

CHAPTER 1

From Abraham to Joshua (Approximately: Eighteenth Century to Thirteenth Century B.C.E.)

Theories abound concerning the origins of the Hebrews as a people. The generally accepted view described in Genesis places the beginnings of Abraham and his family in southeastern Mesopotamia. Other locations given for the origin of the Hebrews include northeastern Arabia and the Arabian Desert. It is known that the names which are to be found in the Patriarchal narrative (Genesis) are similar to those found in the second millennium in both Palestine and Mesopotamia. The Ebla texts, going back to 2500 B.C.E., also contain names similar to those mentioned in the Patriarchal accounts. John Bright believes that northern Syria and upper Mesopotamia contained a population that might have been the ancestors of the Israelites in the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2000-1500 B.C.E.).¹ To add complexity to the question, W.F. Albright pushes the issue farther back in history by stating that the Hebrews are thought to have been part of the Western Semitic, "Amorite" migration along the Fertile Crescent in the Early Bronze Age (c. 3500-2200).² Norman Cantor believes that the Hebrews were originally a subgroup within the older Canaanite society already on the land (c. 2900 – 2500 B.C.E.) and then separated themselves into a distinct religious and tribal confederation.³ Melvin Konner holds that the Hebrews were "indigenous, aboriginal, intrinsic to the region west of the Jordan river," and that their emergence was not a replacement of Canaanite culture, but rather the development of "a new, Israelite culture in towns in the central highlands."⁴ Many archaeologists take this position,⁵ and this view is shared by anthropologists who have found no interruption in the evolution of Canaanite artifacts during the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2000-1500 B.C.E.)

The Patriarchs

¹ John Bright, *A History of Israel*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), fourth edition, pp. 70-78.

² W.F. Albright, *Bulletin of American Schools of Archaeological Research*, Vol. 163 (1961): 36-54, cited in Amichai Mazor, *Archaeology of the Lands of the Bible: 10,000-586 B.C.E.* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 1992 Edition, p. 169.

³ Cantor, p. 68. It is obvious that archaeologists agree with one another about as much as historians do!

⁴ Konner, p. 15.

⁵ Ibid.

It is impossible to examine the origins of the Jewish people without discussing the story of Abraham, the first Hebrew Patriarch. The Abraham narrative has little to do with the history of Hebrew military campaigns in early antiquity given the fact that Abraham's only military campaign was a minor one. But the story of Abraham remains important because it establishes the legendary migration of the Hebrews into Canaan. More importantly, it provides the first description of Canaan itself and of the inhabitants of that land.⁶ The life of Abraham is covered in fourteen chapters of Genesis, from 11:27 to 25:11. At an advanced age, Terah, the father of Abraham, gathered his family including Abraham, Abraham's wife Sarah, and his grandson Lot, whose father Haran had already died, and set out for the land of Canaan from Ur in Chaldea.⁷ The Tanakh does not make clear whether the inspiration for this journey came from Abraham, Terah, or the Almighty.

The family settled for a time in the town of Harran in northwestern Mesopotamia (southeastern Turkey today).⁸ Terah died there at the age of 205.⁹ The Bible does not state clearly whether God made his first prophecy to Abraham about his posterity while the latter was at Harran, or later. The prophecy simply appears at the beginning of Chapter 12 of Genesis, with God saying, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation..." (Genesis 12: 1-2). At the age of 75, Abraham together with his company resumed the journey, in time entering the land of Canaan.

A brief digression describing Canaan's difficult geographic position in relation to the larger political world is necessary here. It was the destiny of the Holy Land to be situated between two cradles of

⁶ Many archaeologists accept the view that the Hebrews and the Canaanites may have been of the same stock, and that there never was a Hebrew migration. This view was expressed by Sandra Scham in a conversation with me.

⁷ The original names of the first patriarch and his wife were Abram and Sarai. God later changed their names to the more familiar Abraham and Sarah, for reasons mentioned in the Tanakh but which are not relevant here. The better known forms are used throughout this work.

⁸ The presence of Abraham and his family in Harran leads some archeologists to believe that the Hebrews originated in Northern Mesopotamia.

