

The Sin at Kadesh as a Recurring Motif in the Book of Joshua

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The story of the spies in Numbers 13–14 occupies a central position in the historical account of the exodus from Egypt and the wandering of the people of Israel in the wilderness, as recorded in the Pentateuch. According to this account, the sin of the spies led to the change in plan to enter the land immediately after the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai; instead, that generation was ordained to die in the desert and their descendants, who had not taken part in the sin, were to settle in the Promised Land (Num. 14:22–23, 29–35).¹ Moses, too, was denied entry (according to Deut. 1:37 because of the people's sin at Kadesh, or because of his sin at the waters of Meriba according to Num. 20:7–13), and Joshua took his place as the leader of the people (Deut. 1:38; Num. 27:18–23). Joshua, one of the twelve spies sent by Moses, attempted, together with Caleb, to persuade the nation that God would lead His people to a victorious conquest of the land He had promised (Num. 13:30–31; 14:6–10; Deut. 1:36, 38). Even though their attempt to influence their brethren was unsuccessful, it exempted them from the collective punishment meted out, which denied them entry into the land and doomed them to perish in the wilderness (Num. 14:30, 38; Deut. 1:35).

Since it was a turning point in the history of the Israelites, it is interesting to examine the role of the Kadesh story in the Book of Joshua, which describes the entrance of the people into the land. Since Joshua plays a central role in this account, it seems reasonable to look for its trace in the book in which Joshua is the main protagonist.

The story of the spies at Kadesh is mentioned explicitly only once, when Caleb requests Hebron as his portion in the land as a reward for his loyalty to God (Josh. 14:6–14). In the circumcision account there is a reference to the sin at Kadesh (5:2–8). It is also alluded to in four other occurrences: the Jericho spy narrative (ch. 2); the account of the cessation of the manna (5:11–12); Achan's sin (ch. 7); and the account of the allotment of the land (18:1–10). In this paper I attempt to explore the function of the Kadesh sin narrative in the Book of Joshua, a topic that, to the best of my knowledge, has not yet received any comprehensive attention in the scholarship on the book.

Two biblical sources deal with the story of the sin at Kadesh, one in Numbers 13–14, which according to most scholars is composed of two separate sources, namely

1. For a discussion on this matter see D. T. Olson, *The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New: The Framework of the Book of Numbers and the Pentateuch*, BJS 71 (Chico, 1985), 144–52.

J and P; the second reference is found in Deut. 1:22–46.² Since the references to the story of the spies of Moses are general, brief, or implicit, it is impossible to uncover the actual sources that are referred to in the various texts in Joshua. The nature of this investigation is to determine the ways in which the story of the sin at Kadesh, in any of its forms, known or unknown, are used in Joshua.

The Jericho Spy Narrative (Joshua 2)

The story of the spies in Jericho is the first case in the Book of Joshua, which alludes to the story of the sin at Kadesh.³ Joshua 2 begins with an association to the spy narrative of Moses: “Then Joshua son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies” (Josh. 2:1), and “Send men to spy out the land of Canaan” (Num. 13:2). This analogy is supported by the recurrent idea of continuation between Joshua and Moses in the previous chapter (Josh. 1:5, 17), and is further emphasized by the notion that Joshua was one of Moses’ spies.⁴

The purpose of this analogy is to highlight the contrast between the two spy narratives. In the first, ten of Moses’ spies disparage the Promised Land, concerned that they would not be able to overpower the inhabitants of Canaan: “We are not able to go up against this people, for they are stronger than we” (Num. 13:31). In the later narrative, Joshua’s spies claim the opposite: “Truly the LORD has given all the land into our hands; moreover all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before us” (Josh. 2:24). Indeed, Joshua’s spies resemble Caleb and Joshua in their efforts to convince the people that the Land is good and that they could conquer it with the assistance of God: cf. “Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it” (Num. 13:30), and “If the LORD is pleased with us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey” (Num. 14:8).

According to the fifteenth-century Bible commentator, Isaac Abarbanel, Joshua had learned a lesson from the experience at Kadesh. Moses elected twelve politicians,

2. For a source analysis of Num. 13–14 see: Gray, *Numbers*, ICC (Edinburgh, 1903), 128–34; G. W. Coats, *The Rebellion of Israel in the Wilderness* (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1966), 213–38; J. Milgrom, “Korah’s Rebellion: A Study in Redaction,” in M. Carrez et al., eds., *De la Tôrah au Messie: Mélanges Henri Cazelles* (Paris, 1981), 144–45. For the differences between the story in Deuteronomy and that of Numbers, see M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, AB (New York, 1991), 144–45.

3. For a detailed discussion on the meaning of the spy narrative in Joshua, see E. Assis, *A Literary Analysis of the Conquest Narrative in the Book of Joshua (Chs. 1–11) and its Meaning* (Ph.D. diss., Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan, 1999), 107–15. (A revised edition was published as *From Moses to Joshua: From the Miraculous to the Ordinary: A Literary Analysis of the Conquest Narrative in the Book of Joshua* [Chaps. 1–12] [Jerusalem, 2005; in Hebrew]. The analogy between the two spy stories must have been evident to the rabbis who instructed that Joshua 2 be read as the prophetic reading accompanying the spy story of the weekly Pentateuch reading in the synagogue.

