

“THREE DAYS” IN JOSHUA 1–3: RESOLVING A CHRONOLOGICAL CONUNDRUM

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The early chapters of the book of Joshua contain several small but persistent chronological problems that have proven difficult to resolve in satisfactory ways.¹ Recourse in solving them is commonly sought in hypotheses of contradictory or conflated sources or traditions.² Such solutions, however, are often unconvincing and are in no way demanded by the evidence of the text. Plausible alternatives present themselves that do more justice to the text as it stands.³ These are in keeping with the current trends for reading texts as literary wholes.⁴

The specific issue addressed in this essay is that of the various three-day periods mentioned in Joshua 1–3. There are no less than three such periods (Josh 1:11; 2:22;⁵ 3:2), and scholars range widely in their interpretations of them. Some scholars argue that the entire time span covered by the three

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¹ See e.g. M. H. Woudstra's comments on the problem (*The Book of Joshua* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981] 12 n. 24, 13–16 and *passim*).

² Typical of this approach are J. A. Soggin, *Joshua: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972); J. Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (NCB; 3d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986); T. C. Butler, *Joshua* (WBC; Waco: Word, 1983); R. D. Nelson, *Joshua: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1997).

³ Commentaries representing more holistic or harmonizing readings that take less recourse to such hypothetical source- and tradition-critical solutions include C. F. Keil, *The Book of Joshua* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint 1975); Woudstra, *Joshua*; C. J. Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986); R. S. Hess, *Joshua* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996); D. M. Howard, Jr., *Joshua* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, in press).

⁴ The wave of literary readings is represented by such pacesetting works as R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981); A. Berlin, *Poetics and the Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Almond, 1983); M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1985). These three full-scale works deal synchronically with the text of Scripture and yet are not driven by the ideological or deconstructive approaches so commonly seen in many literary approaches today. The works cited in n. 3 *supra* are not self-consciously literary in the sense that Alter's and the others' are, but common ground is found in their consistent attention to texts as unified wholes.

⁵ Another reference to this same three-day period is found in Rahab's instruction to the spies that they are to hide in the hills for three days (2:16). Verse 22 is the writer's affirmation—in almost identical wording—that her instructions were indeed carried out. The two references clearly refer to the same three days (of hiding). For this reason, in this essay only 2:22 will be considered.

periods is merely three days at the one extreme,⁶ while others see up to eight days at the other.⁷

Many scholars are pessimistic about the possibility of any solution that would bring coherence to the references to the three days. For example, Donald Madvig states: "It is difficult, if not impossible, to correlate all the references to 'three days' in chapters 1–3."⁸ Richard Nelson speaks of "thematic threads" that "have tangled and knotted,"⁹ concluding that "any generally acceptable comprehensive solution to this compositional tangle is probably unattainable."¹⁰

Based on a close reading of the text, however—one that takes into account the exact wording of each text in turn—I argue that it is indeed possible to correlate these references, that the text has two three-day periods in view, and that the total time elapsed in chaps. 1–3 is seven days. This seven-day period pairs up with another seven-day period (the seven days of marching around Jericho) to bracket some important ritual events in chaps. 3–5.

I. THE TEXTS AND THE PROBLEM

The passages in question are as follows: "Now Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, 'Pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, saying, "Prepare for yourselves provisions, for within three days (בְּעוֹד שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים) you will be crossing this Jordan, to come to possess the land which YHWH your God is giving to you to possess it"' (1:10–11).¹¹ "And [the spies] went and came to the hill country, and they stayed there three days (עַד-שְׁבוּ הָרְדִפִּים), until the pursuers had turned back (וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים), and the pursuers sought in all the way, but they did not find [them]" (2:22). "And it happened, at the end of three days (מִקְצֵה שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים), that the officers passed through the midst of the camp, and they commanded the people, saying, 'When you see the ark of the covenant of YHWH your God, and the priests, the Levites, carrying it, then you, you shall set out from your place and go after it. Surely a space shall be between you and it, about 2,000 cubits in measure; you shall not draw near unto it, so that you might know the way in which you shall go, for you have not walked in the way before.' Then Joshua said to the people, 'Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow YHWH will do wonderful things in your midst'" (3:2–5).

