

STORIES OF THE CONQUEST: JOSHUA 2, 6, 7 AND 8

by

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A significant part of the Bible consists of stories. We are aware of this because we know what stories are. We can sense when a story is beginning and when it comes to an end. We usually know a well-told story when we hear one. We can tell when a story is not put together well or does not ring true. In the experience of hearing and reading stories we expect to encounter what they mean.

When we move from reading to reflecting on stories or discussing what they mean or how they mean, we are engaging in criticism which, as far as the Bible is concerned, has a long history in the form of commentary. There are many ways to reflect on stories, especially those which have grown up in a religious tradition and become part of the sacred literature of that tradition. While there may be many modes of critical reflection which would be appropriate to such texts, to examine them as stories is hardly out of place, nor is it particularly unusual in recent times.¹

Story means action, persons doing things. At least this is true for most biblical narratives. Nor is it a matter of action just going on. The action goes somewhere; there is purposeful and coherent movement. Thus in what follows there will be an attempt to examine story in the account of the conquest found in Joshua 1–11, particularly chapters 2, 6, 7 and 8 and especially from the point of view of narrative action.

ACTION IN NARRATIVE AND BIBLICAL TEXTS

Before moving to these chapters some preliminary remarks are in order. The book of Joshua opens with a speech of Yahweh announcing that the land will be given to the Israelites and ordering Joshua to cross

1. For Joshua, see the discussion of McCarthy 1971. Apart from many articles on biblical narrative, there are several books and monographs. For example, and only a partial list: Alter 1981, Berlin 1983, Clines 1978, Conroy 1978, Gros Louis 1982, Gunn 1980, Jobling 1978, Polzin 1980, and Robertson 1977.

the Jordan. In Josh 11:23 this announcement becomes a reality when it is reported that Joshua has taken all the land. In other words, the announcement at the beginning of the work introduces an expectation which sets the direction of the action of the story. When the expectation is fulfilled at the end of Joshua 11, the story of the conquest is at an end. This movement from announcement to occurrence seems to govern the story of the conquest as a whole but does not prescribe the precise course the action must take, and so ample scope is left for any number of things to happen as the story proceeds. In fact, the narrative moves by means of several subordinate stories largely complete in themselves but usually marking a step on the way toward the conquest. Among these are stories which tell of the crossing of the Jordan, the capture of cities, and the dealings with the people of the land.

Even though the story of the conquest gives the impression of a coherent movement from announcement to occurrence, most scholars agree that the narrative has probably gained its present form only after a long period of growth and development reaching back into a period of oral transmission. Furthermore, the collection of stories within the larger conquest account tells only part of the tale. The narratives are surprisingly few and record only a small number of the battles which would have taken place in a complete conquest of the land by means of a single campaign under Joshua. Much of the conquest is given in a summary form (Josh 10:28-43). It is also widely accepted that the individual stories contain tensions and conflicts within themselves which also testify to a long period of oral and written transmission. Nevertheless, commentators do not agree when it comes to identifying tensions or stages in the development of the text. There are no "classic" cases of the combination of different material like, for example, the flood story.

A text which combines different stages of growth poses a basic problem for critics. How should one study such a text? Usually, scholars have sought to identify those parts of a given text which represent the work of different authors or editors. Once arranged in chronological order, at least as far as possible, these different parts are examined separately. This is the first step, and only later are they considered in combination. This strategy has been widely accepted as the appropriate procedure not only from a historical point of view but also from a literary point of view. For example, a scholar like Wolfgang Richter, who clearly labels his approach as the study of literature, argues that the stages of analysis must be clearly distinguished and carried out in an appropriate, obligatory order: textual criticism, literary criticism, form criticism, and so on (1971, p. 44). To divide up the text in terms of

authorship before examining its structure is reasonable but in my view not inevitable. To do so is to put the question of author ahead of the question of text. Text is thereby defined in terms of author, as something produced by a single author, so that the work of each author or editor must be singled out and studied separately.

But what happens if the text is separated from the question of author? This may be worth exploring more carefully, especially in view of certain problems which arise in dealing with ancient texts. First of all, there is the practical problem of successfully dividing a given text into segments which accurately reflect the stages of growth. Results are not even. Some texts yield rather easily to analysis and the results may be viewed as being highly probable. Other texts, like those in Joshua 1–11, are less susceptible to clear-cut division, so that we find scholars dealing with a number of possibilities rather than a single probable analysis. Or critics may simply admit that the task of division is too difficult to be successful. To be sure, one must not make too much of practical problems, but this one is real and needs to be taken into account.