4. From this analogy Eslinger reached an opposite conclusion; see L. Eslinger, *Into the Hands of the Living God*, BLS 24 (Sheffield, 1989), 36. In his opinion there is a tension between the positive reaction of Joshua in the spy story in Numbers 13–14, and the fact that he sent spies to Jericho even though God did not instruct him to do so in ch. 1. Others, too, view Joshua negatively in the spy story in Joshua 2; see e.g. Y. Zakovitch, “Humor and Theology or the Successful Failure of Israelite Intelligence: A Literary–Folkloric Approach to Joshua 2,” in S. Niditch, ed., *Text and Tradition: The Hebrew Bible and Folklore* (Atlanta, 1990), 75–98.

leaders of the tribes, as spies, whereas Joshua sent only two, apparently professional, spies. Moses made a political miscalculation by giving a large group of high-ranking influential men the task of exploring the land; Joshua sent only two. It is noteworthy that in the spy narrative of Ai the number of spies is not specified. Moses' spy mission included general matters, while Joshua restricted the purpose of the mission. Last, but not least, Moses sent the spies overtly, whereas Joshua's mission was covert.⁵

The most important difference between the two spy narratives, however, concerns their consequences. Joshua's two spies returned with a positive message, parallel to the message of confidence and faith in God conveyed by Moses' spies, Joshua and Caleb. Note that fear of the Canaanites among the ten other spies⁶ generates loss of motivation among the Israelites: "Where are we headed? Our kindred have made *our hearts melt* by reporting, 'The people are stronger and taller than we; the cities are large and fortified up to *heaven!* We actually saw there the offspring of the Anakim!'" (Deut. 1:28). In the Joshua spy narrative, in contrast, fear of the Canaanites serves as encouragement: "As soon as we heard it, *our hearts melted*, and there was no courage left in any of us because of you. The LORD your God is indeed God in *heaven* above and on earth below" (Josh. 2:11).

This parallel suggests a rationale for the positioning of the spy narrative at the beginning of the Book of Joshua. The Kadesh sin narrative began a waiting period in which the divine promises were delayed. The Joshua spy narrative is an antithesis, which heralds the successful process of entering the land and conquering their inheritance.⁷ In a similar analogy, Rahab's words, which recall the magnificent crossing of the Reed Sea, anticipate the miraculous crossing of the Jordan (compare Josh. 2:10–11 with Josh. 5:1).⁸

The purpose of the analogy is, thus, to present Joshua's generation as one worthy of entering the Promised Land, in contrast to the previous generation, to which entrance was denied because of its sin. The story of the Kadesh sin generates a forty-year delay, while the Joshua spy narrative begins the successful process of the inheritance of the land.

The Account of the Circumcision (Josh. 5:2–8)

The Kadesh sin serves as the grounds for the circumcision in Josh. 5:2–8. In this case the Kadesh sin narrative is explicit. Circumcision symbolizes one's association with the Israelite people (e.g., Judg. 14:3),⁹ and expresses the covenant with

5. See Don Isaac Abrabanel at the beginning of his commentary on Joshua 2.

6. According to Nelson two spies were sent because they act as witnesses, and this fact is important for the theological conclusion they make at the end of the narrative; R. D. Nelson, *Joshua: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville, 1997), 48.

7. P. Benjamin, *The Theology of Land in the Book of Joshua* (Ph.D. diss., Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1986), 90; G. Hauch, *Text and Context: A Literary Reading of the Conquest Narrative (Joshua 1–11)* (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1991), 97, 108, 285–304.

8. R. Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History* (New York, 1980), 109. Nelson, *Joshua*, 45.

9. R. G. Hall, "Circumcision," *ABD*, 1.1026.

God (Gen. 17:1–14).¹⁰ In God's instructions to Abraham regarding circumcision, the inheritance of the land is dependent upon the practice of circumcision (Gen. 17:8–9). The inclusion of the circumcision account in the Book of Joshua prior to the conquest strengthens the covenant and characterizes Israel as being worthy of dwelling in the land.¹¹

This idea is presented by means of contrast between the first generation, which came out of Egypt and was prevented from entering the land, and the second, which was entitled to the land.¹² A double reference to the initial circumcision ceremony held just before the exodus intensifies the contrast between the generations: “*Once again make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites a second time*” (v. 2) **ושוב מל את בני ישראל שנית**. The narrator chose not to make do with a brief report of the execution of the command by Joshua (v. 3), but elaborated on the circumstances of this ceremony, noting that those who had been circumcised in Egypt had died in the desert and that the new generation born *en route* had not been circumcised (vv. 4–5). The description goes on to explain that this delay was a punishment for Israel's disobedience (“For the Israelites traveled forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, the warriors who came out of Egypt, perished . . . not having listened to the voice of the LORD,” v. 6). Although the reason for the delay is irrelevant to the episode of Joshua's ceremony of circumcision,¹³ the specification of the sin and punishment of the first generation at Kadesh creates a sharp contrast between the generation prevented from entering the land and the one deemed worthy of it.¹⁴ The fact that the first generation did not practice the rite of circumcision in the desert represents a violation of the covenant;¹⁵ the second generation's performance of the ceremony expresses

10. See, e.g., J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis, ICC* (Edinburgh, 1910), 296–98. Thus circumcision became a metaphor for completeness, as in the term “uncircumcised heart” (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Lev. 26:41; Jer. 4:4; 9:25–26), uncircumcised ear (Jer. 6:6), and uncircumcised lips (Exod. 6:12, 30). Many explanations have been given to the practice of circumcision in the ancient world; see E. Isaac, “Circumcision as Covenant Rite,” *Anthropos* 59 (1964), 444–56. For the connection to fertility, see M. V. Fox, “Sign of the Covenant: Circumcision in the Light of the Priestly ‘ot Etiologies,” *RB* 81 (1974), 557–96, esp. 591–95.