⁹ Dates and quantitative numbers in the Bible need not be taken at face value. Modern thinking tends to reject as highly improbable the lifespans that the Bible accords to our ancestors (see, e.g., Methuselah, who the Bible records as having lived 969 years). This view is not, however, universal – Orthodox Jews and fundamentalist Christians do accept at face value these lifespans as proof of God's omnipotence.

civilization, those of Mesopotamia and Egypt.¹⁰ Canaan lay in the southwest corner of the Fertile Crescent, or Levant, which was the crossroads between these two empires. Invasions by other empires such as that of the Hittites in the Syrian north, further complicated this reality. Following a practice in existence since the origin of states large and small, each one of these empires sought to extend its domain as far as possible into the Fertile Crescent, both for purposes of self-defense and expansion of empire. David Biale notes that small states could only achieve independence in periods during which larger empires were in decline. In addition, they might improve their positions by shifting allegiance from one empire to another.¹¹ The Fertile Crescent therefore was a perpetual battleground. The land that God promised the Hebrews was thus set in a most precarious place.

As they migrated westward, Abraham and his family and followers may have carried with them much of the culture of Mesopotamia. The view that the Bible embodies a unique relationship between God and the Hebrew people may be approached with a mild skepticism when one considers the major themes which are also found in the earlier Mesopotamian and Egyptian sources. Of the many peoples that wandered into Mesopotamia centuries before Abraham, the most important was that of the Sumerians. They entered in approximately 3,500 B.C.E. The civilization which they created, a fusion of several other cultures preceding their arrival, was the first true civilization on earth. It was also the beginning of Western Civilization.

Sumer was primarily an urban society. The population of cities ranged from 10,000 to 50,000 persons, with commerce and the professions the major activities. The Sumerians were polytheistic, worshipping four major deities: the Heaven God, the Air God, the Water God, and the Mother Goddess. They also worshipped many lesser deities.

Elements of Sumerian culture are pervasive throughout the Bible. For example, a great many words in Biblical Hebrew are thought to have been derived from the Sumerian language. Examples include the Sumerian word "*gan*," meaning "garden," corresponding to an identical word in Hebrew; the

¹⁰ Raviv Hanoach , "The Canaanite and Israelite Period," in Michael Avi Yonah, *A History of Israel and the Holy Land* (Jerusalem: G.G. The Jerusalem Publishing House, 1969, 2003 printing) p. 36.

¹¹ Biale, p. 12.

Sumerian "edin," corresponding to the Hebrew name "Eden,"; the Sumerian word for "chair," "guza," which corresponds to the Hebrew word "kisse"; the Sumerian word "malah" for "sailor," whose Hebrew cognate is almost identical; and the Sumerian word "dal" for "mound," corresponding to the Hebrew "tel."¹² A number of motifs in the *Tanakh* likewise have Sumerian roots. As E.J. Kramer points out, these motifs include

...the existence of a primeval sea; the separation of heaven and earth; the creation of man from clay imbued with the breath of life; the creative power of the divine word; several paradise motifs; the Flood story;^[13] the Cain – Abel rivalry; the Tower of Babel and the confusion of tongues; the notion of a personal, family god; divine retribution and national catastrophe; plagues and divine punishment; the 'Job' motifs of suffering and submission; the nature of death and the netherworld; dreams as foretokens of the building of temples...¹⁴ There is more borrowing. Such books as Psalms, Proverbs, Lamentations, and the Song of Songs contain echoes of corresponding Sumerian literary genres.¹⁵

A number of Biblical laws have Mesopotamian origins. Hammurabi, the great lawgiver of Old Babylonia (1792-1750 B.C.E.) lived just before Abraham and a portion of the law code he issued is closely followed in Exodus. The following excerpts are comparable:

Book of the Covenant	Code of Hammurabi¹⁶
And if men strive together, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart, and yet no harm follow, he shall be surely fined, according as the woman's husband shall lay upon him (Exodus 21:22).	If a man strike a man's daughter and bring about a miscarriage, he shall pay 10 shekels of viles. If that woman die, they shall put his daughter to death. If he strike the female slave of a man and bring about a miscarriage, he

¹² E.J. Kramer, "Sumer; Sumerians," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972) Vol. 15, col. 515.