The problem, then, is as follows. In 1:11 the crossing of the Jordan is presented as about to take place three days hence. But according to 2:22 the two spies whom Joshua sent out to Jericho spent three days in hiding before they

⁶ E.g. R. G. Boling, *Joshua* (AB 6; Garden City: Doubleday, 1982) 126, 159; Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* 68.

⁷ E.g. Keil, *Joshua* 31–32 (eight days); Woudstra, *Joshua* 79 (seven or eight days).

⁸ D. H. Madvig, "Joshua," *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (ed. F. E. Gaebelain; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 3.257.

⁹ Nelson, *Joshua* 55.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 56.

¹¹ Unless indicated otherwise, the translations in this essay are mine.

even returned to report to Joshua, and then there seem to have been at least three more days before the people actually crossed (3:2). These passages all mention periods of three days. Are these periods all the same, or are they different? And if they are different, how do they relate to each other?

II. PREVIOUS SOLUTIONS

As noted above, one scholarly solution sees the chronologies as flatly contradictory due to conflated sources or traditions. J. Alberto Soggin, for example, states: “The chronology [of 3:2] is irreconcilable with that of 2:22, where there is a wait of a further three days.”¹² In a similar vein Trent Butler, commenting upon the larger phenomenon of recurring structures in chaps. 1–4, states that “such duplication of structural elements leads to the suspicion of duplicate sources rather than simply duplicate motifs and traditions.”¹³

Another solution, represented by scholars such as Robert Boling, sees the numbers as part of “an extended complex of cultic events.”¹⁴ Most of these scholars rely on the detailed treatment of Jay Wilcoxon:

Joshua 1–6 does not narrate ordinary events in a straightforward manner, and some of the time references in the narrative do not readily clarify the chronology of the action. This is due probably to the fact that these time references have their real significance, not in the chronology of narrated events, but in the temporal sequences and durations of a complex cultic observance the pattern of which is contained in the cult legend.¹⁵

Both of the above-mentioned approaches assume that the text is almost hopelessly confused in its attempt to give any accurate account of what actually occurred.

More optimistic assessments offer plausible solutions that reconstruct a fairly accurate account of the sequence of events. One such solution is suggested by both C. F. Keil and C. J. Goslinga (in slightly different forms), who see the three days of 1:11 as referring to the time before the people are to be on their way—that is, to be leaving to cross the Jordan—and the three days of 3:2 as referring to a second period coming after a move had begun (3:1).¹⁶ If this were true, then there is less of a problem with the chronology: The people were merely to be ready to cross by the third day. They would not necessarily be doing so. The first actual move by the people (3:1) took

¹² Soggin, *Joshua* 55.

¹³ Butler, *Joshua* 41; see also Nelson’s comments about different compositional threads becoming tangled and knotted (*Joshua* 34, 55–56).

¹⁴ Boling, *Joshua* 159; cf. Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* 60–61.

¹⁵ J. A. Wilcoxon, “Narrative Structure and Cult Legend: A Study of Joshua 1–6,” *Transitions in Biblical Scholarship* (ed. J. C. Rylaarsdam; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1968) 60. Wilcoxon assumes that the “heterogeneous” nature of the Jericho stories (and others) is due not so much to disparate sources as to various cultic and ritual considerations (*ibid.* 55).

¹⁶ Keil, *Joshua* 31–32; Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* 40. This solution appears to require reading the participle in 1:11 (לַעֲבֹר) as “to be about to cross over,” “to be ready to cross over”—although neither commentator discusses the grammar here.

place three days after the instructions to the officers in 1:11, on the fourth day (see below).

