

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Journal of Biblical Literature* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_jbl-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jbl-01.php)

## JOSHUA 3:16

MORRIS JASTROW, JR.

University of Pennsylvania

The text of this verse is so manifestly confused that only by a somewhat radical method can one unravel the tangle. We must take as our point of departure the circumstance that the chapter, as others in the Book of Joshua, is full of explanatory glosses and comments, superimposed on an original text. A few illustrations will suffice.

(1) In v. 1 the words **הוא וְכָל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל** omitted in the Greek codices except F<sup>1</sup> are evidently a gloss.

(2) v. 3 **הַלְוִיִּם** without the conjunction is an addition, made with the same intent as in the Deuteronomic Code, e. g., Deut. 17:9; 18:1 to identify the Jerusalemite priesthood with the Levites—as the older generic designation for servitors at any sanctuary. In v. 6 we have correctly **הַכֹּהֲנִים** without the addition.

(3) For the designation of the 'Ark,' the text as it stands vacillates between **אָרוֹן בְּרִית יְהוָה** (v. 3) **אָרוֹן הַבְּרִית** (v. 6, 8) and **הָאָרוֹן** (v. 15). Variations in the Greek codices show attempts to make the usage more uniform, as, e. g., v. 6 where **יהוה** is added. Traces of such an endeavor are to be seen also in the Hebrew text in the addition of **הַבְּרִית** after **הָאָרוֹן** (v. 14) which grammatically is impossible, and even of **בְּרִית יְהוָה** (v. 17) after **הָאָרוֹן** which is still worse. In both cases the reading must be simply **הָאָרוֹן** as in v. 15. The Greek codices again vary in the attempt to make the usage uniform, but the Hebrew text shows that the compilers sanctioned, as is natural, the use of **הָאָרוֹן** as the abbreviation for 'Ark of the Covenant of Yahweh.' In v. 13, we must evidently also read **נִשְׂאֵי הָאָרוֹן**, the following **יהוה** being superinduced through the insertion of **כָּל־הָאָרֶץ** taken over from v. 11. The Greek codices confirm this in reading **אָרוֹן בְּרִית אָרוֹן כָּל־הָאָרֶץ** i. e., without **יהוה** but inserting **בְּרִית** for the sake of consistency.

<sup>1</sup> I use the nomenclature of Swete's ed.

(4) The words אֲרוֹן יְהוָה (or אֲרוֹן הַבְּרִית) in v. 11 are an addition, made with intent to remove the anthropomorphic conception of the original text which read: "when the Lord of all the earth passes (before you)<sup>2</sup> in the Jordan." The 'Ark' is the symbol and therefore the substitute for Yahweh.<sup>3</sup> The present reading "The ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth" is so redundant and so awkward—for the ark can hardly be said to "pass"—that there can be little doubt of the words "Ark of the Covenant" being an addition.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in v. 11. The suspicion is therefore justified that in v. 13 (as in v. 11) the anthropomorphic figure stood in the original text, which therefore conveyed the announcement that when Yahweh himself entered the Jordan, the waters would be cut off, but the text has now been so overlaid with the later view of the priests' carrying the ark in advance of the people that of the original conception only the words "Lord of all the earth" remain as a torso, which is distinctly out of place and more than superfluous.

(5) The words in verse 15 "for the Jordan was full over all its banks during all the days of the harvest"<sup>5</sup> are clearly an explanatory gloss, while the first part of the verse betrays evidence of being a combination of two sources<sup>5a</sup>:

(a) וּכְבֹא [הַכְּהֲנִים] נִשְׂאֵי הָאָרוֹן עַד-הַיַּרְדֵּן

(b) וּרְגְלֵי הַכְּהֲנִים נִשְׂאֵי הָאָרוֹן נִטְבְּלוּ בַקֶּצֶה הַמִּים

Coming now to v. 16, it is evident that the first part of the verse must be considered in connection with the second part

<sup>2</sup> Probably also an addition—omitted in the Greek codices except F.