Then too, we may ask how one defines the term “author” with regard to traditional literature. By “traditional literature” is meant here not just poems and stories produced and transmitted in oral tradition, but also material from the early stages of written composition and transmission which may reflect in style and content some continuity with an oral period. We have learned that oral poets and storytellers quite commonly view themselves as simply being preservers of the tradition, even though investigation has shown them to be quite creative within the bounds of tradition.² Transmission is frequently a mixture of preservation and creativity. There is no original or authoritative version of a story. Rather, a story exists in its many versions. Any version of a story is the creation of a performer yet at the same time the product of the tradition which has gone before. If the early stages of the written transmission of traditional material bears some similarity to the oral process, then the question of author in texts like Joshua 1–11 may be more complex than is usually assumed and in need of further consideration. It is enough simply to raise the question here.

If a story in a traditional literature exists as a bundle of versions produced by a long series of retellings, it is less clear why earlier versions should be given special status by definition. If there is no “original” version from which all others derive in a straightforward way, chronology may be less of a decisive factor than is often assumed. Here, too, it

2. See the discussion in Culley 1975.

will be enough to signal an issue which requires further reflection and discussion. It is worth noting that the question of different versions in Joshua 1-11 is not limited to a supposed period of oral transmission but extends into manuscript tradition, as may be seen from the variations between the MT and LXX.³

The issues of authorship and different versions have been mentioned only as a reminder that the relationship between text and author in traditional literature is far from clear. It may be useful to separate the issues, or even to turn things around in order to tackle the question of text first. In other words, one could seek to discern coherent segments which bear the characteristics of text first and place the question of features which indicate stages of growth in the text second. As far as narrative is concerned, this would mean defining story in terms of sections of text which can be read as story.

In fact, it has become common more recently to start from what appear to be larger wholes.⁴ In a study of the Deuteronomist, Robert Polzin (1980, pp. 16-23) begins with the task of making sense of the present text, whether it be the product of a single mind or the result of a long editorial process. Authorship is thus defined in terms of the text. Following Wayne Booth (1961), Polzin speaks of an implied author, a construct derived from the work itself. While his approach implies a concern to integrate all tensions within the work, Polzin looks for different voices within the text and seeks to establish the relationship between different points of view in a text. Indeed, following lines set out by two Russian scholars, Mikhail Bakhtin (1973) and Boris Uspensky (1973), Polzin sets the question of point of view in the center of his approach.

Point of view is one of three features often used in the discussion of narrative, the others being narrative action (plot) and character.⁵ In what follows, I will be using narrative action as a starting point, rather than character or point of view. It strikes me that action is the basic feature of narrative, at least for traditional narrative, within which character and point of view are developed. Whether or not narrative action is more central or more significant for the study of narrative than the other two features remains to be seen. It may not be. Nevertheless, it would appear useful to take the basic feature of narrative action as a starting point for the exploration of the shape of biblical narrative.

3. See the discussions of Orlinsky 1968 and Auld 1979.

4. See for example Robertson 1977 as well as others mentioned in n. 1 above.

5. See for example Scholes and Kellogg, and more recently Rimmon-Kenan 1983.

In dealing with narrative structures I will be attempting to work out further an approach that I have been exploring for some time (See Culley 1980a and 1980b). Essentially, this approach seeks to trace movement: how a story begins, how it ends, and how it gets from beginning to ending. It is assumed that this movement is fundamental to the nature of narrative or story. In other words, this is an attempt to identify the logic of this movement or narrative action, what it is that holds a story together in a coherent pattern. Narrative action moves from expectation to fulfilment, such that expectations are awakened at one point in a story and fulfilled later on. Thus, a threatening danger may lead to a rescue, a wrong to a punishment, a good deed to a reward, a difficult task to its accomplishment, and an announcement to its realization. I have called these movements action sequences. While one of these sequences is enough for a story, usually several are brought together to produce a complex narrative. If these movements or action sequences can be seen as building blocks of narrative, one can analyze narrative by identifying sequences within stories and the relationship of sequences to each other. This would be one way of describing the shape of a given story.

Looking at stories in this way, a critic is consciously tracing the line of narrative action which creates the impression of story in a listener or reader. That is to say, these lines of action may be one of the important devices used by narrators for organizing story material into coherent wholes and may also function in a similar way for listeners and readers. They may govern the narrative for both teller and reader in such a way that all other material is in one way or another brought under their sway and understood in their light. If obvious tensions in stories met all the time in biblical narrative are subordinated to the narrative structure, they may lose some of their power to disrupt, at least to the extent that the text cannot be read as a story. The tensions do not thereby disappear and must still be accounted for as features of the narrative in question.