Thus Keil, for example, sees a total of eight days from the time the instructions were given in 1:11 and the time the crossing took place in chap. 3: four days for the spies' trip to Jericho and their hiding in the hills (2:1, 22), one day for their return (3:1) and three more days at the edge of the Jordan (3:2).¹⁷ Likewise Goslinga sees "at least four or five days" for the spies' mission plus three more waiting by the Jordan.¹⁸ This is a serious, plausible solution. But I believe that the total time frame in question is only seven days, for reasons I shall show below. An eight-day period may also be questioned on grammatical grounds.¹⁹

Another possibility, which is compatible with this last-mentioned solution but does not require it, is that Joshua simply was mistaken in his announcement and proven wrong by subsequent events. Both Goslinga and Keil assume this in their reconstructions. Goslinga states that Joshua's command was "not a prophecy,"²⁰ and Keil states that "Joshua no doubt intended to proceed to the Jordan" but that events forced a postponement.²¹ It is possible that he truly did intend to cross over within three days (1:11), thinking that the spies' mission would be completed in one or two days and envisioning the preparations among the tribes taking place while the spies were gone. The people would certainly be ready, then, to cross on the third day.²² But the spies were unexpectedly delayed due to the goings-on in Jericho once they entered the city.²³ Thus they hid in the hills for three days until the

¹⁷ Keil, *Joshua* 31–32.

¹⁸ Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* 50.

¹⁹ The grammatical issue of reading עֲכָרִים in the way suggested in n. 16 *supra* is not assured. Discussing the participle, GKC §116 *p* speaks of an "imminent future"; B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor (*Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990] §37.6f) speak of a "futurum instans." Both of these phenomena appear to be similar to that suggested here except that in almost every case such a participle follows הִנֵּה, which is not the case here. This weakens Keil's and Goslinga's proposals, if indeed they understand the grammar in the way I have suggested they do.

²⁰ Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* 40.

²¹ Keil, *Joshua* 31–32.

²² The exact location of Shittim is unknown, but it was near enough to the Jordan for the people to have journeyed there and crossed in two or three days. For the three major options proposed for its location see W. S. LaSor, "Shittim," *ISBE* 4.490; J. C. Slayton, "Shittim," *ABD* 5.1222–1223.

²³ Joshua certainly intended the spies to concentrate their energies and attention on Jericho and not the entire land of Canaan, if only because Jericho—and only Jericho—is singled out for mention here. The thrust of his words to the spies in 2:1 is "Go, spy out the land, especially Jericho." This understanding of the *wāw* phrase here, explained by P. Wilton as a *wāw explicativum* and translated by him as "that is, Jericho" ("More Cases of the *Waw Explicativum*," *VT* 44 [1994] 126), is echoed in many commentators and translations; cf. e.g. Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* 63; Woudstra, *Joshua* 69; Soggin, *Joshua* 36; NASB; NIV; NRSV; NJPSV. We can also deduce Joshua's intentions from his instructions in 1:11. He certainly would not have told the Israelite leaders that they would be beginning their crossing within three days if his intent was for the spies to reconnoiter the entire land of Canaan. (Recall that the earlier spying expedition, of which he was a part, took a full forty days to complete, Num 13:25.) Thus the spies' delay, which forced them into hiding in the hills, did not delay them by more than a day or two beyond what Joshua expected them to be gone in any case.

pursuers had returned to Jericho (2:22). Then there was a further delay once the nation reached the Jordan (3:2) that rendered Joshua’s plans unrealistic. This second delay is unexplained in the text, and we can only speculate as to its cause or nature.²⁴

In principle, there is no real problem with seeing Joshua’s estimate in 1:11 in this way—that is, as being mistaken. He is not referred to anywhere as a prophet, a test of whom is absolute accuracy in prediction (cf. Deut 18:22), and here he is not speaking in the name of YHWH in any case. The delay of the spies in Josh 2:22—or the later, unexplained delay in 3:1–2—merely forced a longer period of time to elapse than Joshua had anticipated.

In all of these proposed solutions the primary problem is the three days mentioned in 3:2. For some scholars these are the same as the three days in 1:11, as we have noted. For others, such as Keil and Goslinga, these three days represent an unaccounted-for delay that has led them to the proposals just reviewed. Joshua 3:2 shows the officers passing through the camp at the end of these three days with instructions about crossing.

It is not three entire days in 3:2, however, that are unaccounted for. Rather, the period is too long only by one day. The first day is accounted for by the journey to Shittim (3:1), while the third day was the day of the crossing proper (3:5, 14–17). For those who see two different time periods in 1:11 and 3:2 it is the apparent one day’s wait (on the second day of the three mentioned in 3:2) that remains unexplained.