<sup>3</sup> It is tempting to assume that אֲרוֹן יְהוָה in Josh. 4: 11 is an intentional change for אֲרוֹן i. e., again "the Lord of all the earth." In fact the similarity between אֲרוֹן and אֲרוֹן is a factor in leading to a confusion between the two terms.

<sup>4</sup> Bennett's view in the 'Rainbow' Bible (p. 3) in dividing the verse between D<sup>2</sup> and J<sup>2</sup> misses the point—the avoidance of the anthropomorphic figure.

<sup>5</sup> The wheat harvest in the spring. I Chron. 12, 15, adds specifically "in the first month." Cf. Josh. 4, 19 (10th day of the 1st month). The Greek text has "as in the days of the wheat harvest" which points to a misconception of the gloss.

<sup>5a</sup> So also Holzinger, *Das Buch Josua*, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> So the Greek text.

of v. 13. The two stand in the relation to one another of announcement and fulfilment. The announcement is made that when (according to one and probably the older version) Yahweh as the "Lord of all the earth" passes through the Jordan, or, according to the other, when the priests carrying the Ark enter the Jordan, "the down-flowing waters shall be cut off," i. e., they will be miraculously dammed at a certain point, and since with the downward grade of the river-bed the water in the Jordan from the point in question will flow off, the people will be able to pass through the dry river-bed. To make this more explicit two explanatory glosses are added in v. 13 (1) מִלְמַעְלָה and (2) וַיַּעֲמְדוּ נַר אֲחָד. Neither of these glosses is represented in the Greek text, which follows an independent path in describing the situation. It reads

"The water of the Jordan will flow out (*ἐκλείψει*),<sup>6a</sup> the down-flowing water will stand still." The picture, however, in the Hebrew and Greek texts is the same, the chief difference being that the latter adds the explanatory gloss *before* the phrase **וַיַּעֲמְדוּ הַמַּיִם הַיְרֵדִים**, while the former places the two glosses after the phrase. Of the two glosses in the Hebrew text, the first (מִלְמַעְלָה) is of little moment and may have been taken over from v. 16 where it is more in place, but the second indicating that the waters will rise and "stand up as a column" at the point where they are dammed up, adds an important touch. The down-flowing waters suddenly checked and driven back naturally rise like a large wave. The gloss, therefore, adds to the miracle of the damming of the waters, the almost equally striking phenomenon of the driven-back waters standing up like a column and *remaining* in that position. In v. 16 the fulfilment of the announcement is described in even greater detail and the attempt is made to localize the point up to which the waters are driven back. The waters are not "cut off" but "stand still," i. e., cease to flow. To the phrase **וַיַּעֲמְדוּ הַמַּיִם הַיְרֵדִים** "and the down-flowing waters stood still" the words **מִלְמַעְלָה . . . הַרְחֵק** "from above, . . . far off" are added,

<sup>6a</sup> Based on a reading **וַיַּעֲמְדוּ מִיְהֵרָב** corresponding to **וַיַּעֲמְדוּ** in v. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Further on in the verse, however, we find **וַיַּעֲמְדוּ הַמַּיִם הַיְרֵדִים** which I take as a misplaced gloss to **וַיַּעֲמְדוּ הַמַּיִם הַיְרֵדִים** in v. 13 and suggesting the identity of the waters 'standing still' with their being "cut off."

to specify the point to the north of the point of the ultimate crossing at which the waters stopped flowing. Just as in v. 13, the gloss מְלִמְעָלָה is superinduced through the occurrence of the word in v. 16, so, on the other hand, the phrase קָמוּ נְדֵ-אָחָד in v. 16 is suggested by the gloss וַיַּעֲמֵרוּ נְדֵ-אָחָד in v. 13. It is not in place in v. 16 for it interrupts the construction. We must read

וַיַּעֲמֵרוּ הַמַּיִם הַיֹּרְדִים מְלִמְעָלָה הַרְחָק

“And the down-flowing waters stood still from above (i. e. above the crossing place), far off.” There follows an endeavor to localize the exact point of “far off.” The text as it stands is entirely unintelligible. What does or rather what can בְּאֵרֵם הָעִיר<sup>8</sup> mean? Some region is no doubt intended, further described as אֲשֶׁר מִצַּד צִרְתָּן “which is at the side of Sarethan.” The corruption is old as is shown by the Greek version, which, reading *σφόδρα σφόδρως*, evidently assumed a text מֵאֵד מֵאֵד for מֵאֵד<sup>9</sup> and thus eliminates a place Adam for which the passage in Joshua is the *sole* witness. But that does not help us. A more radical operation is required.