In examining Joshua 2, 6, 7 and 8, I have received much help from commentaries and articles.⁶ Since, however, most scholars were pursuing questions other than those posed here, there will be little discussion of their work in what follows. As the first story to be examined, Joshua 2 will receive the most extended discussion, and the work of two scholars, Floss and Polzin, will be introduced, since they represent such differing perspectives. In these four chapters of Joshua, the narrative sequences

6. Especially Boling 1982, McCarthy 1971, Miller and Tucker 1974, Noth 1938, Tucker 1972, Soggin 1972, and Zevit 1983.

within each story will be identified and their relationship to each other will be described. Since the study of narrative action by no means exhausts the study of narrative, and indeed may in the end not be the most important aspect of some narratives, other features, such as character and point of view, will be noted where it seems important to do so.

JOSHUA 2

The story about the spies in Joshua 2 will provide a suitable starting point. The narrative action can be described by identifying three narrative sequences. The first sequence tells of a task assigned and carried to completion. At the very beginning of the chapter two men are given the task of a spy mission, and at the end of the chapter the men return with a report, thus completing the task assigned to them. As it turns out, this task is a difficult one and the men are fortunate to return alive. A similar pattern is found in Josh 7:2 and 3 where Joshua sends spies to Ai. In this case, the instruction to spy is followed immediately by the report. No incident intervenes. What in Joshua 7 is a small part of a larger story appears in Joshua 2 as the framework for the story as a whole. The report which the spies bring back from Jericho is what they heard from Rahab.

The second action sequence has to do with a rescue and can be seen in what happens to the men when they arrive in Jericho: the men, having landed in a dangerous situation, are rescued by Rahab. Upon arriving in Jericho and entering the house of Rahab, the men are threatened by the king, who has heard of their presence and has sent messengers to take them into custody. The rescue by Rahab takes place in two stages. First, the men are hidden and their pursuers sent off on a wild goose chase. Then they are lowered out of a window which gets them out of the city. After a delay in the hills to avoid the pursuers, they return safely to Joshua.

A third sequence is begun in this chapter but not completed until Joshua 6. This sequence is more difficult to describe. The woman succeeds in getting the men to promise that she and her family will be spared when the city is taken. In other words, she makes an appeal to which the men respond positively. The response has two elements: a promise to save, given immediately, and the future fulfilment of the promise at the capture of Jericho. One might think of this sequence in terms of a good deed which is rewarded. The woman rescued the men and then makes an appeal for a reward which she gets. But this is not explicit. Perhaps there is a veiled threat in the woman's request. The men are still in the city. If they do not accept Rahab's terms, she has no

reason to let them go. Possibly neither sense can be ruled out, although reward seems to be more likely. In any event, a request is made and granted.

The structure of the narrative action in Joshua 2 can now be described in terms of these three sequences: the task, the rescue, and the request granted. There is no necessary connection between the task and the rescue. One happens within the framework of the other. The request granted is closely linked to the rescue and depends on it. The request also links the story to the fall of Jericho in chapter 7. Similarly, the task is seen in a larger story context, in that the mission of the spies is a first step in the conquest of Jericho and the land.

Following the lines of these action sequences, one gains the impression of a coherent narrative structure within the chapter itself and with regard to how the chapter relates to surrounding material. On the other hand, a careful, clause-by-clause reading of the text turns up a significant degree of unevenness. There are gaps and tensions. A recent attempt to deal with this dimension of the text may be seen in the work of Johannes Floss. Working largely within the approach developed by Richter, Floss begins with textual criticism followed directly by literary criticism which seeks to determine whether or not the text is a unity or the work of more than one author or editor. Since the study of Floss is thorough and detailed, it may be useful to refer briefly to his study in the light of comments made above regarding where one starts when analyzing a text.

His work on textual criticism involves a detailed comparison of the Massoretic text with the Septuagint, which has a number of different readings consisting to a large extent of words and phrases present in the MT but not in the LXX. Following scholars like Orlinsky and Auld, Floss puts a high value on the LXX and considers it a better witness to a Hebrew *Vorlage* than MT. Thus, Floss frequently reads with the LXX. Just to cite one example, he reads "youths" with the LXX rather than the MT "men" in Josh 2:1.