III. THE PROPOSED SOLUTION: A RITUAL OBSERVANCE ON DAY FIVE

The solution offered here attempts to provide an accurate sequence of events based on a close reading of the text. It sees the three-day periods in 1:11 and 3:2 as different from each other, and it sees seven days overall in chaps. 1–3. It proposes a ritual function for the second day of the three mentioned in 3:2, the fifth day overall.

1. *Different prepositions.* In 1:11 Joshua commands the officers of the people to pass through the camp before the three days are completed. The preposition here is *בְּעוֹר* (“within”).²⁵ The implication is that by the time the three days were completed Israel would have crossed the Jordan. In 3:2, however, the officers pass through the midst of the camp after the three-day

²⁴ Keil does speak (*Joshua* 31–32) of Joshua encountering an unanticipated delay, but he sees it as the delay in 2:22. Boling (*Joshua* 159) notes the unexplained nature of the delay, but he believes all three references to three days refer to a single period.

²⁵ The term *בְּעוֹר*, “while, within,” occurs 20 times in the OT. Its uses can be divided into two categories, in both of which a continuance of time is signified. (1) “Within (the time specified)”: In this category it always precedes a period of time, which is specified with a number. It occurs 8 times in this usage (Gen 40:13, 19; Josh 1:11; Isa 7:8; 21:16; Jer 28:3, 11; Amos 4:7). (2) “While yet”: In this category it can be used temporally (usually) or spatially (rarely). It occurs 12 times in this usage (Gen 25:6; 48:7; Deut 31:27; 2 Sam 3:35; 12:22; Isa 28:4; Jer 15:9; Pss 39:1 [MT 2]; 104:33; 146:2; Job 29:5; Prov 31:15).

period mentioned there. The preposition in 3:2 is מֵאַחֵרֵי (“at the end of”).²⁶ The references as to when the officers would be passing through the camp are clearly different in the two cases. There is no semantic overlap between these two prepositions, as a detailed analysis of the two demonstrates.²⁷ Thus 1:11 and 3:2 refer to two different time periods.

The narrator states specifically that the officers did pass through the camp in the second case (3:2) but not the first. In 1:11 we find merely Joshua’s command to do so. Thus we must assume that the execution of this first command happened sometime during the three-day absence of the two spies,²⁸ because when the spies returned the people were ready to move.

2. *Different instructions.* This second observation is even more significant than the first. Upon careful inspection of the text we find that the instructions given to the people are distinctly different. In the first case (1:11) Joshua commanded the officers to instruct the people about their provisions: They were to prepare for themselves provisions for the trip. In the second case (3:2–4) the officers’ instructions for the people are very different, having to do with the actual crossing itself: The people were to follow the ark when it moved, keep a certain distance from it, and consecrate themselves.

The first set of instructions (1:11) needed clearly to have been given far enough in advance of the march and the crossing to allow the people to prepare for the trip. The nation had been encamped on the plains of Moab for some time, since it had arrived there from Kadesh (Num 22:1; 25:1), and thus extra preparation time for moving would naturally be needed. The people would have needed some provisions even for the short trip from Shittim to the edge of the Jordan (3:1).

The second set of instructions (3:2–4), on the other hand, clearly had to do with the more immediate concern of the imminent crossing itself and the ark’s role in this. These instructions are last-minute directives about logistical details, indicating how the people should line up and cross. They do not at all concern their preparation of provisions.

3. *Incomplete days.* In considering the exact chronology during each of these three-day periods we should remember that when we read the HB we need not imagine each day as a complete 24-hour unit. The normal system

²⁶ The term מֵאַחֵרֵי occurs 37 times in the OT. Its uses can be divided into three categories. (1) “At the end (of a certain time)”: In this category the term is always modified by a time reference. It occurs 10 times in this usage (Gen 8:3; Deut 14:28; Josh 3:2; 9:16; 2 Sam 24:8; 1 Kgs 9:10; 2 Kgs 8:3; 18:10; Ezek 3:16; 39:14). (2) “From (or “at”) the end of (a geographical location),” often to be translated as “border” or “outskirts.” It occurs 24 times in this usage (Gen 47:21; Num 34:3; Deut 4:32; 13:7 [MT 8]; 28:49, 64; Josh 15:1, 2, 5, 21; 18:15; Isa 5:26; 13:5; 42:10; 43:6; Jer 10:13; 12:12; 25:33; 51:16; Ezek 25:9; 48:1; Pss 19:6 [MT 7]; 61:3; 135:7). (3) “From all (belonging to a certain group)”: A distributive use is determinative of this category. It occurs three times in this usage (Gen 47:2; Isa 56:11; Ezek 33:2).

