

ACHAN AND ACHOR: NAMES AND WORDPLAY IN JOSHUA 7¹

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I. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to consider the function of the personal names in Achan's genealogy as found in the account of Joshua 7 and 1 Chronicles 2. The role of these names within their own onomastic context will be considered. Do these names represent fictional creations in the narratives, or do they occur in the wider context of the ancient Near East? The appearance of these names and their variants elsewhere in Joshua and in 1 Chronicles will be discussed. Reasons will be suggested for spelling variations within the Hebrew Bible as well as in the Greek tradition.

II. The Genealogy of Achan

A. Occurrences and Spellings

In the book of Joshua no figure is introduced with such a detailed family background as Achan. Four "generations" are listed, beginning with Achan and listing his earlier ancestors in succession. In this way Achan's sin is part of the actions of the "children of Israel" who have behaved unfaithfully. More importantly, the specific names prepare the reader for the identification of Achan, which proceeds in the opposite direction (from the general ancestor, Judah, to Achan) in vv. 16-18.

The names in this genealogy appear elsewhere in the Bible. Achan, who appears in Josh 7:1, 18, 19, 20, 24, is called Achar in 1 Chr 2:7. Carmi, Achan's father, appears in Josh 7:1, 18 and in 1 Chr 2:7. Zabdi, Carmi's father, appears in Josh 7:1, 17, 18, but he appears as Zimri in 1 Chr 2:6.

1. An earlier draft of this paper was read at the Society of Biblical Literature International Meeting, July 26, 1993, in Münster.

Zerah, Zabdi's father, appears in Josh 7:1, 18, 24 and twice as a gentilic for a *mišpāhā*, "family," in v. 17. The name Zerah also appears in 1 Chr 2:6.

In Josh 7:1 the MT, LXX, and Peshitta attest to the following spellings of these names:²

Achan	<i>ʿākān</i>	<i>achar</i> ³	<i>ʿākān</i>
Carmi	<i>karmî</i>	<i>charmî</i>	<i>karmî</i>
Zabdi	<i>zabdî</i>	<i>zambri</i> ⁴	<i>zabdî</i>
Zerah	<i>zerah</i>	<i>zara</i>	<i>zārāḥ</i>

Unlike the MT, the LXX does not mention Zabdi in v. 17 and omits Carmi in v. 18.⁵ Otherwise the versions remain consistent in the appearances and spellings of the names in Joshua 7. The gentilic of Zerah, which appears twice in Josh 7:17, is spelled as follows:

Zerahites	<i>hazzarhî</i>	<i>zarai</i> ⁶	<i>zārāḥ</i>
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In 1 Chr 2:6-7 the MT, LXX, and Peshitta attest to the following spellings of these names:

Achar	<i>ʿākār</i>	<i>achar</i>	<i>ʿākār</i>
Carmi	<i>karmî</i>	<i>charmî</i>	<i>karmî</i>
Zimri	<i>zimrî</i>	<i>zambri</i>	<i>zamrî</i>
Zerah	<i>zerah</i>	<i>zara</i>	<i>zārāḥ</i>

The spellings of Carmi and Zerah remain consistent throughout all of the occurrences. Achan and Zabdi change their spellings, both in the MT and in the Peshitta. The Peshitta preserves the same variations as those of the MT. Only in the LXX do they remain consistent. Even there, however, the spelling for Zabdi seems to combine three of the four letters which vary between

2. The MT and the LXX are the most important versions for this study, representing as they do the most ancient witnesses to the text.

3. A and Theodotion (Kaige), Aquila, and Symmachus read *achan*, which may reflect a Hexaplaric correction to the MT. Cf. Tov (1978, p. 58); Greenspoon (1983, p. 128).

4. A reads *zabri*.

5. Tov regards the Hebrew text behind the LXX as more original than that underlying the MT. He designates this as an example of a "harmonizing addition" by the editors of the MT. Cf. Tov (1986, p. 332).