¹³ This is a reference to the Gilgamesh epic. There was an actual Mesopotamian king by that name who reigned in the twenty-eighth or twenty-seventh century B.C.E. While the epic mentions the Flood, its central theme is Gilgamesh's search for personal immortality. In this search, Gilgamesh meets Utnapishtu, the one human whom the gods have granted immortality. The latter relates the story of the Great Flood, including the building of a great ship on which he loaded representatives of every species as well as craftsmen of every skill. Through further adventures Gilgamesh is finally given a thorn bush which carries the gift of eternal youth. A serpent carries away the bush while Gilgamesh is bathing in a pond. Thus, in the Gilgamesh epic, a serpent steals immortality from one man. In the Bible, a serpent brings mortality to all humanity. Stephen Mitchell, *Gilgamesh: A New English Version*, (New York: Free Press, 2004).

¹⁴ Kramer.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Percy Hancock, *The Code of Hammurabi* (London, 1920).

	shall pay 2 shekels of silver. If that female slave die, he shall pay 1/3 mana of silver.
But if any harm follow, then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. And if a man smite the eye of his bondman, or the eye of his bondwoman, and destroy it, he shall let him go free for his eye's sake. [The same is applied to "a tooth," in Exodus 21:23-37.]	If a man destroy the eye of a man [gentleman], they shall destroy his eye. If one destroy the eye of a man's slave, or break a bone of a man's slave, he shall pay one-half his price. If a man knock out a tooth of a man of his own rank, they shall knock out his tooth. If one knock out the tooth of a freeman, he shall pay 1/3 mana of silver.

Abraham and his family and followers apparently settled peacefully among the native Canaanites, as the Bible does not mention any conflict between these two groups. Canaan at the time of Abraham's entry seems to have been primarily a land of pastoral peoples. This pastoral period occurred between two eras of urbanization. Further evidence that Abraham's entry into this Promised Land was peaceful lies in the fact that when Sarah died, Abraham was able to purchase land for her burial from a Hittite.

The Lord was unclear regarding the precise limits of the territory promised to Abraham and his descendants. In one place (Genesis 12:7) it is the land of Canaan only. In another (Genesis 15: 18) it is all the land from the "River of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates." In Genesis 17:8 the territory in question is again reduced to the land of Canaan itself. In Joshua 1:4, the Promised Land is to "...extend from the wilderness and the Lebanon to the Great River, the River Euphrates [on the east] – the whole Hittite country – and up to the Mediterranean Sea on the west." But let us, for the moment, confine ourselves to Canaan. The Bible lists ten peoples already residing there, i.e. the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmenites, the Raphaims, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, the Jebusites, the Hittites and the Perizzites (Genesis 15:21). Were these peoples to be absorbed by the Hebrew intruders? Exterminated? Driven out? Enslaved? Ignored? Were the Hebrews to be assimilated into these peoples? Not a word is said.

A famine occurred while Abraham was living in Canaan, and the family, including Abraham's nephew Lot, thereupon migrated to Egypt. A curious event is related about Abraham and Sarah while they were there. As they entered the land, the husband asked his beautiful wife to pose as his sister, for as her husband he might otherwise be killed so that Pharaoh could add her to his harem. (An unmarried

sister had greater legal standing than a married woman.) Abraham remained alive, Sarah entered Pharaoh's harem, but shortly thereafter, Pharaoh began to suffer all kinds of misfortunes. In some way, he learned of Sarah's true identity. He reproached Abraham for this subterfuge and then sent the couple and Lot out of Egypt loaded down with extensive flocks and precious possessions.¹⁷ When the family left Egypt to return to its previous settlement in Canaan, (Genesis 13:3) Abraham had become "...very rich in cattle, silver, and gold" (Genesis 13:2).

Abraham's first and only military campaign involved the rescue of Lot. The two had separated some time earlier because the land they occupied could not accommodate the wealth in livestock that each had brought back from Egypt. After separating from Abraham, Lot and all his wealth were captured in a battle among rival local kings. Hearing of his nephew's plight, Abraham took 318 of his retainers, pursued Lot's captors, and in a nighttime battle was able to rescue Lot and all his flocks and herds. The Tanakh does not provide any further details about the composition of Abraham's company of retainers. Was this force part of an army? Or was it a hastily gathered assembly against marauders? Nothing further is known.