At the level of literary analysis, Floss uses doublets on the one hand along with tensions and contradictions on the other as criteria for determining lack of unity. By carefully matching these two sets of criteria, he establishes places in the text where unevenness can, in his view, be taken as a sign of different authorship. On the basis of his analysis, Floss proposes that the earliest unit of the text consists essentially of vv. 1-3, 4c-6, 15, 22, and 23 (1982, p. 79). The rest of the chapter is viewed as being material added at later stages. This proposal is bolstered by an extensive analysis of the form of this unit, using

methods based on and developed from the work of Richter. Within this unit Floss (1982, p. 217) distinguishes a preliterate stage. It tells of a prostitute who finds that two of her customers have been charged with being spies. She takes their side, sends their pursuers on a false trail, and later helps them to safety. According to Floss, this oral story has been picked up by a later author and given a framework which turns it into a story about the sending of spies in connection with Joshua's conquest.

Floss' proposal is an interesting possibility to be sure. It is clear that there are a number of tensions and gaps in the text. Yet, in spite of his extraordinary effort, I remain less confident than Floss about our ability to mark off the stages of development of the text with a real measure of probability, as opposed to a certain degree of plausibility. Explaining why tensions appear in texts is a very complicated business for several reasons. For example, many stories in the Bible are rather short, surprisingly short in fact, when one considers that many may go back to oral tradition. It is as though a process of condensation has gone on. If stories have been reduced for one reason or another, then the task of explaining the reasons for gaps and tensions would become even more complex.

The first several verses of Joshua 2 read like a story which has been reduced in transmission from a longer story. The text lacks information that a reader would like to know. For example, the spies arrive in Jericho and immediately find themselves in a prostitute's house. We are not told how or why they did this, business or pleasure. Nor do we know how their identity and purpose was discovered so that it could be reported to the king of Jericho. The king sends to Rahab, demanding that the men be handed over. It is not indicated by whom the instruction is sent, nor is the arrival at the house of Rahab described. However, the woman is already in the act of hiding the men without our knowing what prompted her action. She speaks immediately to the emissaries of the king as though their presence had caused the hiding. We are not told how Rahab could have dealt with the messengers and hidden the men all at the same time. This condensed section of narrative may indicate the difficulty of distinguishing clearly those tensions and repetitions which result from the weaving together of the work of different authors from those which reflect condensation and summarization.

With all these gaps it is surprising that the narrative does not fall apart. Nevertheless, the general outline of the rescue sequence remains clear: the spies are in danger, but the woman rescues them by misleading the messengers of the king. The story line, the narrative sequence, manages to hold the story together in spite of gaps and distortions in the

text. These may still be perceived by a reader, but they seem to lose some of their power to disturb unduly because the main movement of the action is clear.

This discussion of condensation leads to another issue, the balance among the sequences, which has to do with perspective or point of view. While the rescue story seems surprisingly short, the speech of the woman to the men hidden on the roof is remarkably full. Here the words flow; moreover they flow in a style and vocabulary reminiscent of the tradition of Deuteronomy. The content and style of this speech shifts the perspective from the question of the rescue of the men to the perspective of the conquest of the land. In other words, the speech has less to do with the rescue of the men than with their task as spies. The report which the spies take back has to do with what Rahab has said about the condition of the people of the land in the face of the invading Israelites. The mission of the spies, as preparation not only for the capture of Jericho but also for the conquest of the land, governs the story of Joshua 2. Even if Floss were correct, and his suggestion is possible, the present version of the story has a rescue story in a condensed form within the framework of the spy mission which highlights the speech of Rahab, since it forms the substance of the report taken back by the spies. There is also considerable prominence given to the appeal made by the woman for herself and her family. The rescue story may be related to this, if it forms a good deed for which the response to the appeal becomes the reward.

It may be worth noting briefly how the various characters are distributed among the action sequences in this chapter. Yahweh's acting with power is an important feature of the chapter, because it is His reputation that has debilitated the people of the land, and this is what the spies report to Joshua. But Yahweh is not an actor. He does not send the spies. Nor is He consulted in the matter. He does not intervene to rescue the spies. He has nothing to do with the promise made to the woman. In short He is remarkably absent from the action. Other characters play important roles. Joshua sends the spies and receives their report. Rahab and the spies are participants in all three action sequences. Rahab supplies the report to the spies, rescues them, and gains a favour, if not a reward. The spies complete the task assigned to them, are rescued from danger, and make a promise to Rahab and her family. Both Rahab and the spies take surprisingly bold initiatives. They improvise responses to the situations they meet, surviving by their wits. It is true that the power of Yahweh may be at the bottom of all this, but only indirectly and in the larger perspective.