6. A reads *zariei*. This name occurs only once in the LXX of this verse.

Joshua and 1 Chronicles, i.e., *mem*, *beth*, and *resh*. Thus, the LXX spelling is a conflation of the two different spellings in the MT.

B. Etymologies and Attestations

[◌]*ākān* appears as a personal name in Joshua 7 and in a reference to the same figure in Josh 22:20. The name occurs nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible, though some scholars have compared *yā[◌]kān*, related to the Gadites according to 1 Chr 5:13 (Noth, 1928, pp. 246, 253). A personal name *a-ka-an* appears in a Middle Bronze Age tablet from Alalakh.⁷ A Punic inscription from Mogador also records [◌]*kn* as a personal name (Benz, 1972, p. 378). Zadok (1988, p. 96) suggests a derivation related to the Middle Hebrew root meaning "be curved," but this remains uncertain. Thus Achan has a few extrabiblical attestations as a personal name, but it has no etymology in the vocabulary of Classical Hebrew.

[◌]*ākār* appears as a personal name in the Hebrew Bible only in 1 Chr 2:7. The Hebrew root means "break, disturb, destroy." This root may occur in the name [◌]*okrān* which appears in Numbers.⁸ There it is supplemented by the adjectival suffix *-ān* (Zadok, 1988, p. 80). It does not seem to be attested elsewhere as a personal name, either in the Bible or in the ancient Near East. The significant point is that, with the consonantal spelling [◌]*kr* without prefix or suffix, this name is unique in its appearance in 1 Chr 2:7. Unlike Achan, Achar has no extrabiblical attestations as a personal name but it does have an etymology in the vocabulary of Classical Hebrew.

karmî appears as a personal name associated with a son of Reuben (Gen 46:9; Exod 6:14) as well as the father of Achan. The noun associated with the root (*kerem*) refers to a vineyard. The personal name *krmy* occurs on a jar stamp from Lachish, c. 700 BCE, and as a patronymic on two bullae from the vicinity of Tell Beit Mirsim a century later (Davies, 1991, pp. 180, 196, 387). This same root appears in the name of a thirteenth century BCE inhabitant of Ugarit, *kar-mu-nu*.⁹ It therefore functions as a West Semitic personal name in both the second and first millennia BCE.

7. Cf. Wiseman (1953, p. 126). Although an initial [◌]*ayin* can be rendered with *ḥ* in syllabic cuneiform, this correspondence is by no means consistent among the Amorite personal names of the early second millennium (cf. the many examples in Gelb, 1980). In the orthography of syllabically written Ugaritic words and names, no Ugaritic word beginning with [◌]*ayin* is syllabically spelled with *ḥ*. Cf. van Soldt (1991, pp. 306, 332).

8. Cf. Noth (1928, p. 253); Num 1:13; 2:27; 7:72, 77; 10:26.

9. Cf. Sivan (1984, p. 236). The text is PRU III, RS 12.34 + 12.43, line 40 (Schaeffer, 1955, p. 193).

In addition to serving as the name of Achan's ancestor, *zabdi* appears as a personal name in three places in the Bible. It is used of a son of Shimei the Benjaminite (1 Chr 8:19), of a state official in the time of David (1 Chr 27:27) and of a Levite (Neh 11:17). Closely related is the name *zabdi'el*, which designates two figures in the Hebrew Bible (1 Chr 27:2 and Neh 11:4). In Hebrew the root *zbd* is used with the sense of giving a gift. A personal name *zbdyw* appears on a jar stamp of the sixth-fourth centuries BCE (Davies, 1991, pp. 252, 344). Aramaic names with this root are found within the Bible and without (Maraqten, 1988, pp. 157-158). Maraqten collects evidence of the name *zbdy* in Egyptian Aramaic, Nabatean, Palmyrene, Safaitic, and in Neo-Assyrian, where it is written *zab-di-i* and *zab-di* (Ibid.; cf. Tallqvist, 1914, p. 245).