11. See e.g.: J. A. Soggin, *Joshua: A Commentary, OTL*; trans. R. A. Wilson (London, 1972), 70–71; and M. J. Miller and G. M. Tucker, *The Book of Joshua* (Cambridge, 1974), 45–46. Ottosson claims that the practice of circumcision and Passover after the crossing of the Jordan is meant to separate Israel from the Canaanite population; M. Ottosson, “Tradition and History, with Emphasis on the Composition of the Book of Joshua,” in K. Jeppesen and B. Otzen, eds., *The Productions of Time: Tradition History in Old Testament Scholarship* (Sheffield, 1984), 90.

12. For the presentation of the first generation as a sinful one, and the second as worthy of entering the Land, see Deut. 2:14ff. On this matter see N. Lohfink, “The Problem of Individual and Community in Deuteronomy 1:6–3:29,” in idem, *Theology of the Pentateuch: Themes of the Priestly Narrative and Deuteronomy*, trans. L. M. Maloney (Edinburgh, 1994), 229–30.

13. Indeed, according to many scholars vv. 5–6 are a late exegetical interpolation, in which v. 7 originally followed v. 4. On the development of these verses, see H. Holzinger, *Das Buch Josua, KHAT* (Tübingen, 1901), 11; M. Noth, *Das Buch Josua*, 2nd ed., *HAT* (Tübingen, 1953), 39. The Septuagint presents a different viewpoint from the MT. For a comprehensive discussion on this matter, see D. W. Gooding, “Traditions of Interpretation of the Circumcision at Gilgal,” *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies* 6 (1977), 1.149–64.

14. Nelson, *Joshua*, 76–77.

15. M. H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua* (Grand Rapids, 1981), 101.

the renewal of the covenant. The first generation failed, as is evident in the results of the reconnaissance mission, thus delaying the implementation of the covenant; by contrast, the second generation reinforces the covenant.¹⁶

This contrast—depicting the willingness of the second generation to enter the land in juxtaposition with the refusal of the first—may account for the cumbersome syntax of v. 6, which consists of a main clause and three subordinate clauses, all beginning with the word *אשר*:¹⁷

For the Israelites traveled forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, the warriors who came out of Egypt, perished,

[*אשר*] not having listened to the voice of the LORD.

[*אשר*] to them the LORD swore that he would not let them see the land

[*אשר*] that he had sworn to their ancestors to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey.

This syntactic structure forms a contrast between the two clauses opening with the words *אשר נשבע* [= *אשר* . . . swore]. Thus, God's promise to punish the sinful generation in the desert is contrasted with God's promise to give the land to the people of Israel.

Another grammatical complexity in the last part of v. 6 intensifies the tension between the two generations. Although the entire section refers to Israel in the third person, in the final part of v. 6 the people of Israel appear as the first-person narrator: *אשר נשבע ה' לאבותם לתת לנו ארץ זבת חלב ודבש* ("To them the LORD swore that he would not let them see the land that he had sworn to their ancestors **to give us**, a land flowing with milk and honey"). Some suggest that this divergence is a textual error.¹⁸ It may, however, be claimed that the use of the first person is intentional, presenting the verse as coming from the mouth of the second generation, thus exposing their inner desire to enter the Promised Land.¹⁹ If this is indeed intentional, perhaps the words of the people in Joshua 5 are meant to contrast with the words of Moses' spies, praising the Land while expressing reservations: "We came to the land to which you sent us; it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. Yet the people who live in the land are strong, and the towns are fortified and very large; and besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there" (Num. 13:27–28).

The renewal of the covenant emerges from the meaning of the phrase "disgrace of Egypt" in Josh. 5:9. Some believe that the disgrace was removed by the practice

16. It is possible that the ideology behind the possibility of exterminating Israel following the sin at Kadesh is that the sin is a violation of the covenant (Num. 14:11ff.); thus a new election of Israel will be made, and Moses will become a new Abraham. This was prevented after Moses claimed that this would desecrate God's name (Num. 14:15–16). See: A. H. McNeile, *The Book of Numbers*, CBSC (Cambridge, 1911), 74.

17. In English translations of this verse some of the syntactic anomalies are not maintained in order to deliver a coherent text (e.g., KJV and NRSV). Although this goal has its advantages, the setback is that in many cases extraordinary syntax, grammar, or vocabulary are an intentional tool of expression.

18. Weiss suggested that the resemblance between the combination *nun* + *waw* and a final *mem* caused scribal errors. Thus he proposes to read *לאבותם* instead of *לאבותנו*. See R. Weiss, "On Ligatures in the Hebrew Bible (נו = ם)," *JBL* 82 (1963), 188–94.