A possible connection between the phrase מֵאֵד בְּאֵרֵם הָעִיר in Joshua and I Kings 7:46 (= II Chron. 4:17), reading as follows: בְּמַעְבַּר הָאֵדָמָה (var: בְּעַבִּי) has been suggested by scholars. So, e. g., Moore<sup>10</sup> proposes to read בְּמַעְבַּר הָאֵדָמָה (or plural במעברות) “at the ford of Adam,” thus finding a second mention of the place Adam. Independently of Moore, Clermont-Ganneau made the same suggestion,<sup>11</sup> and the reading בְּמַעְבַּר is adopted by Benzinger<sup>12</sup> and noted in Kittel’s text.<sup>13</sup> The passage in Kings, for which we have the parallel in

<sup>8</sup> Kere בְּאֵרֵם.

<sup>9</sup> According to the Kere. The Greek version B, corresponding to הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר מִצַּד צִרְתָּן (see below note 17), further shows the uncertainty of the text. See the other Greek versions given by Stevenson in *PEF.*, Quarterly Statement, 1895, p. 335, some of which clearly represent attempts to reconcile the Greek text with the present Hebrew one.

<sup>10</sup> *JBL.* 13 (1894), 78. Cf. also Moore’s commentary on Judges, p. 213. Clermont-Ganneau (*PEF.*, Quarterly Statement, 1896, p. 80) proposed the same conjecture independently. Moore (*JBL.*, 13, 79) refers to an earlier conjecture to read בְּעִיר אֵדָם.

<sup>11</sup> Palestine Exploration Fund, Quarterly Statement, 1896, p. 80.

<sup>12</sup> *Hand-Kommentar zu den Büchern der Könige*, p. 54.

<sup>13</sup> *Biblia Hebraica*, p. 471.

Chronicles, describes the casting of the temple utensils in the valley of the Jordan. The objection to the proposed conjecture is that after so general a mention as the "Jordan Valley" for the casting, we would hardly expect a *precise* localization at a particular spot. The interest of the writer being to inform us that the utensils were made in the Jordan Valley, it would be more natural for him to rest content with a general indication "between Succoth and Sarethan"; and if he did add "at the ford of Adam" would not that be sufficient? In the two parallels "the ford of Yabbok" (Gen. 32:23) and "the ford of Michmas" (I Sam. 13, 23) no further specifications are added, and elsewhere only the "fords of the Jordan" in general are mentioned (Josh. 2:7; Jud. 12:5, 6. Cf., also, I Sam. 14:4). Certainly "at Adam," as in Joshua, would be sufficient if the writer wished to specify a locality. Why should he add "at the ford?" And if he did so, why a further localization of a place that must have been well known?

The variant **בְּעֵבִי** in II Chron. 4:17 shows that the Jewish editors took the phrase to mean in a thick or heavy soil, as the Greek translators and the Targum also understood it. This view, accepted by all commentators till the question as to its correctness was raised by Klostermann, represents, I venture to think, a more plausible view than the one which seeks a proper name in this part of the passage. Even Moore who objects to the phrase **בְּמַעֲבֵה הָאֲרָמָה** or **בְּעֵבִי הָאֲרָמָה** as awkward, admits that for the casting of columns, a spot would naturally be selected where there was considerable depth of earth and that "the deep alluvium of the Jordan Valley meets this requirement." I cannot find that the phrase in question is a particularly awkward one to express a "heavy soil," though this to be sure is a question of feeling rather than grammar. George Adam Smith<sup>14</sup> calls attention to the great number of mounds in the Jordan Valley north of Jericho which consisting of sun-dried bricks "are probably the remains not of cities but of old brick fields." It would be natural, therefore, in the passage in Kings and Chronicles to add as a reason for the casting of the utensils in "the Valley of Jordan" a reference to the section of the Valley marked by its "thick soil," and that this section was included between "Succoth and Sarethan."