zmrî occurs in 1 Chron 2:7 in place of the name Zabdi. Zimri is a name used of a king of Israel, of a Simeonite leader (Numbers 25) and of a member of Saul's family (1 Chr 8:36; 9:42). Outside the Bible, the root *zmr* occurs frequently. *zmr* appears as a personal name in the eighth century BCE Samaria ostrakon 12. It is attested on a seventh century Hebrew seal from Egypt, where it is compounded with the divine name as *zmr yhwh* (Davies, 1991, pp. 344-345). Names containing *zmr* are attested at Mari and in other third and early second millennium BCE contexts. It is found at Ugarit and in Phoenician inscriptions.¹⁰ As part of the longer name, most frequently spelled *zi-im-ri-da*, it is borne by leaders of both Sidon and Lachish in the 14th century BCE Amarna letters (Hess, 1993, pp. 169-170). Although the root signifies "protect" in various Semitic languages, and although this may reflect the original meaning of the name, a Hebrew reader of the text would associate the name with one of two homonymous Hebrew roots *zmr* "sing, praise" or "prune."

The personal names Carmi, Zimri, and Zabdi all share a *yod* suffix. Layton studies Zimri and Zabdi to identify whether this suffix is a *hireq compaginis* or a hypocoristic suffix. Because both names could be shortened forms of examples with an additional element, e.g., *zi-im-ri-ilu* and *zabdi'el*, he is unable to come to a definite conclusion (Layton, 1990, pp. 121, 145). The same may also be true of Carmi.¹¹ Whichever understanding is correct,

10. Cf. Benz (1972, p. 306), Gröndahl (1967, p. 197), Gelb (1980, pp. 18, 297-298), Huffmon (1965, pp. 187-188), and Kinlaw (1967, p. 338).

11. Layton (1990, p. 209 n. 53) mentions Carmi, but does not address the question of its suffix.

the suffix provides further evidence that these vocables were intended to be understood as personal names.

zerah appears both as a personal name and as a gentilic denoting one of the five major divisions of the tribe of Judah.¹² It designates a sub-tribal group in both the tribes of Simeon and Levi. It is also used of Ethiopian and Edomite rulers and of a subdivision of the Edomite tribe of Reuel.¹³ A seventh or sixth century bulla, possibly from the vicinity of Tell Beit Mirsim, attests to this personal name (Davies, 1991, p. 345). West Semitic cuneiform occurrences of this root are difficult to identify, due to its orthographic similarity with *zr* "to sow," which is attested quite early in Amorite personal names (Huffmon, 1965, p. 188; Gelb, 1980, pp. 18, 298). The root *zrh* means "shine, break forth."

C. Summary of Spellings, Origins, and Etymologies

In Joshua 7 and in 1 Chronicles 2, six names occur in the genealogy of Achan. These names are all one-word names. All the names, with the exception of Achan, have Classical Hebrew etymologies. All of the roots occur elsewhere in the Bible, and all the names except Achar occur outside the Bible in Hebrew and ancient Near Eastern inscriptions. Three of the six names - Carmi, Zabdi, and Zimri - have a suffix which is often found attached to one-word names. Of the three remaining names, Achan and Zerah both occur as personal names in inscriptions outside the Bible, spelled as they are in Joshua 7. Although Achan appears as a personal name in only a few examples, Achar has no extra-biblical attestations at all. Further, Achar does not possess a suffix or other identifying mark common to personal names. Among these personal names, Achar is least likely to be recognized as a name, whereas Achan is least likely to be recognized as possessing an etymology.

The meanings of the Hebrew roots connected with the names possess positive associations: "vineyard" for Carmi, "give a gift" for Zabdi, "sing, praise" or "prune" for Zimri, and "shine" for Zerah. The exception is Achar with its meaning of "break, disturb, destroy." The negative and destructive meaning of its Hebrew root provides a background for its usage as an alternative to Achan in 1 Chronicles 2 and in wordplay in Joshua 7. It further contrasts Achar with the other personal names in the genealogy.