Once again, it is not being argued that tensions do not exist, or do not matter, or that they disappear. It is only being suggested that, as long as a reader grasps the direction of a narrative at the level of action sequences, difficulties like gaps, tensions, and other marks of unevenness appear as disturbances of greater or lesser degree within a story rather than as disruptions which pull a story apart and make it impossible to read. They are more likely to be something like noise or static in transmission rather than disruption of communication. This would mean that one would have to recognize blurring at certain points in the text, points where things remain uncertain. On the other hand, disturbances may be a more positive factor in texts, more like conflicting signals than static. Indications of more than one message are present, thickening the text, so to speak. In these cases, one might speak of shimmering rather than blurring, since a reader may be shifted back and forth between one perspective and another very rapidly.

A possible example of this can be cited in Joshua 6. In v. 1 the word "Jericho" follows the word "land" directly in such a way that there appears to be a disturbance in the text. Even though the city name "Ai" and the word "land" appear in the same context in Josh 7:2, the juxtaposition in Josh 6:1 looks odd. However, it was noted above that the story itself appeared to have a double function as being preparation for the capture of Jericho and also for the conquest of the land. The juxtaposition of the words "land" and "Jericho" matches this double function and produces a shifting back and forth, a shimmering, between two perspectives.

At this point it may be useful to consider Polzin's reading of Joshua 2 (1980, pp. 85-91). In line with his concern for larger wholes, he interprets Joshua 2 within the context of the Deuteronomistic historical work. He takes the framework of this work to be a joining together of reported speech (mostly, in Deuteronomy, the expression of the prophetic word of God) and reporting speech (mostly, in Joshua to 2 Kings, the recounting of events which are the fulfilment of that word). In the book of Deuteronomy, Polzin found two perspectives present. A subordinate one, labelled authoritarian dogmatism, stresses that the law must be followed completely with no adding or subtracting. The dominant one, identified as critical traditionalism, seeks to establish the need for revision and variation in interpretation.

Polzin comes to the book of Joshua fresh from Deuteronomy and frankly anticipates a continuation of issues which emerged from his study there. He expects a weaving together of the themes of the justice and mercy of God, the unique status of Israel, and the prophetic leader.

He is prepared to see the description and interpretation of events as an exposition of the meaning of the law of Moses. Seen in the context of his own interpretation of the book of Deuteronomy, the sending of the spies is viewed by Polzin as a timid act which casts doubt upon the faith of Israel in Yahweh. By contrast, Rahab acts the way the Israelites should have. She represents those nations which will be spared by the God of Israel. With Israel being cast in a different light, the point of view of the story is thus non-Israelite. According to Polzin, the relationship of the spies to Rahab is set parallel to the relationship of God to Israel. The end result yields a more subtle and complex picture of the relationship of Israel to the deity and to other nations. What one would expect to be straightforward is not.

Only two brief comments will be made at this point. For a number of reasons Rahab is a remarkable figure as a non-Israelite cast in a positive light. Nevertheless, it is not obvious from the story of Joshua 2 that Joshua is thereby cast in a negative light. Polzin's interpretation appears to be developed to a large extent on the basis of the voices he hears in Deuteronomy. Whatever effect this wider context may have on Joshua 2 cannot be adequately evaluated within the framework of a study of the conquest stories, although so far my inclination does not lean in the direction of Polzin's proposal. Then too, Polzin has moved directly to point of view in his approach, while my decision was to start with narrative structure. Thus, after all the stories have been discussed, it will then be appropriate to raise the question of point of view once more.

JOSHUA 6

The story of the capture of Jericho in Joshua 6 is composed of a single action sequence. An opening speech of Yahweh (vv. 2-5) contains two things. First, an announcement is made assuring Joshua that Jericho has been delivered into his hands. Second, instructions are issued pertaining to what should be done by the warriors and priests. The warriors are to go around the city once each day for six days. Seven priests are to carry seven horns before the ark. On the seventh day, the march around the city is to be done seven times and the priests are to blow their horns. At the sound of the horn, the people are to raise a shout. The walls of the city will fall. These instructions are followed. It is reported in v. 20 that the walls fell. The people go up and capture the city. The movement of the action runs from the announcement that the city is theirs, more specifically that the walls will fall, to the occurrence of that announcement when the walls do fall and the city is taken. This sequence does provide a tension of sorts, the tension between knowing something is

going to happen and then watching it happen. This is the same sort of movement mentioned above which controls the whole conquest story from Joshua 1–11.