<sup>14</sup> *Historical Geography of Palestine* (7th ed.).



My suggestion, therefore, is to take the three words in Joshua 3:16 **מֵאֵר מֵאֵר מֵאֵר הָעֵיר** as a scribal "pie" for **בְּמַעְבַּה הָאֲרָמָה** or in other words to turn the thing around, and take the passage in Kings as furnishing the reading for the one in Joshua. The picture conveyed, therefore, by the proposed reading **בְּמַעְבַּה זָרְתָן מֵאֵר מֵאֵר הָאֲרָמָה אֲשֶׁר מֵצִד זָרְתָן** is of the waters standing still at a point near Sarethan in the region marked by its "thick soil."

The word **עֵיר** (or **הָעֵיר**) would be either a gloss to Sarethan or due to an erroneous interpretation of **בְּמַעְבַּה הָאֲרָמָה** as the name of a place. Cutting off the word, we have **מֵאֵר בְּאֲרָמָה**. If we assume a misplacement of the first letter of the second word and place the **ב** before **מֵאֵר**, we would have two of the letters of **בְּמַעְבַּה**. To further assume an exchange of **א** for **ע** and **ד** for **ב** and the omission of an **ה** involves, to be sure, a most violent treatment of the text, which but for the two passages in Kings and Chronicles would be entirely unwarranted. That there is a close connection between these two passages and the one in Josh. 3:16 is evident on the surface. In deciding, therefore, between correcting Kings and Chronicles according to Joshua, as has hitherto been done, or *vice versa*, we must weigh the objections and give the preference to the procedure which involves fewer difficulties. I venture to think that to assume in both cases an indefinite region at which the waters were dammed, and in which the casting of the temple utensils was done, is the more satisfactory conjecture. A place name of so vague and general a character as Adam or Adamah is most unlikely and the connection between such a place and ed-Damieh<sup>15</sup>, is not so close as to make the equation of the two an absolute necessity. The fact that the Greek version does not introduce a *place name at all* and that this passage in Joshua, according to the traditional interpretation of the Massoretic text, would be the only mention, together with the fact that even according to this text there is a vacillation between **בְּאֵר** and **מֵאֵר**, quite apart from the difficulties of finding a place Adamah to answer the requirements of being at the side of

<sup>15</sup> Moreover, if Sarethan is to be identified with Tell es-Sarim (see below, p. 62), about 40 miles to the north of ed-Damieh, it would not be likely that a writer should speak of the latter as "at the side of Sarethan."

Şarethan<sup>16</sup>—all this speaks in favor of removing a place Adam or Adamah from our Biblical geography, and accepting a meaning that a region of thick, rich soil is meant—suitable for casting and appropriately described as included between two places, or with equal indefiniteness as ‘about’ or ‘in the region’ of Şarethan, which seems to be intended by the use of the particle **מִצַּד**.<sup>17</sup>

The variant **בַּעֲבֵי** in Chronicles for **בַּמַּעֲבָה** in Kings, while of doubtful value because of the general state of the text in Chronicles, nevertheless attests the antiquity of the tradition which saw in the phrase the description of a region rather than a proper name; and since the Jordan has many fords,<sup>18</sup> none of which are distinguished (so far as the evidence goes) by any name with the word “ford” attached, there would be no special reason why Adam or Adamah should be so distinguished. There is, therefore, much in favor of the traditional explanation of **בַּמַּעֲבָה הָאֲרָמָה** or **בַּעֲבֵי הָאֲרָמָה** as denoting “thick soil.”