19. According to Nelson (*Joshua*, 77), the use of the first person at the end of v. 6 is meant to include the readers as recipients of God's promise and members of the new generation that God established in the Land.

of circumcision, but this interpretation is based on the erroneous assumption that the ancient Egyptians did not practice circumcision.²⁰ The most likely interpretation of this phrase refers to the subjugation of Israel to Egypt, believed to continue as long as Israel had not entered the Land of Israel.²¹ According to this interpretation, v. 9 is the continuation of v. 1, which describes Israel's entrance to the land.²² The conjunction of the disgrace of Egypt with the topic of circumcision stems from the notion that the wandering in the wilderness constitutes a continuation of Israel's disgrace, which originated in their slavery in Egypt. Thus, the elimination of the disgrace is dependent upon the rectification of the sin by the symbolic renewal of the covenant through circumcision.²³

The willingness of Israel to reestablish the covenant is reciprocated by God's confirmation of Israel as His people: "So it was their children, whom he raised up (הקים) in their place" (NRSV translation). The root קים in the *hiph'il* carries a connotation of establishing a covenant: "The LORD will establish you as his holy people" (Deut. 28:9; Gen. 17:7; see also: Lev. 26:9; Deut. 8:18; 2 Kgs. 23:20, etc.).²⁴

The celebration of Passover follows the ceremony of circumcision, probably because this festival is considered to be a covenant between Israel and God,²⁵ marking the end of the slavery of Israel in Egypt and designating the inception of the life of Israel in the land. It thus functions as a juncture between the period of wandering in the wilderness and the permanent settlement of Israel in the Promised Land.²⁶

20. For the practice of circumcision in ancient Egypt, see *ANET*, 326, and *ANEP*, 206, for a picture of the circumcision ceremony. For circumcision in Egypt see J. M. Sasson, "Circumcision in the Ancient Near East," *JBL* 85 (1966), 473–76.

21. R. Joseph Ibn Kaspi; Don Isaac Abrabanel; J. Bright, *The Book of Joshua*, IB 2 (Nashville, 1953), 575.

22. From this Zakovitch concluded that v. 9 originally followed v. 1, and only at a later stage were vv. 2–8 inserted. In his opinion the episode of circumcision was inserted at this location because circumcision is also considered חרפה; see Gen. 34:14. Y. Zakovitch, *Olam HaTanakh* (Tel-Aviv, 1994), 57 (Hebrew).

23. The importance of the circumcision is reflected in a tradition in the Septuagint that adds a report about the knives of stone which were used for the circumcision, Josh. 21:40: "and Joshua took the knives of stone wherewith he circumcised the children of Israel that were born in the desert by the way and put them in Thamnasachar." In another tradition in the Septuagint it is reported that Joshua was buried in the same tomb in which the knives of the circumcision were put, 24:31: "there they put with him into the tomb in which they buried him, the knives of stone with which he circumcised the children of Israel . . . and there they are to this day."

24. A. B. Ehrlich, *Mikra ki-Peschuto* (Berlin, 1899, repr. New York, 1969), 2.11 (Hebrew).

25. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, 98. For the meaning of Passover as a covenant, see H. C. Trumbull, *Blood Covenant: A Primitive Rite and Its Bearings on Scripture* (New York, 1885), 230–37. In his opinion the Passover covenant is based on the ritual of entrance of a bride or bridegroom to their new family. See idem, *The Threshold Covenant; or the Beginning of Religious Rites* (Edinburgh, 1896), 203–6. In this rite the bridegroom would enter the new house after blood was spilled on the doorposts. Similarly, Israel put blood on their doorposts to invite God to enter their houses (206–12). According to this thesis, the Passover is a marriage pledge between Israel and God (212–14). For a survey on the origin of the festival and its meaning see J. B. Segal, *The Hebrew Passover: From Earliest Times to A.D. 70* (London, 1963), 78–113. On the marriage metaphor in the Exodus story see I. Gottlieb, "Law, Love, and Redemption: Legal Connotations in the Language of Exodus 6:6–8," *JANES* 26 (1998), 47–57.

26. Because the relationship of Israel as a nation with God began with the celebration of the Passover on the occasion of the Exodus from Egypt, the festival became in the eyes of the following generations

The Cessation of the Manna (Josh. 5:11–12)

Following the circumcision and the Paschal sacrifice, the cessation of the manna is reported, and immediately Israel began to eat from the produce of the land. The importance of the consumption of the food of the land is highlighted by its triple repetition: “On the day after the Passover, on that very day, *they ate the produce of the land*, unleavened cakes and parched grain. The manna ceased on *the day they ate the produce of the land*, and the Israelites no longer had manna; *they ate the crops of the land* of Canaan that year” (Josh. 5:11–12). The eating of the produce of the land and the cessation of the manna are linked to the Passover: “*On the day after the Passover*, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land” (v. 12). Indeed, these two features are indicators of the transition from the nomadic life in the wilderness to life in the land. The cessation of the manna marks the end of the old period, and the eating of the new crops signifies the beginning of the new period.²⁷