The narrative proceeds from announcement to occurrence by means of small movements in the action which are very much like action sequences: an instruction is given, and then it is reported that the instruction has been obeyed. For example, the instructions about going around the city (vv. 3–4) are repeated to the people in an abbreviated and slightly modified form in v. 7. The performance of these instructions is reported in vv. 8–9 with even further modifications. Then again, in v. 10, Joshua gives another instruction warning the people not to shout until he instructs them. Following this, vv. 11–16 describe the march around the city on the seventh day at which point (v. 16b) Joshua intervenes with a command to shout followed by an instruction to put the city to the ban but to save Rahab and her family. After the city is taken (v. 20), the instructions regarding the ban and Rahab are carried out.

While there are no other action sequences in Joshua 6, there are parts of action sequences present which link this chapter with two other stories. We have already seen how the sequence involving the promise to Rahab made in Joshua 2 remained incomplete and could only be fulfilled at the capture of Jericho. And so it is, as has been noted, in the form of an instruction. Just before the capture, Joshua sends the two spies with the instruction to bring the woman and her family out of the city, and they do so.

The other link looks ahead to the story of Achan. In Josh 6:17–19, Joshua announces the ban of the city and warns against taking anything lest they put the camp of Israel under the ban, thereby causing it trouble (the same verb as in 7:25). It is not just that this alludes to the Achan story. This warning is in fact a prohibition which, as we are told at the beginning of Joshua 8, Achan transgresses. A prohibition can be an element in a punishment story, in that the sequence prohibition/prohibition transgressed can function as the “wrong” in the action sequence wrong/wrong punished, as will be seen when Joshua 7 is discussed.

While in Joshua 2 Yahweh took no active part in the story, here He is a major participant. He initiates the action, tells what will happen, and presumably sees that it does happen. How the miracle occurs is not explained, nor is the exact relationship between the action of the people and the falling of the walls. Joshua and the people do what they are told. Joshua passes on the instructions. The people perform the required actions. The central role of Yahweh creates a sense of inevitability. The enemy poses no threat. They are passive and play no active role, an obstacle to be removed rather than an enemy to be defeated in battle.

Even though the general movement of the narrative is clear, the details are not. The tensions are obvious and may well be due to a history of development in the text. Yet no consensus has been reached among the commentators as to the stages in growth. The most evident tensions may be seen in the details of the procession. The first description of the procession (vv. 3–5, a speech of Yahweh to Joshua) mentions warriors, seven priests with seven horns, and the ark. In v. 7, the people are to go around the city with an armed contingent going before the ark. In vv. 8 and 9, a rearguard is added. Blowing the horns is also viewed differently in different places. From vv. 4 and 16, the impression is left that the horns are to be blown on the last day only. However, vv. 8, 9 and 13 have the priests blowing the horns on each daily round. Nevertheless, since the general action of the narrative is fairly coherent, the confusion in details only amounts to some blurring in the story.

The tension in Joshua 6 is reduced to a fairly smooth movement from the announcement to fulfilment. There is no struggle. Rather, this movement is characterized by a rhythm produced by a whole series of short narrative movements involving an instruction given followed by a report that the instruction has been carried out. This rhythm creates the impression, at least in my view, of a sense of order and inevitability. This is further heightened by the content of the instructions themselves, in that they entail a ritual-like procession around Jericho repeated for six days and followed by a sevenfold circuit on the seventh day. Even though the details vary through the story, the impression of an orderly ritual remains. It has already been suggested that the central role of Yahweh contributes to this impression. Whether or not this narrative stems from an actual ritual is not an issue here; it is rather the effect produced by the ritual-like quality of the instructions and their contents.⁷

JOSHUA 7

Even though Joshua 7 narrates the beginning of the conquest of Ai, the chapter can be discussed separately from Joshua 8. The sin of Achan provides the main subject. What is striking about this story is the way in which two major action sequences are intertwined throughout the story. The first tells about a punishment. Achan does something wrong and is punished for it. The other focuses on Israel and has to do with a problem which must be solved. The crime of Achan affects the people, in that they have failed to capture Ai and do not know why. This failure, along with the loss of men, is not so much seen as a punishment as it is the

7. For a discussion of a possible ritual background, see Wilcoxon 1968.

sign of a problem that needs to be solved before the conquest can continue.

