauses that use רק 'only' fall into two categories: (1) those that use כל in the absolute statement (cf. Josh. 6:17, 24: 8:2, 26-27; 2 Kgs 12:3-4 [2-3]; 14:3-4; 15:34-35) and (2) those that do not use כל 'all' in the absolute statement (cf. Exod. 8:5 [9]; 10:24; 1 Kgs 3:3; 8:9). Exception statements that use בלתי 'except' also fall into two categories: (1) those that use כל in the absolute statement (cf. Num. 11:6) and (2) those that do not use כל 'all' in the absolute statement (cf. Gen. 43:3, 5: Exod. 22:19 [20]; Num. 32:11-12; Josh. 11:19). In each case, the writer makes the point that something is substantially but not absolutely complete.

except (רק) in the matter of sacrificing and burning incense at the high places. Gunn and Fewell see this absolute statement as ironic in the light of its qualification, and in this, they follow Polzin, Hauch and Hawk in the understanding of qualifications in Joshua.[44] However, if this convention portraying something as virtually complete has any validity then the writer portrays Solomon as substantially obedient (cf. 1 Kgs 3:3). Therefore, Winther-Nielsen correctly says, 'language surely has the capacity to express concession without deconstructing the central statements, and closures often have such explanatory features'.[45] In verses 19-22, we find two such exceptions that qualify and explain the statement found in verses 16-18. The Gibeonites were from the only city that made a peace treaty with Israel (v. 19); and Israel destroyed all the Anakites who lived in the land of Israel, but they failed to kill the Anakites in Philistine territory. Israel had not taken all the land or people groups promised by the Lord to the descendents of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

3:3 A Summary within a Summary (v. 23)

In a concluding statement, the Biblical narrator returns to the theme of verse 16. Joshua took all the land according to everything the Lord spoke to Moses. Here the narrator reminds us of the promises made by the Lord to Moses regarding the conquest. After arriving at the foot of Mount Sinai and receiving the Law, the Lord says to Moses that he would send an angel ahead of the Israelites and bring them into the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites (cf. Exod. 23:20-23), which is the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Then at the end of that speech, the Lord says that he would send hornets ahead of Israel to drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites (v. 28). Significantly, the second list (v. 28) is only a subset of the list given in verse 23. The Lord then continues by saying he would drive out the inhabitants of the land in stages rather than all at once (vv. 29-30). Therefore, as we look at the promise referred to in Joshua 11:23, we should not be surprised to see evidence of a substantially but not exhaustively complete

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[44] David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993): 55-56.

[45] Nicolai Winther-Nielsen, *A Functional Discourse Grammar of Joshua: A Computer-assisted Rhetorical Structure Analysis* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1995): 250 n. 26.

conquest. Cities remained that Israel had not taken in the first phase of the conquest, and others needed to be settled or even retaken before they could be settled.

4. Joshua 21:43-45: The Final Summary

At the conclusion of the settlement portrayed in Joshua 13–20, we now encounter yet another summary of the conquest. Israel, it seems, has taken all the land and killed all its former inhabitants. Somewhat amazingly, a short time later Joshua tells the assembled leaders that nations remain in the promised land, but the Lord will push them out before the Israelites in faithfulness to the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (cf. Josh. 23:1-5). It seems that contradictions may remain within the text.[46] In fact, Polzin says that this passage is so out of line with the rest of the book that the only way to make sense of Joshua 21:41-43 is to read it in an 'ironic sense'.[47] Hawk, on the other hand, sees a 'glaring disjunction between narrated reality [incomplete conquest] and narrative evaluation [unequivocally complete conquest]', which cannot be resolved by reference to irony.[48] Therefore, it is to the text that we must turn in order to determine what the writer said.