The consumption of the produce of the land may also be associated implicitly with the sin of the spies at Kadesh. The spies returned from their mission carrying the unique fruit from Canaan: “And they came to the Wadi Eshcol, and cut down from there a branch with a single cluster of grapes, and they carried it on a pole between two of them, they also brought some pomegranates and figs” (Num. 13:23); and “they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land” (Num. 13:26). Nevertheless, they refused to enter the land to eat from its fruit. The second generation, in contrast, renewed the covenant and ate from the crops. Perhaps the eating of the fruit of the land symbolizes the people’s readiness to abandon desert life and to enter the land.²⁸ It is apparently no coincidence that the manna ceased only after the people of Israel had begun to eat from the produce of the land (vv. 11–12), making a point that they chose to eat the natural local produce, even before the manna ceased.²⁹ The second generation is depicted in its excitement

a symbol of the renewal of the covenant between Israel and God. Four celebrations of the Passover are described in the Bible: in the accounts of Joshua, Hezekiah, Josiah, and Ezra. In all four cases the description of the Passover is part of a rectification of the covenant between Israel and God after a significant period of distance from God and abandonment of His ways. The Passover of Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 30) is part of his reform (2 Chronicles 29–31) following the period of idol worship of his father Ahaz (2 Chronicles 28), who even prevented the worship of God by closing the temple gates (2 Chronicles 28:24). The Passover practiced by Josiah (2 Kgs. 23:21–23; 2 Chron. 35:1–19) is part of his reform to reestablish the worship of God after its abandonment by his father Menasseh (2 Kgs. 22–23:30; 2 Chron. 34:3–35:24). The description of the Passover of Ezra (Ezra 6:19–20) follows the completion of the building of the temple and its dedication (Ezra 3–6), and is part of the renewal of the covenant between God and Israel after the destruction of the Temple and the exile of Israel.

27. R. de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel*, trans. D. Smith (Philadelphia, 1978), 605; C. H. W. Brekelmans, “Joshua v 10–12: Another Approach,” in A. S. van Der Woude, ed., *New Avenues in the Study of the Old Testament*, OTS 25 (Leiden, 1989), 89–95. Mitchell has indicated that the manna is associated with Israel’s complaints and rebellion against God; the manna symbolizes the end of one era and the beginning of a new one of obedience to God. See G. Mitchell, *Together in the Land: A Reading of the Book of Joshua*, JSOT Sup. 134 (Sheffield, 1993), 47.

28. W. R. Nicoll and J. T. Stoddart, *The Expositor’s Dictionary of Texts* (London, 1910), 1.168.

29. Nelson, *Joshua*, 78–79.

at eating the produce of the land, in contrast to the first generation, which was reluctant to enter the land, despite having seen its fruit.³⁰

Achan's Sin (Joshua 7)

Another possible reference—albeit only implicit—to the sin of the spies at Kadesh is the story of Achan. The only sin discussed in the Book of Joshua is that of Achan (7:10–13). In both stories the sin is an obstacle to the conquest of the land: the punishment for the sin of the spies is the prevention of the entire generation from entering the land (Num. 14:28–35), and in the Achan story God says that He will not be with Israel to conquer the land as long as sin is in their midst (Josh. 7:12).

The Achan story opens with a report of the sin that occurred during the conquest of Jericho: “But the Israelites broke faith in regard to the devoted things: Achan son of Carmi son of Zabdi son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things; and the anger of the Lord burned against the Israelites” (Josh. 7:1).³¹ Although at this point the reader is already aware of Achan’s sin and of the people’s responsibility, the protagonists—Joshua and the Israelites—are still ignorant. Joshua therefore sends spies to Ai, and thus begins the battle against the city on the basis of the intelligence delivered to him,³² a battle in which Joshua’s army is defeated. This description is followed by a detailed description of Joshua’s reaction in mourning and complaint (Josh. 7:6–9). At first, Joshua mourns for a full day, tearing his garments, falling on his face and throwing dust on his head (v. 6).³³ This is followed by an extensive description of Joshua’s complaints to God:

Ah, Lord God! Why have you brought this people across the Jordan at all, to hand us over to the Amorites so as to destroy us? Would that we had been content to settle beyond the Jordan! O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has turned their backs to their enemies! The Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will you do for your great name? (vv. 7–9).

Nelson has drawn an analogy between Joshua’s words and Moses’ intervention for his sinning people (Deut. 9:25–29),³⁴ but this suffers from a few shortcomings. Unlike

30. Elsewhere I have shown that the idea of transition between the life in the desert that was identified with miraculous life and the life in the Promised Land that is identified with normal type of life is the main thrust of the conquest narratives in Joshua 6–11; see Assis, *The Literary Structure of the Conquest Narrative*, 47–66.

31. For the tension between individual guilt and corporate responsibility as a main idea in the story, see R. G. Boling, *Joshua, AB* (New York, 1982), 220, 229–30. For more on this topic, see J. Porter, “The Legal Aspects or the Conquest of ‘Corporate Personality’ in the Old Testament,” *VT* 15 (1965), 361–80; and J. S. Kaminsky, “Joshua 7: A Reassessment of Israelite Conceptions of Corporate Punishment,” in S. W. Holloway and L. K. Handy, eds., *The Pitcher is Broken: Memorial Essays for Gösta W. Ahlström*, *JSOT Supp.* 190 (Sheffield 1995), 315–46.

32. Some scholars think that the approach of the spies is due to their self-confidence and a lack of confidence in God. See Nelson, *Joshua*, 104; and P. Benjamin, *The Theology of Land in the Book of Joshua* (Ph.D. diss., Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1986), 99. I doubt that the spies’ answer can be attributed to their self-confidence; their report may be a logical conclusion of what they saw.