²⁷ See nn. 25 and 26 *supra*. I would be happy to supply complete data for the information in these two notes.

²⁸ On 2:16 cf. also Boling, *Joshua* 149.

of time reckoning in the OT was inclusive. Edwin R. Thiele states that “reckoning was according to the inclusive system, whereby the first and last units or fractions of units of a group were included as full units in the total of the group.”²⁹ Thus Wilcoxon explains that “three days” need only signify parts of three days, as in “part of today, tomorrow, and part of the next day.”³⁰ Furthermore the counting of days was on a morning-to-morning basis here.³¹ That is, each day began with the light of the morning and ended with the last hours of darkness of the next morning. This observation will help when we consider the overall chronology in the next section.

4. *Ritual observations.* The entire first part of the book of Joshua is concerned with proper ritual and cultic concerns.³² In chap. 3, for example, the author goes to great lengths to describe the prominence of the ark of the covenant. In chap. 4 the importance of memorializing the great event of YHWH’s stopping of the Jordan’s waters is paramount. In chap. 5 concerns for holiness come to the fore in the episodes describing the Israelites’ circumcision, the celebration of the Passover, and Joshua’s encounter with the commander of YHWH’s army. In chap. 6 Jericho itself is dedicated to YHWH, and a seven-day period of marching around it precedes its destruction.

Thus in considering the unexpected delay in 3:2 we can easily imagine that it had some sort of ritual function. This is precisely what John Gray proposes in a brief but insightful comment.³³ Gray suggests that the insertion by the author of this three-day period in 3:2 was dictated by the requirements of the presumed later religious celebrations of this event—that is, it was not the events themselves that determined what the narrative said but rather the ritual reenactments of the (supposed) events in the time of the author, centuries later. According to Gray the dramatic reenactment would have included a ritual journey from the sanctuary at Gilgal to Shittim on the first day, “a token sojourn in tents there” on the second day, and “a sacramental crossing of the Jordan” on the third day.³⁴ Gray does not seem to believe that the events took place in Joshua’s day as described in the text, since he assumes that the (fictional) content of the text was determined by later ritual considerations, a point we may certainly dispute.³⁵

But Gray’s suggestion of “a token sojourn in tents there,” which was concerned with ritual considerations of some type, points the way to a solution of the chronological problem that does not do violence to the integrity of the text. It is indeed plausible that the three days in 3:2 had a ritual function

²⁹ E. R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* (3d ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) 52; see also Keil’s comments in this regard (*Joshua* 30–31).

³⁰ Wilcoxon, “Narrative Structure” 62 n. 31.

³¹ *Ibid.* 62 n. 30.

³² This is a major burden of Wilcoxon’s work.

³³ Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* 60.

³⁴ *Ibid.* (italics mine).

³⁵ V. P. Long, *The Art of Biblical History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), argues effectively that the representational and referential aspects of a work of art (such as a literary text) are by no means mutually exclusive; cf. also Sternberg, *Poetics* 23–35.

not only in later years but also when they actually occurred—in Joshua's day. That is, the second day very well could have been devoted to ritual preparation and reflection (as Gray suggests), even as the third day was. On the third day the Israelites were to devote themselves to the ritual function of sanctifying themselves. This is explicitly stated in 3:5. The second day very well could have been a "token sojourn" for purposes of heightening Israel's expectancy for the "wonders" (3:5) that YHWH would do.³⁶

For all of the above reasons, then, I conclude that the three-day period in 3:2 is not the same as the three-day period in 1:11. It actually began on the fourth day of the present complex of events, and it was after the spies' three-day time in Jericho and the hills. It began with the arrival at Shittim (3:1), and it concluded two days later (i.e. on the sixth day) with the officers of the people actually going through the camp with the last-minute instructions about the crossing (3:2–4). Then the actual crossing took place the next day, which was the seventh day.