After Abraham, there follow the familiar stories of the other Patriarchs and their descendants without any military incidents. In the story of Jacob, however, there is one battle regarding his only daughter Dinah. After a male inhabitant of Shechem had raped her, the father of the young man proposed a marriage between Dinah and her assailant, as well as the establishment of commercial relations between the Israelites and the Shechemites. The Israelites agreed, on condition that all male Shechemites be circumcised. Jacob's sons, led by Simeon and Levi treacherously attacked the Shechemites and killed many of them during their post-operative convalescence.

¹⁷ Josephus, in his *magnum opus*, *The Jewish Antiquities*, embellishes this story, adding luster to the first Patriarchal family. When Abraham heard about the "Egyptians' frenzy for women..." he asked Sarah to pose as his sister. Pharaoh thereupon sought to lay hands on her. But "God thwarted his criminal passion by an outbreak of disease and political disturbance." The Priest told Pharaoh of the cause of these woes and Pharaoh became very apologetic, telling Abraham that it had been his intention to marry the lady. Abraham stayed on and taught the Egyptians arithmetic, the rules of logic, and astronomy. He had received this knowledge from the Chaldeans. He transmitted it to the Egyptians, who thereupon conveyed it to the Greeks. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, I, par. 161-168, in H. St. J. Thackeray (tr.), *Josephus: Jewish Antiquities*, Books I-III, (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, 2001, reprint). Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities*, which paraphrases the *Tanakh*, was written in an age dominated by Greek culture, and the irony of the above was not lost on his audience.

The military tradition of the ancient Hebrews began with their exodus from Egypt. They were in Egypt because Joseph had invited his father Jacob and his brothers to settle there. In Egypt, according to the *Tanakh*, they became slaves and were liberated by the lawgiver, Moses. As noted earlier, no evidence exists outside the Bible for the Exodus from Egypt or even for any stay by the Hebrews in the land of the Pharaohs. And yet, when one examines the maxims in Egypt's "Book of the Dead," one finds what seem to be startling antecedents in substance and sequence to the Decalogue given to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Decalogue

Thou shalt not murder.
 Thou shalt not steal.
 Thou shalt not commit adultery.
 Thou shalt not bear false witness
 against thy neighbor.
 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife.

Book of the Dead

I have done no murder.
 I have not committed theft.
 I have not defiled the wife of a man.
 I have not uttered falsehood.
 I have not polluted myself (in the
 holy places of the god of my city)
 ...
 I have not given order for murder
 to be done for me.¹⁸

The *Tanakh* was a literary document formulated within a regional and historical context. Just as the ancestors of the Hebrews, living in Mesopotamia, borrowed from the Sumerians in writing the *Tanakh*, the Hebrews living in Egypt may well have borrowed from the Egyptians in creating this sacred text.

It is more difficult to claim that the Hebrews learned the practice of circumcision from the ancient Egyptians, even though the earliest historical reference to the practice is to be found in an Egyptian bas-relief dating back to 2,500 B.C.E. Other Semitic groups, as well as the Hebrews, engaged in this practice, offering a very significant part of themselves to the gods, and it is to be found among other cultures stretching around the world from Africa to Australia.¹⁹

As has been seen, the two great centers of civilization, the Mesopotamian and the Egyptian, left an imprint on the Hebrews. Several explanations for this influence may be offered. First, the Hebrews may

¹⁸ Sir Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Dead*, (London, 1949), cited in Dubnow, Vol. 1.

¹⁹ Lawrence S. Draitsas, review of David L. Gallaher, *Circumcision: A History of the World's Most Controversial Surgery* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), in *Science, Technology and Human Values*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Spring, 2001): 248-253.

have lived for a time in Mesopotamia and Egypt and thus absorbed much from their cultures. Second, the cultural grandeur of each civilization penetrated the Fertile Crescent, touching all the peoples who lived there. A third possibility, applying to Egypt alone, was its long - standing control of the western portion of the Fertile Crescent. I am inclined to believe that it was the actual residence of the Hebrews in Mesopotamia and Egypt that enabled them to absorb their cultures.