33. Mourning ceremonies often include the tearing of garments (e.g., Gen. 37:34; 44:13), and prostration (e.g., Num. 14:5; 16:22).

34. Nelson, *Joshua*, 102. In some medieval Jewish exegesis Joshua’s plea to God was interpreted as a prayer for salvation, see, e.g., R. David Kimḥi in his explanation to v. 10.

Joshua, Moses knew that the people had sinned and begs God for forgiveness. Moreover, Moses rebukes the people (Deut. 9:23–24), whereas Joshua accuses God for not assisting Israel and does not cry to God for salvation.³⁵

Joshua is characterized in the story as one who does not comprehend the events; thus, he accuses God falsely. The key to reversing the situation is not in the hand of God, but in actions that should be taken by Israel. The story presents Joshua in an ironic light, especially since the reader has already been informed that Israel's failing is due to his sin.³⁶ The detailed description of Joshua's complaints and the prominence accorded to his accusations further intensify the ironic presentation of this character.³⁷

The most surprising irony lies in the style and vocabulary of Joshua's complaint, which are analogous to the complaints of the spies at Kadesh.³⁸ In Deut. 1:27 the spies accuse God saying that His hatred towards them is what led Him to bring them into the Land of Israel to annihilate them there: "you grumbled in your tents and said, 'It is because the LORD hates us that he has brought us out of the land of Egypt, to hand us over to the Amorites to destroy us'." Joshua airs a similar complaint: "Ah, Lord GOD! Why have you brought this people across the Jordan at all, to hand us over to the Amorites so as to destroy us?" (Josh. 7:7).

An even closer analogy is evident between Joshua's words and those of the spies in Num. 14:2–3:

	Josh. 7:7	Num. 14:2–3
1	Joshua said, "Ah, Lord GOD!	And all the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron; the whole congregation said to them,
2	Why have you brought this people across the Jordan at all, to hand us over to the Amorites so as to destroy us?	"Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness!
3	Would that we had been content to settle beyond the Jordan!"	Why is the LORD bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become booty; would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?"

35. In line with his interpretation, Nelson (*Joshua*, 80) attempts to find in Joshua's words an appeal to God, and thus he explains v. 9 as a prayer to God to act. However, Joshua does not make any request from God, that the core of his words is complaint. Indeed, Nelson admits that Joshua does not specify a request or a petition.

36. Mitchell (*Together in the Land*, 67) and Hawk think that the report of Achan's sin at the beginning of the story creates an expectation of the inevitable outcome. See D. L. Hawk, *Every Promise Fulfilled: Contesting Plots in Joshua* (Louisville, 1991), 110. In my opinion this notice appears at the beginning of the story and reveals to the reader the reason for the whole event. It thus seems to me that the information in the beginning of the story is meant to prevent any dramatization so that the reader's attention will be concentrated on the ironic presentation of Joshua and his army, instead of on plot development.

37. Contrary to Woudstra (*The Book of Joshua*, 123) who claims that the vivid description of Joshua's grief enhances the emotional sympathy of the reader and reflects the seriousness of the offense.

38. A number of scholars have noticed some of these analogies; see Mitchell, *Together in the Land*, 68; Hawk, *Every Promise Fulfilled*, 114–17. But they do not explain the meaning of the analogy between Joshua's words and those of the spies.

The words of the spies contain three components, the last two of which occur in Joshua's words as well.

1. A preference for Israel to have perished in Egypt or in the wilderness.
2. A complaint that God led them to the Land only to be killed by its inhabitants.
3. A preference for an alternate place of abode.

Despite the affinity between these two complaints, Joshua's claim is more moderate. Although both agree that Israel should not move into the Cisjordan, the spies express a more rebellious desire: they claim that even death would be preferable to God's plan and suggest returning to Egypt, whereas Joshua merely claims that it would have been better to stay in Transjordan. Joshua suggests that it would have been better "to settle (וַיֵּשְׁב) beyond the Jordan," whereas the spies suggest "(going) back (שׁוּב) to Egypt." The similarity between these two verbs, שׁוּב and יֵשְׁב, highlights the difference between the parallel claims. Joshua would be content with what God had already given to Israel, but the spies prefer to return to the place from which God had taken them.

Even though Joshua's complaint is not as extreme as the spies', the strong parallel between their words cannot be underestimated. Joshua is the one who, together with Caleb, stood firm against the other ten spies and confronted the entire nation, confident that God would assist them in conquering the land (Num. 13:30; 14:7–9). It was because of this stand that the people attempted to kill Joshua and Caleb (Num. 14:10). The confidence of Joshua and Caleb spared them from the misfortune of the nation (Num. 24:38), and Joshua was chosen to be the leader of the people in Moses' place. In light of this, it is all the more surprising that after the defeat at Ai, Joshua's words are constructed in the style of the spies' complaint, which Joshua had so strongly opposed.

The analogy between the complaint of Joshua and that of the spies presents Joshua as though he had adopted their argument, thus withdrawing from his position in the Kadesh confrontation, in which he claimed that God would assist Israel.