IV. TWO CLARIFICATIONS

At least two assumptions lie behind this solution that need a brief clarification and defense. (1) I assume that Joshua sent out the two spies in 2:1 on the first of the three days referred to in 1:11 and 2:22. Another way of stating this is that the three days of 1:11 and 2:22 are the same (while these three days are different from those of 3:2). (2) I assume that, for the critical verses in question, the chronology is straightforward—that is, that sequential *wayyiqṭōl* forms in these verses indicate actions occurring in sequence, not dischronologized narrative. I shall address each assumption in turn.

My first assumption rests upon the observation that the narrative framework of chap. 1 and the beginning of chap. 2 presents the action as occurring in rapid, strict sequence. That is, God spoke to Joshua (1:1), Joshua spoke to the officers of the people (1:10) and to the Transjordan tribes (1:12), the people answered Joshua (1:16),³⁷ and Joshua sent out two spies (2:1). There is no precise way in which to determine exactly how much time elapsed during or between each of these events, but the literary presentation makes them appear to have happened in rapid succession. This is reinforced by the literary presentation in chap. 2, in which all of the action prior to v. 22 takes place in one day, the day on which Joshua sent out the spies (their trip from

³⁶ Goslinga is sensitive to this unaccounted-for day in 3:2, and he attempts an historically oriented explanation. He suggests that the high levels of the river (see 3:15) were a barrier to the Israelites and that YHWH allowed Israel to remain next to the raging river as a test of the nation's patience (*Joshua, Judges, Ruth* 50–51). Given the importance of proper ritual observances in this entire section, however, the suggestion that this extra day was for ritual observance and reflection makes better sense.

³⁷ I have argued elsewhere that it was representatives of the entire nation answering Joshua here, not just the Transjordan tribes; see D. M. Howard, Jr., "All Israel's Response to Joshua: A Note on the Narrative Framework of Joshua 1," *Fortunate the Eyes That See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday* (ed. A. Beck et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 81–91.

Shittim to Jericho in 2:1 being relatively easily accomplished within one day).³⁸ The MT of 2:2 reinforces this impression: The king is informed that the men came (or arrived) that night—that is, at the end of what may have been a long day for them. We thus see Joshua beginning his tenure as Israel’s leader in a quick, decisive manner, issuing a series of instructions in rapid succession.

We may also observe—by way of further clarification of the assumption, not further support—that all three of the three-day periods under consideration are qualified in the text by prepositional phrases that distinguish them from each other. Furthermore these prepositional phrases themselves follow a sequence: “within three days” (1:11), “and they stayed there three days until the pursuers returned” (2:22), “at the end of three days” (3:2). The first reference looks at the three days as upcoming. The second looks at them as coming to completion. The third also looks at them as coming to completion, but the context makes clear that these are a different set of three days, as I have argued above.

My second assumption—that the sequential *wayyiqṭōls* in 1:11; 2:22; 3:2 (and 3:1) are truly sequential—needs some defense because of the phenomenon discussed in print first by William J. Martin, known as dischronologized narrative.³⁹ As discussed by Martin and others, this refers to what is known in most languages as the pluperfect of the verb whereby two sets of actions are in view, both in the past but one further in the past than the other, such as in the sentence “Mary had gone to the bank by the time she arrived home.” In Hebrew this is most commonly expressed via the *qāṭal* verb form.⁴⁰ But the pluperfect also can be expressed—less commonly—via the *wayyiqṭōl* form (although this point is disputed).⁴¹

The possibility should be considered, then, that the verbs in 3:1—which tells of Joshua’s and the people’s actions in moving from Shittim to the edge of the Jordan—might be read as pluperfects, as dischronologized narrative. If so, v. 1 would read as follows: “Now Joshua had arisen early in the morning and had set out from Shittim.” Thus the events in chap. 3 would be

³⁸ Shittim was approximately 10 to 15 miles east of Jericho, depending on its site identification. For the three major options proposed for its location see the references in n. 22 *supra*.