The Wandering

Although we can perhaps establish these kinds of links or influences between the Egyptians and the Hebrews, it is more difficult to ascertain the existence of a leader named Moses as a documentable historical figure for this period. Jonathan Kirsch believes that the question of Moses' existence is likely to remain an enigma.

...One day, perhaps, an archaeologist will retrieve some fragment of parchment of some shard of pottery bearing the name of Moses. But even then, we will not know with certainty whether the three Hebrew characters that make up the name Mosheh belonged to a purely mythical character in the legend and lore of ancient Israel or a flesh-and-blood human being who actually did the things that are described so memorably in the pages of the Bible.²⁰

If the Exodus never really occurred, as Norman Cantor and Sigmund Freud maintained, is there any justification for its continued inclusion in the Jewish heritage? In a discussion with me, my older son, psychologist Seth Rigberg, suggested a poetic justification. What has been attached to the Exodus, he said, is the great ideal of human liberty and freedom. Because the founders of the Jewish faith made such a connection, Passover is, if not the most important, certainly one of the most joyous of the Jewish festivals because it celebrates an emancipation from slavery and the beginning of Hebrew nationhood. The first Hebrew celebration of joy is found in Moses' and the Israelites' "Song of Freedom" after the drowning of Pharaoh's army (Exodus 15: 1-18).

I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously;
Horse and driver He has hurled into the sea....
Pharaoh's chariots and his army

²⁰ Jonathan Kirsch, *Moses: A Life*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), pp 354-355.

He has cast into the sea;
And the pick of his officers
Are drowned in the Sea of Reeds.
The deeps covered them;
They went down into the depths like a stone...
The peoples hear, they tremble;
Agony grips the dwellers in Philistia.
Now the clans of Edom dismayed;
The tribes of Moab – trembling grips them;
All the dwellers in Canaan are aghast.
Terror and dread descent upon them;
Through the might of Your arm they are still as stone –
Till your people cross over, O Lord (Exodus 15: 1, 4-5, and 14-16)²¹

The Israelites are said to have wandered in the wilderness for forty years.²² When the wanderers reached the frontiers of the Promised land, God ordered Moses to muster a reconnaissance of the land, the first military maneuver since their escape from Egypt. The mission was to select a chieftain from each of the Israelite tribes (Numbers 13:1-3). Among them were Joshua, son of Nun (Numbers 13:8) and Caleb, son of Jephunnah (Numbers 13:6).

When Moses sent them to scout the Land of Canaan, he said to them 'Go up there into the Negeb and on into the hill country, and see what kind of country it is. Are the people who dwell in it strong or weak, few or many? Is the country in which they dwell good or bad? Are the towns they live in open or fortified? Is the soil rich or poor? Is it wooded or not? And take pains to bring back some of the fruit of the land.' (Numbers 13: 17-20).

At the end of their mission, which lasted forty days, they made this military report to Moses, Aaron, and the rest of the assembled Israelites:

We came to the land you sent us to; it does indeed flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who inhabit the country are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large; moreover, we saw the Anakites there. Amalekites dwell in the Negeb region; Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites inhabit the hill country; and Canaanites dwell by the Sea and along the Jordan. (Numbers 13: 27-29).

²¹ It became customary in future generations for the Hebrews to refer to all their enemies as "Moab," and ultimately, "Edom."

²² The number forty is used a great deal, not only in the Hebrew Bible but also in the Christian Bible. It seems to mean "a great many" or "more than a few," rather than any specific number.

Despite Caleb's advice urging the Israelites to conquer the land at once, the other members of the reconnaissance party opposed an attack, saying:

...All the people we saw in it [Canaan] are men of great size. We saw the Nephilim there - and the Anakites are part of the Nephilim⁻²³ and we looked like grasshoppers to ourselves, and so we must have looked to them. (Numbers (13:32-33))

Upon hearing the news of the overwhelming might of the inhabitants, the assembled Israelites bitterly lamented why God had brought them out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? They would rather return to Egypt. The Lord had completely overestimated their ability to fight.