Joshua's words are also analogous to Moses' response to God's intention to exterminate Israel for their sin at Kadesh (Num. 14:13–19). Moses expresses his concern that the destruction of Israel would desecrate God's name in the eyes of the nations, who would interpret the outcome as God's impotence in leading Israel out of the desert into the Land: "They have heard that you, O LORD, are in the midst of this people . . . Now if you kill this people all at one time, then the nations who have heard about you will say, 'It is because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land he swore to give them that he has slaughtered them in the wilderness'" (Num. 14:15–16). In the Ai story Joshua uses this exact same claim, with the additional concern that the defeat would encourage a Canaanite attack: "The Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will you do for your great name?" (Josh. 7:9).

Joshua's repetition of Moses' arguments emphasizes God's different responses to the two leaders. Moses succeeds in changing God's intentions: "I do forgive, just as you have asked" (Num. 14:20). Joshua's parallel argument, in contrast, does not change God's plan; on the contrary, God points out Israel's responsibility to exterminate the

sinner, and directs Joshua how to do this. This contrast too, presents Joshua in an ironic way.³⁹

The first three references to the sin of the spies in the Book of Joshua characterize Joshua's generation as being worthy of entering the land, contrary to the first generation. The main thrust is to present them as having rectified the sin of their ancestors. In the Achan narrative, the allusion to the Kadesh sin narrative functions in the opposite manner. The sin is molded as an equivalent to the sin at Kadesh, but Joshua, who performed admirably in the earlier episode, now appears to be quoting the sinful words of the people in the wake of the spies' report. The sin of Achan is a threat to God's support for Israel. The conclusion is that Israel's success is measured by their adoption of an opposite approach to that of the spies, and in the way they rectify that sin. Israel's failure to follow God immediately generates a comparison to the sin of the spies.

The Caleb Episode (Josh. 14:6–15)

The spy narrative is explicit in Caleb's recollection of the events at Kadesh (14:6–15), when he requests Hebron as his reward.⁴⁰ Caleb begins his request with a brief review of the episode of the spies, placing emphasis upon his fulfillment of his mission and his loyalty to the Lord, in contrast to the sinful spies who went with him (vv. 7–8). This is followed by a recollection of Moses' promise: "On that day, Moses promised an oath: 'The land on which your foot trod shall be a portion for you and your descendants forever, because you were loyal to the Lord my God'" (Josh. 14:7).⁴¹ Caleb adds another justification for receiving Hebron: "I am still as strong today as on the day that Moses sent me; my strength is the same now as it was then, for battle and to go out and come in" (Josh. 14:11). This claim, although seemingly superfluous, given Moses' pledge, is intended to emphasize Caleb's current merits: that he is ready to continue to conquer the land. His willingness to proceed with the conquest creates continuity with the narrative of the spies.

Caleb continues: "So assign to me this hill country as the Lord promised on that day. Though you too heard on that day that *the Anakites* are there *and great fortified cities*" (Josh. 14:12). The Anakites and the fortified cities were the main cause of the weakness of spirit that plagued the spies: "However, the people who inhabit the country are powerful, and *the cities are fortified and very large*; moreover, we saw *the Anakites* there" (Num. 18:28; see also vv. 32–33; Deut. 1:28). Caleb, however, is ready to do battle with them. His words of trust in the Lord in this verse—his conviction that He would come to his aid—is a composite of Joshua's response and his own response to the ten rebellious spies. Caleb says to Joshua: "if only *the Lord is*

39. Some scholars have pointed out the resemblance between Joshua's plea to God and that of Moses, but the irony of this analogy has not been noticed; see, e.g., Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, 125.

40. The following is dealt with in detail in E. Assis, "'How Long Are You Slack to Go to Possess the Land' (Jos. XVIII 3): Ideal and Reality in the Distribution Descriptions in Joshua XIII–XIX," VT 53 (2003), 16–24.

41. Such a vow by God is not apparent in the Pentateuchal sources. The tradition here reflects that which appears in Judg. 1:20. Some believe that Num. 14:24 is God's vow to Caleb; see G. A. Cooke, *The Book of Joshua* (Cambridge, 1918), 133. But this interpretation is problematic.

with me, I will dispossess them [וְהוֹרַשְׁתִּים], as the Lord promised” (Josh. 14:12). In the narrative of the spies Caleb and Joshua assert: “Let us by all means go up, *and we shall gain possession of it* [וְיִרְשְׁנוּ אֹתָהּ], for we shall surely overcome it” (Num. 13:30), “*But the Lord is with us. Have no fear of them!*” (Num. 14:9).

An awareness of the spy story apparently underlies the report that Caleb captured the Anakites from Hebron: “And Caleb drove out from there the three sons of Anak: Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai, the descendants of Anak” (Josh. 15:14).