³⁹ W. J. Martin, “‘Dischronologized’ Narrative in the Old Testament,” VTSup 17 (Leiden: Brill, 1969) 179–186.

⁴⁰ See e.g. GKC §§106 f; 142 b; S. R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1897) §16; P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1991) §§112c; 118d.

⁴¹ Martin’s brief treatment demonstrates that *wayyiqṭōls* can be used in this way. His student, D. W. Baker, expands and defends his treatment (*The Consecutive Non-Perfective as Pluperfect in the Historical Books of the Old Testament* [Genesis–Kings] [master’s thesis; Regent College, 1973]). Baker’s third chapter is the one most directly relevant here (*ibid.* 54–99). That the pluperfect can be expressed via the *wayyiqṭōl* form (at least in some contexts) is acknowledged also by GKC §111 q; cf. already D. Kimḥi (1160–1235), who cited six passages in support (L. McFall, *The Enigma of the Hebrew Verbal System* [Sheffield: Almond, 1982] 8–9). Most recently Waltke and O’Connor have supported this notion with further examples (*Introduction* §33.2.3a). Those who dispute this phenomenon include Driver, *Tenses* §76, and Joüon and Muraoka, *Grammar* §118d n. 2.

introduced by this “resumptive flashback,” alerting the reader that the three-day period in 3:2 is the very same one as in 1:11.⁴²

Despite the fact that I accept the notion of the *wayyiqṭōl* as pluperfect in some contexts,⁴³ however, none of the verbs in 1:11, 2:22, 3:1 or 3:2 can be legitimately read this way. By its very nature this special pluperfect is identified only by contextual considerations, and I have shown how the contexts for the two key passages (1:11; 3:2) are different: The prepositions describing the two three-day periods are clearly different, and so are the instructions to the people as to what they are to do. Thus I read each *wayyiqṭōl* in the relevant verses in its usual, past-time, sequential function.

V. THE CHRONOLOGY SUMMARIZED

The chronology and the activity in Joshua 1–3, as I have argued for them here, are as follows.

1. *Day one.* Joshua gave instructions to the officers that they should prepare the people for march within three days (1:10–11). Sometime during this or the next day the officers went through the camp with the instructions to prepare provisions, which would have thus given them adequate time (1–2 days) to prepare for the journey that would begin on day four. The execution of the command, however, is unrecorded.

Also on day one Joshua sent out two spies into Jericho (2:1). The spies arrived at Rahab’s house, hid, and then escaped sometime that night into the hills. The end of the hours of darkness constitutes the first of the three days of hiding mentioned in 2:22.

Furthermore on day one Joshua spoke to the Transjordan tribes about their responsibilities to be at one with the rest of Israel during the taking of the land of Canaan (1:12–15).

Finally all Israel⁴⁴ answered and affirmed Joshua in his role as their leader (1:16–18).

2. *Day two.* The spies continued hiding in the hills (2:22). Presumably the people were beginning their preparations for the journey to cross the Jordan.

3. *Day three.* The spies continued hiding and returned sometime during this day to report to Joshua (2:22–23). The people’s preparations presumably were completed.

4. *Day four.* Joshua and the people arose early and left Shittim, arriving later that day at the Jordan, where they spent the night (3:1). This is the first of the three days mentioned in 3:2.

⁴² This point, using this term, is made by N. Winther-Nielsen, *A Functional Discourse Grammar of Joshua* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1995) 173.

⁴³ Examples in this section of Joshua would include 2:4, 16.

⁴⁴ On “all Israel” see n. 37 *supra*.

5. *Day five.* The people remained next to the Jordan (3:2), perhaps engaging in ritual preparations of some type.

6. *Day six.* At the end of the three days of 3:2 the officers (again) went through the camp, this time with instructions concerning the actual crossing on the following day and the role of the ark in it (3:2–4). Joshua also instructed the people to sanctify themselves in preparation for the wonders that YHWH was about to do (3:5).