The first sequence involving Achan has two phases, a wrong and a punishment. The first phase, the wrong, has two elements: a prohibition and a transgression of that prohibition. The prohibition, as already noted, is pronounced in the Jericho story (6:17–19). The transgression is reported in 7:1. It is worth noting that the comment of 7:1 is made by the narrator to the listener or reader. In other words, the narrator and the reader know what none of the other participants, apart from Achan, know. Thus, in order to move from wrong to punishment, this hidden crime and the unknown perpetrator must be brought out into the open and identified. The exposure of this wrong takes place in three stages. First, the defeat of Ai and the appeal of Joshua lead to a response from Yahweh (v. 11) in which He points out only that Israel has sinned and transgressed the covenant. The next stage is the selection process, ordered by Yahweh, which leads to the identification of Achan (v. 18). The punishment is also specified: the guilty party must be burned. The last stage comes when Joshua confronts Achan, demanding that he tell the truth. Achan confesses that he has sinned (v. 20). The secret crime is now known to all. The punishment follows. After being taken to the vail of Achor, Achan is killed, being stoned, burned, and then stoned again.

The second sequence is introduced in the very first verse, when it is said that Israel acted faithlessly. One might take this to be a declaration of a wrong leading to a punishment. But the statement points in another direction. It parallels the statement of Achan's crime and, like it, forms a comment made by the narrator to the listener or reader. The Israelites do not yet know that something has gone awry. The same steps which functioned in the Achan situation to expose the crime function here to expose the problem and effect its solution. The defeat of Ai and Joshua's appeal lead to Yahweh's speech, in which He reveals the problem: material taken from the ban rests in the camp. Yahweh then gives instructions about how the guilty person may be found and decrees what must be done. The person who took the material and all that he has must be burned so that no trace of contamination remains. Once the guilty party has been brought to light, the people know what they did not know before and are able to deal effectively with this situation in accordance with Yahweh's instructions. The difficulty has been removed and the conquest of Ai may now continue.

Chapter 7 is one story, in that it revolves around what Achan did. But the two intertwined sequences give two views of the series of events in the chapter. On the one hand, Achan does wrong and is discovered and

punished. On the other hand, Israel is faced with a problem revealed in the failure to take Ai, so that they must take steps to uncover the perpetrator and the banned material in order to remove them from the camp. The main events of the story have double functions, in that they work in both sequences in different ways to move each sequence to its conclusion.

Other features of Joshua 7 may be noted briefly. First, there is the selection process by which the identity of the sinner is discovered. This ritual-like movement, working down in stages from the unit of the tribe to the individual, evokes something of the same sense of inevitability and orderliness that was noted above in the story of the capture of Jericho. There is no struggle or difficulty involved in gaining the information. It is revealed in a straightforward way as the people go through the steps of the selection process as it narrows down to the culprit. Then, there is the role of Joshua in the story. Joshua sends the spies and presumably accepts their advice to send only a small party to attack the city, all this without any advice from Yahweh. It is only after the disaster has occurred that Joshua turns to Yahweh. After suitable acts of mourning, he utters a reproach which recalls the murmuring tradition. Further, he appeals to Yahweh by pointing out what the loss of the people would mean for His great reputation. While this has all the appearances of an appeal in the face of a real crisis, a genuine attempt to move the deity to help Israel out of a difficult situation, the plea must be taken ironically in the present form of the story, since the readers already know what the problem is and that it concerns Israel rather than Yahweh.

JOSHUA 8

As in Joshua 7, the capture of Ai (Josh 8:1-29) is governed by an action sequence consisting of an announcement by Yahweh that the city has been given into the hands of Israel. This happens. The announcement creates the expectation that the rest of the narrative will recount the events which move toward the point at which the announcement becomes a reality. The announcement comes in the opening speech of Yahweh, which also contains two instructions. First, there is an instruction allowing booty and cattle to be exempted from the ban, and this is carried out after the capture of the city. The second instruction demands in a single terse statement that an ambush be set up behind the city. No further information is offered as to how this should be done.

The instruction about the ambush is obeyed, but the description of how the ambush is set up and how it works amounts to an action sequence in itself. It takes the form of a deception or trick. A trap is laid

for the enemy and they fall into it. The city is captured by means of a ruse. While Yahweh first gives the instruction to set an ambush, it is Joshua who elaborates a more detailed plan to capture the city by these means (vv. 4–8). He chooses a party who are to station themselves behind the city. The main army will advance toward the city but retreat as soon as the enemy forces come out from the city to meet them. At this point, when the enemy pursues the retreating Israelites, the ambush will make its move, seize the city, and set it on fire. The trick works and the enemy forces are caught out in the open (vv. 14–26).