4:1 All the Promised Land (v. 43)

On its surface verse 43 confronts the reader with the clearest and most straightforward statement of complete conquest, which then stands in conflict with the incomplete conquest implied in Joshua's farewell speech (cf. Josh. 23:1-5). 'The Lord gave Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and they settled there' (v. 43). The main question here is the nature of this promise to Israel's fathers. In many passages, when the biblical writers refer to Israel's fathers (לאבותם), the English translations correctly render this as 'forefathers'. In most cases, the idea of distant ancestors is clear from the context.[49] Then in other cases, the writer speaks of the

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[46] Howard, *Joshua*, 397; Woudstra, *Joshua*, 314; Mitchell, *Together*, 102, 106; Nelson, *Joshua*, 242.

[47] Polzin, *Moses*, 132.

[48] Hawk, *Every Promise*, 115. Also see Miller and Tucker, *Joshua*, 165; Butler, *Joshua*, 235; Woudstra, *Joshua*, 314; Howard, *Joshua*, 397.

[49] Cf. Exod. 3:15; 4:4; Deut. 1:8; 6:10; 9:5; 29:12 [13]; 30:20.

immediately preceding generation.[50] When the writer speaks of the promise to Israel's forefathers, he often spells out that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are implied.[51] However, in some cases, the writer makes the point that the Lord made a promise to the fathers and to the current generation. For instance, Moses says in Exodus 13:11, 'After the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites and gives it to you, as he promised on oath to you and your forefathers; you are to give over to the Lord the first offspring of every womb.'[52] The identity of the ancestors in Joshua 21:43 is suggested by the parallel in verse 44 where the narrator speaks of the rest promised לאבותם 'to their fathers'. Yahweh's promise of rest occurs for the first time in the final form of the Pentateuch to the immediately preceding generation (cf. Exod. 33:14). Therefore, since the fathers of verse 43 are arguably the same as those of verse 44, the expression לאבותם 'to their fathers' in verse 43 at least includes the previous generation.

An examination of Exodus 23:20-33, which records the first promise of the land to the generation coming out of Egypt, shows that the Lord had indeed promised to bring Israel into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites (cf. v. 23). The Lord goes on to say that, he would give the land to Israel in stages. In the first stage, he would drive out the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites, but the Amorites, Perizzites and Jebusites would apparently remain at the end of the first phase of the conquest.[53] So, when Joshua 21:43 says that God had been faithful to give Israel the land promised to their fathers (לאבותם) it is not at all certain that this verse stands in conflict with passages referring to an incomplete conquest.

4:2 Rest From War (vv. 44-45)

With the first stage of the conquest complete, Israel had the rest promised in Exodus 33:14 and Deuteronomy 12:10, and no one person

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[50] Cf. Exod. 10:6; 34:7.

[51] Cf. Deut. 1:8; 6:10; 9:5; 29:12 [13]; 30:30.

[52] Also see Deut. 1:35 where the same point is made to the children of those who came out of Egypt.

[53] See Josh. 15:63 (Jebusites remained); Josh. 17:15 (Perizzites remained); Judg. 1:34-36 (Amorites remained). According to Cassuto v. 28 lists 'one people from each pair enumerated in v. 23 [, which are] … mentioned for the sake of brevity'. The idea being that v. 28 stands for the six nations listed in v. 23. This is not convincing in light of v. 29 which says that the Lord will drive out the nations before Israel in stages rather than all at once. See *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: The Manges Press, 1967): 308.

out of all their enemies successfully opposed Israel's entry into the land. Two issues confront us in verse 44. First, Israel has the promised rest, which might imply a complete conquest and the 'absence of enemies'.[54] Therefore, Hawk asks, 'Why does the land have rest from war when the peoples of the land still occupy much of the territory promised to Israel?'[55] A survey of the term 'rest' shows that it occurs at several points where peace has been achieved even when there are still enemies left who are not attacking Israel at that time.[56] An interesting example occurs in Deuteronomy 25:19. Moses says, 'When the Lord your God gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land he is giving you … you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.' So while von Rad correctly says, 'This "rest" … is the altogether tangible peace granted to a nation plagued by enemies and weary of wandering',[57] Deuteronomy 25:19 makes it clear that rest does not automatically imply the elimination of all Israel's enemies.