12. Gen 38:30; 1 Chr 2:4, 6. Cf. Knauf (1992, pp. 1080-1081).

13. Ibid. Cf. Num 26:13; 1 Chr 6:6, 26; 2 Chr 14:8; and Gen 36:13, 33.

III. Wordplay with the Names

In light of the above discussions on wordplay and names in Achan's genealogy, it is now appropriate to consider the most obvious example of wordplay in Joshua 7.¹⁴ This is the relationship between the name of the valley where Achan and his family are put to death, *ēmeq ākôr* "the valley of Achor," and the similarly spelled verbal root *kr* "make taboo, destroy, bring disaster," which occurs in v. 25. Joshua uses this verb twice. It describes the effect of Achan's sin on Israel. It also expresses the effect of Israel's act of carrying out the divine punishment against Achan. He observes, *meh ākariānū yākōrēkā yhw̄h bayyôm hazzeh* "That disaster which you have brought upon us, YHWH will bring [the same] disaster upon you this day."

This wordplay has often been identified as an etiology.¹⁵ It is not my purpose to explore the nature of etiologies or to consider recent observations about the problems in their identification. Instead of probing into the origin and purpose of the story, I want to focus on the name of the valley and the associated verb as one more example of the wordplay which one might expect to see in this chapter.

Similar wordplay occurs in 1 Chr 2:7 using the verbal root *kr* "make taboo, destroy, bring disaster." Here, however, the wordplay is not between the name of the valley and the effect of Achan's sin. Instead it concerns the effect of the sin on Israel and the alternative name of Achan, namely Achar. The text reads, *ākār ōkēr yisrā'el āšer mā'al bahērem* "Achar brought disaster upon Israel when he violated the ban." The appearance of this wordplay raises several questions. Why is the name Achar used in the MT of 1 Chr 2:7, when the same person is consistently named Achan in the MT of Joshua 7? Why is Achan used in Joshua 7, especially in vv. 24-26, when the wordplay with the verb and with the name of the valley would invite the usage

14. This wordplay has been noted and studied by Rabbinic commentators as well as later scholars. Cf. Garsiel (1991, p. 20) for a recent study.

15. For an etiological understanding of this narrative, cf. Noth (1953, pp. 43-45); Childs (1963, pp. 281-282); Golka (1976, p. 416); Boling and Wright (1982, p. 229). Boling and Wright observe that the narrative, even understood as an etiology, does not explain why the valley came to be called Achor. Thus, it is not primary to the narrative for Long (1968, pp. 25-26) and Butler (1983, pp. 81-82). For criticism of the whole method of etiology, with questions as to what such an identification actually establishes, cf. van Dyk (1990), for whom many etiologies serve a rhetorical function to heighten interest in the narrative (rather than an explanatory function), and Brichto (1992, pp. 28-30), who criticizes etiologies as labels that are attached to certain narratives but, in fact, provide no insight into the text.

of Achar? Why does the LXX use only the name Achar, especially as it does not reproduce in Greek the wordplay which exists in the Hebrew text? Several reasons have been suggested for the change from Achan to Achar that takes place in the Hebrew text of Joshua and of 1 Chronicles.

First, there is the possibility of an orthographic scribal error, either rendering the final *nun* of Achan as a *resh*, or the final *resh* of Achar as a *nun*. If the name was originally Achan, then the LXX copied the scribal error in 1 Chronicles 2 and rewrote the error into the occurrences of the name in the seventh chapter of Joshua. If Achar was original, then the LXX preserves the correct spelling in all cases. This would support the view that its text has greater antiquity than the MT (Tov, 1986). However, the consistency of the different transliterations of the personal names in the texts of both the MT and the LXX does not suggest an error (Tov, 1978, p. 58).