It appears, then, that there are two action sequences in the story, the announcement and the trap, one within the other. But there is more to it than this. The announcement sequence represents the action of Yahweh. He is deciding and controlling events. On the other hand, the story about the trick is action on the human level, with Joshua doing the planning and the army, along with the ambush, accomplishing the victory. Nevertheless, the two modes of action are intertwined beyond the fact that one is placed within the other. Yahweh not only gives the instruction for the ambush, but He also intervenes at one point in the story to instruct Joshua (v. 18) to stretch out his weapon. From what follows, it appears that this is a signal to the ambush, but it may also, or alternatively, have something to do with affecting the tide of battle. This instruction to Joshua comes as a surprise in that there is no mention of this earlier in the story when Yahweh gives His initial order about the ambush.

The intertwining of these two sequences does not remove a basic tension which is created by placing the two together. The juxtaposition of divine and human points of view is curious here because of the fact that a trick was needed to gain a victory. Usually a trick or deception is needed only when the enemy is fairly strong and has some chance of winning in a straight fight. Thus, at one level the story proceeds as if Israel is faced with a powerful enemy that can only be overcome if caught in a trap. On the other hand, the announcement at the beginning of the story makes clear that Yahweh has everything under control. The only indication of this in the story is the unexplained instruction to Joshua to raise his weapon. These two different perspectives may reflect stages in the growth of the story, but they remain side by side in the present form of the story without pulling it apart. They produce a kind of shimmering effect, moving the reader back and forth between two perspectives.

Commentators have noted tensions in the story which may reflect different stages in the growth of the text. For example, the reference to an

ambush of one size in v. 3 and one of another size in v. 12 remain confusing. Still, since the main lines of the narrative action are fairly clear, smaller tensions like the one just mentioned only create a kind of blurring of the sort discussed above.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this study of four stories from the conquest narrative of Joshua 1–11, an attempt has been made to make the question of story, and especially the question of narrative action, the starting point for analysis. A more complete study of narrative would have to examine other issues, like character and point of view, more fully than was done here where only a beginning was made, not to mention various other features explored by various kinds of literary, discourse, and structuralist analysis.

From the point of view of narrative action, the four stories as they now stand each have a reasonably clear structure. At the level of action sequences, they seem to be fairly coherent narrative texts. Instances of unevenness, tensions, and gaps still remain and appear as blurring at various points in the text, so that some details of a story may remain fuzzy. Yet this indeterminacy is a feature or property of these texts and a signal that different perspectives have come together and are clashing in the same text.

It was also seen that these four stories are bound together to some extent by action sequences which begin in one story and finish in another. The rescue of Rahab promised in the story of the spies is effected in Joshua 6. The prohibition regarding banned material pronounced in the Jericho story is transgressed at the beginning of Joshua 7. There is no such link between Joshua 7 and 8, although the first attempt to capture Ai is found in chapter 7.

It was noted in Joshua 8 that there appeared to be a juxtaposition of two different perspectives, one focusing on divine action and the other on human action. This was described as a shimmering effect rather than a blurring effect because the tension seemed to have a positive rather than a negative effect. The clash of different perspectives appeared to enrich the story by presenting more than one way of looking at the action.

Apart from individual stories, it was also possible to see a similar shimmering effect working among the four stories in terms of the way that divine action and human action are set side by side. On the one hand, the action in the stories about the fall of Jericho and the sin of Achan involves a ritual-like activity implying order, control and inevitability. This is especially true of the Jericho story, where the fall of the

city is announced at the start and the capture proceeds in an orderly fashion. In the Achan story, there is some sense of disorder in the abortive attempt on Ai and the sin of Achan itself, but the uncovering of the crime and its remedy moves smoothly to its conclusion. On the other hand, in Joshua 2 Joshua sends the spies without consulting Yahweh. The spies work things out completely on their own, even to the point of promising safety for Rahab and her family.

Thus two views are introduced of how things happen: through direct divine intervention and control or through human initiative and action. The intermingling of these two may be the result of different traditions; yet the effect is richness, in that the text reflects more than one perspective. This observation touches on the question of point of view in a text, an issue central to the work of Polzin. His main interest was the interplay of various perspectives in a text, although he did it differently from the analysis carried out above.

Trying to take account of both coherence and tension in a text leads back to a matter mentioned at the start, namely composite texts. One may focus quite legitimately on the tensions in a text as clues to the history of the development of a text, but this postpones the discussion of coherence to a much later stage in the investigation. One may also make coherence the primary focus, since tensions do not necessarily prevent narrative texts from being read as stories. Still, this very fact may lead to an ignoring or overlooking of tensions which are clearly present in a text. The work of Robert Alter is notable because he has sought to come to terms with both coherence and tension in texts with his notion of composite artistry (1981, pp. 131–154). Thus the whole matter of the nature of composite texts and the appropriate critical response requires further serious examination.

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