7. *Day seven.* The crossing actually began and was accomplished (3:5; 14:17) on the tenth day of the first month (4:19). This was celebrated and commemorated in the erecting of the stone altars (chap. 4).⁴⁵

VI. CONCLUSION: RITUAL OBSERVANCES AND THE SEVEN DAYS

It is interesting to note that the total number of days here is seven, the number of completion and perfection, a number often found in the religious and priestly materials in the OT. This is particularly appropriate here in the early chapters of Joshua, given the concern in the book for correct ritual and ritual purity.⁴⁶ A few days later, seven days were spent marching around Jericho in activities also clearly marked by ritual significance.

Thus we can see that on the seventh day after the action in the book began Israel crossed over the Jordan and commemorated this with an altar of memorial stones. Shortly thereafter, Israel celebrated the important ritual of the Passover (5:10–12), which was followed by another seven-day period of ceremonial marching around Jericho (chap. 6). This was not to be a military encounter so much as a religious event, for Jericho was under the ban (6:17, 21), to be sacrificed to YHWH.

The Passover celebrated in 5:10–12 is the climax that is pointed to from 4:19 onward. In 4:19 we read that the crossing happened on the tenth day of the first month (the month of Nisan). This was the exact day prescribed

⁴⁵ Wilcoxon develops a detailed reconstruction of the chronology in all of Joshua (“Narrative Structure” 1–6). He sees the chronology here as consisting of two consecutive seven-day periods, corresponding to the cultic calendars of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (in contrast to my analysis, which sees two seven-day periods that bracket the events of chap. 5). Thus his first seven-day period also includes the aftermath of the crossing (i.e. the three or four days between the crossing and the beginning of the march around Jericho [cf. 5:8, 10]). Like Gray (see n. 33 *supra*) he maintains that the text was written to serve a cultic purpose, its details created or arranged in order to fit a later cultic calendar. But Wilcoxon fails to do justice to the specific issue here, which is the nature and relationship of the three-day periods in 1:11; 2:22; 3:2. His actual treatment of the chronology proper is limited to three pages (“Narrative Structure” 60–62), and he merely assumes that the two three-day periods of 1:11 and 3:2 are the same without dealing with the actual details in the text that would indicate otherwise. He does not deal with the differences in the prepositions *בַּעֶרְד* and *בְּקִצָּה*, nor does he deal with the differences in what actually transpired during the two three-day periods. Because of these deficiencies his reconstruction of the chronology of events must be judged to be wanting.

⁴⁶ For a brief tracing of this important theme throughout the book see D. M. Howard, Jr., *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books* (Chicago: Moody, 1993) 94–96; *Joshua* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, in press).

in the law for the selection of the Passover lamb (Exod 12:3). Four days later the Passover was celebrated (Josh 5:10), again in accordance with the prescriptions of the Passover calendar (when the lamb actually was to be killed; Exod 12:6, 18).

Thus it is clear that proper ritual observance was indeed a concern here in the early chapters of Joshua. This was so much so that even the events themselves fall into patterns with ritual significance. There is a clear pattern of Joshua and the people wanting to do things right before they took possession of the land. When we reach chap. 5 we find three ritual ceremonies: circumcision, Passover, and Joshua's encounter on holy ground with the commander of YHWH's army.⁴⁷ These rituals are highlighted and emphasized by being bracketed by two seven-day periods, the first involving the crossing of the Jordan and the second involving the march around Jericho. A very important message of all of chaps. 1–5 is that the people needed to be in a right relationship with God before he would begin to give them the land. It is an OT parallel to Jesus' words in the sermon on the mount: "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matt 6:33, NIV).

Finally, it is most interesting and instructive to note that each of these seven-day periods is climaxed by a mighty work of God. In the first instance God stopped up the waters of the Jordan in a miraculous way, and in the second instance he destroyed Jericho, likewise in a miraculous way. Thus as the events unfolded in an orderly, ritually correct manner, God was clearly at work on behalf of his people.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ See my comments on the theme of holiness in this chapter in *ibid.*

⁴⁸ I thank my students Joseph Vadnais, Bruce Wells and Loren Lineberry for reading and critiquing earlier drafts of this paper, and special thanks go to T. C. Butler for his careful reading of a late draft and his many valuable suggestions.