Secondly, when verse 44 says, 'not one man out of all their enemies stood before them', many scholars believe the author said all of Israel's enemies had been destroyed.[58] Mitchell makes this point by equating the phrase כל־איביהם 'all their enemies' with all the occupants of the land.[59] This phrase occurs twice in verse 44, and a close look at both is helpful. The final clause reads, אֵת כָּל־אֹיְבֵיהֶם נָתַן יְהוָה בְּיָדָם 'the Lord gave all their enemies into their hand'. Here the idea parallels Exodus 23:27, which specifies the identity of all their enemies. The Lord identifies them as the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites (cf. Exod. 23:23). Clearly, the Lord gave these nations into Israelite hands, but the question is, has Israel taken what has been given? According to our reading of Joshua, Israel had not taken all that the Lord had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Returning to Joshua 21:44b, the text also says, וְלֹא־עָמַד אִישׁ בִּפְנֵיהֶם מִכָּל־אֹיְבֵיהֶם 'out of all their enemies no one stood before them'. This is closely related to Joshua

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54 Butler, *Joshua*, 235.

55 Hawk, *Joshua*, 175. Hawk asks this in reference to Josh. 11:23, but the point is relevant in connection with Josh. 21:44.

56 Cf. 2 Chr. 14:6; 2 Chr. 15:15.

57 Gerhard von Rad, 'There Remains Still a Rest for the People of God: An Investigation of a Biblical Concept' in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver & Boyd, 1966): 95.

58 Butler, *Joshua*, 235; Miller and Tucker, *Joshua*, 165.

59 Mitchell, *Together*, 137.

1:5, which says לֹא־יִתְיַצֵּב אִישׁ לְפָנֶיךָ 'no one will be able to station himself before you'. While the *yiqtol* form of יצב suggests a future resistance to Israel's advance into the land, verse 5 does not automatically mean that Joshua or Israel would confront everyone in the land. Rather, it says none of those who stand in the way of Israel's advance into the land would succeed in preventing the conquest. Then according to Joshua 1:3, Israel would take every place on which they placed their feet and by implication nothing more than that. Israel must take what the Lord gives. Joshua 21:44b speaks of the fulfilment of the promise in Joshua 1:5 with the statement, וְלֹא־עָמַד אִישׁ בִּפְנֵיהֶם מִכָּל־אֹיְבֵיהֶם 'out of all their enemies no one stood before them'. For our purposes, the key issue is the partitive use of the preposition מן 'out of' in this clause.[60] No one person out of the mass of Israel's enemies ever successfully opposed Joshua or Israel. What the author does not say is as important as what he said. The story does not tell us that all Israel's enemies actively opposed them and were subsequently put to death. Consequently, there is no evidence in the final form of the text of Joshua 21:43-45 that necessarily implies an unequivocally complete conquest. Nevertheless, the Lord had been faithful to his promises.

5. Conclusion

Over the last few decades, synchronic readings of Joshua have dealt with the apparent tension between complete and incomplete conquest with sensitivity that has turned up many themes in Joshua previously underappreciated if not altogether overlooked. For instance, the tension between competing voices found by Polzin or the issues of obedience and disobedience found by Hawk have added a sophistication and depth not found in diachronic readings of the text. In the background of all these approaches the issue of complete versus incomplete conquest has been a staple. According to our analysis of this issue, there is at least room for a question mark next to the prevailing view. None of the three passages examined require a reading of an unequivocally complete conquest that stands in conflict with an incomplete conquest.

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60 Cf. Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction*, 213-14.

Therefore, while there are several tensions still present in the book, they should be reexamined in a new light.[61]

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[61] This paper was delivered at the International SBL conference in Auckland, NZ, July 2008.