Another explanation considers the phonological interchange which can take place between Hebrew *nun* and *resh* (e.g., Fitzgerald, 1978, pp. 481-488). Thus, Achan and Achar may be two variant spellings of the same name heard differently (Soggin, 1972, p. 93; Tov, 1978, p. 58). This is possible but does not seem to do justice to the unattested nature of the name Achar. In no other occurrences of the name Achan does Achar interchange with it. The same is true of the already mentioned *ya^ʿkān* in 1 Chronicles 5 and of *ʿokrān* in Numbers; names which also use the roots *ʿkr* and *ʿkn*. There is no evidence of an interchange between the *nun* and the *resh*. With reference to both orthographic and phonological changes, a *nun-resh* interchange is infrequent in Hebrew (Tov, 1981; 1982). Indeed, the best known example among personal names, Nebuchadnezzar and Nebuchadrezzar (Fitzgerald, 1978, p. 481), is not a good comparison due to problems associated with the transcription of a foreign name.

I suggest a different reason for the variations in the spellings of Achan and Achar, one which is based upon the wordplay in Joshua 7. This proposal assumes that Achan is the original name.¹⁶ What can be concluded from the study of the personal names is that the name Achan occurs elsewhere as a personal name but has no known etymology in Classical Hebrew. Achan's other occurrences are few in number, and this may have encouraged wordplay. If Achar were original, there is no reason that a name such as Achan should be introduced, for it would serve no known purpose in any wordplay. The absence of Achar in the Hebrew text of Joshua 7 cannot be satisfactorily explained as a secondary development of the text, whether accidental or

16. Cf. Woudstra (1981, p. 121); Boling and Wright (1982, p. 218); Butler (1983, p. 76).

intentional. This is because the name is spelled consistently as Achan despite the obvious association with the Valley of Achor.

Therefore, it is more likely that Achan was the original name in the story and that Achar was a second name. This "nickname" was applied to the figure on the basis of his association with the Valley of Achor and with the Hebrew root *ʿkr*. Thus, the occurrences in 1 Chronicles and in the LXX may reflect a tendency to nickname Achan according to his fate. The wordplay in Joshua 7 supports this interpretation. If the writer of 1 Chr 2:7 wrote subsequent to the account of Joshua 7, and this is likely if Achan is the original name, then the writer of 1 Chr 2:7 sought to reflect the presence of wordplay in the story of Achan and especially in the explicit wordplay of v. 25. The Chronicler used the same Hebrew root *ʿkr* but applied it in the form of the nickname of Achan. The scribe responsible for the Hebrew *Vorlage* of Joshua, as used by the LXX translators, was aware of the spelling of the name as Achar. At some point before its translation into Greek, the scribes and copyists of this Hebrew *Vorlage* made a change in the story of Joshua 7. They wrote the name Achar back into the account of Joshua 7, substituting it in the place of Achan. The result was a Hebrew text with additional wordplay not only between the name of the valley and the verb describing how Achan brought disaster upon the people, but also now encompassing the name of the perpetrator as well.

The one other name in the genealogy of Achan which changes in the MT is Zabdi, who is named Zimri in 1 Chronicles 2. Two explanations may be suggested. First, the phonological similarity of *beth* and *mem* and the orthographic similarity of *daleth* and *resh* could explain the change as an aural and scribal error. Second, the wordplay with a root meaning "to prune" could have provided an irresistible nickname for the scribe responsible for 1 Chronicles 2. Already having nicknamed Achan as "the terminator," this scribe found the image of pruning an appropriate one for a line which would be cut short (cf. Olyan, 1985, pp. 203-207). The Zabdi name is thus the original one in the MT. Zambri of the LXX is a conflation of Zabdi and Zimri. The change of Zabdi and Achan to Zimri and Achar served the purposes of the author of the MT of 1 Chronicles 2 as a means to associate the name bearers with their fate through wordplay.

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