When Moses relayed these views to the Lord, He reacted angrily. "How long will this people spurn Me, and how long will they have no faith in me [?]"(Numbers 14:11). He threatened to "...strike them with pestilence..." (Numbers 14: 12), and to build a new nation from the stock of Moses (Numbers 14:12). Moses replied that if the Lord wiped out the Israelites, the Egyptians and other nations would conclude that "...the Lord was powerless to bring that people into the land" (Numbers 14: 13). God accepted this argument, but then excluded all males over twenty years of age, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, from ever reaching the land He had promised to them. (Numbers 14: 20-33). He said nothing about Moses' fate.

Prior to their entry into the Promised Land, the Israelites fought wars with many peoples who were later destined to be their neighbors. Some of these conflicts were brief and desultory, while others were intense and prolonged. The Amalekite tribe was foremost among those peoples with whom the Israelites fought. Amalek, its founder, was the grandson of Esau, according to the Bible. Throughout their known existence, the Amalekites were nomads whose range extended from northeastern Arabia to Suez. As the Israelites moved forward toward Canaan, the Amalekites attacked stragglers. They proved to be the perennial enemy of Israel, and the Israelites were still fighting battles against them several centuries later at the time of Saul and David (I Samuel 8 and 27:8-9). In subsequent generations, the Amalekites were to serve as mercenaries in the armies of the Moabites and Ammonites in their wars against the Israelites. At

²³ Genesis 6:4 refers to the Nephilim as a people who appeared on earth "...when the divine beings cohabited with the daughters of men, who bore them offspring.

the beginning of the eleventh century B.C.E., when the Midianites swept into the area, riding their camels and raiding and pillaging, Amalekites were part of their horde as well. Scientists say that the camel was not domesticated as a herd animal until the latter part of the second millennium B.C.E, circa 1100, and while this date puts parts of some Bible narratives into doubt, this story could pass muster.²⁴

When the Israelites approached Edom, a kingdom which lay to the south and east of Canaan, they asked the king's permission to pass through. He refused them passage. In this case the Israelites refrained from battle and moved elsewhere. As a portent of what lay ahead in Canaan, the Israelites fought the people of Bashan, defeated their army, and exterminated them, taking possession of all the land. A short time earlier, the same dire fate had befallen the Amorites. After the defeat of the Bashan people, the famous incident occurs of the Moabite priest Balaam's being ordered by his king to curse the Israelites. God prevented this and compelled Balaam to bless them with the now much used passage, "How fair are your tents, O Jacob, your dwellings, O Israel" (Numbers 24:5).

An intriguing aspect of the many wars that the Israelites fought on their way to Canaan is that the opponents described as exterminated in earlier Biblical passages reappear in later ones. This is true of the Midianites. God ordered Moses and Joshua to destroy them because they had led the Israelites into pagan worship. Nonetheless the Midianites appeared a century later as the enemy of Judge Gideon.

These battles which the Israelites fought on their way to the Promised Land molded them into a military force which was now prepared for a successful invasion of the inhabited land of Canaan. But the Israelites, according to the *Tanakh*, had much more than their own strength to assure victory. The Lord repeatedly promised that they would triumph. When they faltered, He goaded them on. The God Who has appeared here is indeed a God of war and not the God of peace in Whose name the prophets spoke later. In a typical passage, God said to Moses that if the Hebrews faithfully obeyed His laws, then, "...I will send forth My terror before you, and I will throw into panic all the people among whom you come, and I will make all your enemies turn tail before you" (Exodus 23:27). And further, "... I will send a

²⁴ "The essential historicity of the account preserved in Genesis is becoming increasingly acknowledged by recent scholarship. *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 1, p. 101.

plague ahead of you, and it shall drive out before you the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites" (Exodus 23:28). In another passage, God declared, "...I will drive them out before you little by little, until you have increased and possess the land" (Exodus 23:30). The Lord once more made reference to a large, although vaguely delineated Promised Land (Exodus 23:31). He also seemed to indicate, from these words, that the conflict would be long-lasting. He demanded that the Israelites drive out the indigenous inhabitants "...lest they cause you to sin against Me," by worshipping local deities (Exodus 23:33). How the Israelites fulfilled God's command to conquer Canaan is related in the following three chapters.