The Casting of the Lot at Shiloh (Josh. 18:1–10)

The narrative of the division of the land at Shiloh (Josh. 18:1–10) is probably also related to the episode of the spies. Joshua’s dispatch of the delegation to inspect the land is reminiscent of the spies’ narrative: “Appoint three men of each tribe; I will send them to go through the country” (Josh. 18:4). This connection to the story of the spies comes forth primarily in Joshua’s charge leveled against the seven tribes: “How long are you slack [מְתַרְפִּים] to go to possess the land” (Josh. 18:3). The use of the verb מְתַרְפִּים is reminiscent of the narrative of the spies. The meaning of the word רַפָּה “weak” is the opposite of חֹזֶק “strong,” a key word in the episode of the spies. Before their departure, Moses encourages the spies: “*be you of good courage*” [וְהִתְחַזְּקֻתֶם] and petitions them to “. . . see what the land is, are the people who dwell in it *strong or weak* [הַחֹזֶק הוּא הַרַפָּה]” (Num. 13:18). However, instead of strengthening them, scouting out the land arouses their fear of the might of the Canaanites: “We cannot attack that people, for it is *stronger* [חֹזֶק] than we” (Num. 13:31; see also v. 28). When Joshua berates the seven tribes, asking them “How long are you *slack*,” he is implicitly comparing them to the spies. In Numbers 13–14 spying led to slackness; in the narrative in the Book of Joshua the sending of the delegation is the solution to the problem of slackness. In the episode of the spies, Joshua stood against the rebels, in an attempt to persuade the people not to be incited by the spies; here, Joshua solves the problem created by the tribes. In the narrative in Numbers, Caleb argues: “Let us by all means go up, *and we shall gain possession of it*, for we shall surely overcome it” (Num. 13:30), and, together with Joshua, asserts: “If the Lord is pleased with us, *He will bring us into that land . . . and give it to us*” (Num. 14:8). Joshua argues against the seven tribes in a similar vein: “How long are you *slack to go to possess the land*” (Josh. 18:3).

In the narrative of the division of the land at Shiloh (Josh. 18:1–10), the episode of the spies serves to highlight the people’s weakness. Their lack of resolve to continue to capture the land resembles the weakness of the spies.

As seen above, the episode of the spies underlies both the Caleb narrative and the story of the division of the land at Shiloh. In the former, Caleb is presented as one who continues his path of loyalty to the Lord, in contrast to the faintheartedness of the other spies. In the Shiloh narrative the seven tribes are cast as slackers, who are following in the footsteps of the spies.

Conclusion

The story of the sin of the spies at Kadesh in Numbers 13–14, is a turning point in the accounts of the exodus from Egypt and the entrance to the Promised Land. The

sin led to a forty-year delay of wandering in the wilderness until the first generation had perished and a new one was born. Although the emotional response to this punishment is not recorded at any length, the postponement of the entrance to the promised land would have been traumatic. The Book of Joshua describes the continuation of the events from the point at which they ended in the Pentateuch, depicting the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel's forefathers to bring the people to the land and to settle them there. This promise was postponed because the Israelites followed the approach of the spies who "rejected the desirable Land" (Ps. 106:24). The Book of Joshua continues the theological concept of the Pentateuch that if the Israelites follow God's ways they will flourish, but if they deviate from His ways they will perish. While this concept has been recognized in scholarship, it has not been noted that one of the themes exemplifying this concept throughout the Book of Joshua is the story of the spies at Kadesh. This sin and its outcome function as a constitutive event, in that success is measured in relation to it and failure is cast as a continuation of the spies' transgression.

Although the sin of the spies is mentioned explicitly only once, I have shown that through intertextual reading it is implicit in five other occurrences. Four references appear in the first part of Joshua (chs. 1–12), which describes the conquest of the land; two other references occur in the second part of the book, recording the division of the land.

In the first three instances, which occur prior to the conquest, the sin functions as a contrasting constitutive event. The story of the spy mission to Jericho is placed at the beginning of the book, immediately after God encourages Joshua and provides him with the key to success: walking in the path of God. Joshua sends spies, but instead of discouragement, this act generates confidence in God. The (implied) narrator attempts to convey the impression that the second generation had abandoned the ways of its ancestors. This idea is repeated in the ceremony of the circumcision. Before the conquest can begin, Israel must renew its covenant with God, established by the collective ceremony of circumcision and the celebration of the Passover. This ceremony is depicted as a rectification of the sin of Israel and the spies at Kadesh. The cessation of the manna and the eating of the produce of the land contrasts Israel with the spies.

The fourth instance recalling the sin at Kadesh is the downfall of Israel in their first battle against Ai. This story presents the only sin that occurs in the book. Joshua complains to God that He let Israel cross the Jordan, only to be defeated. This complaint is framed in the style and vocabulary of the spies at Kadesh. The irony in Joshua's presentation is further achieved through the analogy between Moses' successful attempt to reverse God's decision to bring destruction upon Israel and Joshua's unsuccessful plea. The only setback in the Book of Joshua is depicted in similar terms to the approach of the spies at Kadesh. This occurs even in the account of Joshua's ironic presentation as he adopts his colleagues' approach, reversing his own loyal declarations in the Kadesh event.

In the second part of the Book of Joshua, which deals with the geographical descriptions of the territories of the tribes, there are two allusions to the sin of the spies, which serve a similar function to those in the first part. In the first occurrence, Caleb is presented as being willing to continue to conquer the land and as constant in his attitude since his opposition to the spies at Kadesh. In the second allusion,

Joshua draws a comparison between the faintheartedness of the seven tribes and the weakness of the spies. Once again, as in the Achan narrative, a setback is characterized in terms recalling the attitude of Moses' spies.

In sum, the comparative function of the spy story of Kadesh throughout the Book of Joshua, may have implications vis-à-vis our view of the composition of the book. Critical research has uncovered the diverse material from which the book was composed. The repeated theme examined in this study may suggest that the various materials were molded constructively and artistically to convey a theological message.