It is, to be sure, not necessary to take the phrase as having the force of “forms of clay” as, e. g., Kamphausen<sup>19</sup> and Kittel<sup>20</sup> propose. This, indeed, is most unlikely. By translating the phrase literally “in the thick (part) of the soil,” we obtain a description of the *character* of the soil in the Jordan Valley above Jericho for which there is sufficient evidence—

<sup>16</sup> See on these difficulties, Moore as above, and also *JAOS.*, 26, pp. 331-333.

<sup>17</sup> The specification Kiriath-jearim in the Greek codices is due to a manifest tinkering with the difficult passage and has no more value than a modern conjecture. Stevenson (*Quarterly Statement*, 1896, p. 82) proposes to associate Kiriath-jearim with a place Karawa, mentioned in Nuwairi's narrative (see below, p. 60) as near ed-Damieh. He further assumes a distortion of the Hebrew text **מִצַּד צִרְתָּן** into the reading underlying the Greek version. The Greek, however, as we have seen, eliminates a place Adam (identified with ed-Damieh) altogether. That the Greek version rests on an attempt to localize the stoppage of the Jordan at Karawa, a town on the Jordan mentioned by the Arabic geographer Yakut, is possible, though it is unlikely that the translators should have been so familiar with the nomenclature of the Jordan Valley. In any case, the further distortion into Kiriath-jearim appears to be due to awkward manipulation of an unintelligible text.

<sup>18</sup> Above, p. 57.

<sup>19</sup> In Kautzsch's German translation of the Bible.

<sup>20</sup> *Bücher der Könige (Handkommentar etc.)*, p. 46.



suitable for making both bricks and clay moulds for casting. The 'thick soil' would also be a natural place at which the waters of the Jordan might be choked up during the dry season, so that the miraculous intervention would consist in this stoppage of the flow so as to permit a crossing on a dry bed in the spring when, as the text in Joshua states, the Jordan ordinarily was at its highest and overflowed its banks.

As for the occurrence itself, it is plausible to assume that the tradition of the miraculous crossing rests upon the recollection of a temporary stoppage of the flow of the river, similar to that recorded by Nuwairi for the year 1266, when at the time that workmen were repairing a bridge at ed-Damieh, constructed by Sultan Beybars across the Jordan, a mound of soft marl fell into the river and checked the flow for several hours, enabling the workmen to make the repairs without difficulty.<sup>21</sup> If this happened once, it might have happened frequently, especially in view of the marl deposits in which the river has gradually hollowed out its narrow bed in the remarkable land depression, which begins south of the Sea of Galilee. There is no reason to question the reliability of Nuwairi's narrative, and certainly no reason to assume that the story in Joshua inspired the account.

In the details of the biblical story two accounts have been fused, or perhaps it is more correct to say confused. According to one, the priests carrying the Ark stood on stones in the midst of the Jordan (Joshua 4:3 and 10) while the people crossed, and these stones remained there in the Jordan. According to the other, Joshua took twelve stones from the Jordan and had them carried across (Joshua 4:8) to the encampment of the people (הַמַּלֵּי) and eventually set up as a memorial at Gilgal (4:20).<sup>22</sup> The former strikes one as the more natural, and taken in connection with the main incident in Nuwairi's narrative, i. e., the falling of a mound of marl into the river, it will not seem too farfetched to conjecture that the stones in

<sup>21</sup> See the text and translation of the passage in the Quarterly Statement of the Palestine Exploration Fund for 1895, pp. 256-258, and also in Quatremère's *Histoire des Sultans Mamluks*, etc., II, p. 26.

<sup>22</sup> On the assumption of two versions, we may account for the duplication of the explanation of the memorial (4: 6-7 = 4: 21-22), the latter further amplified with details in verses 23-24 in the style of the Deuteronomist.

the Jordan on which the priests stood represent the mound, which in falling would break into pieces and form stepping-stones on which to cross the river-bed, thus temporarily choked by the fallen mass. When the tradition of the natural occurrence became associated with the tales of the fortunes of the Hebrew clans, all kinds of more or less embellishing details would be added and these would grow in number with the repetition of the tale. So the *motif* of the twelve tribes would be introduced and the stepping-stones would become twelve stones. A version would arise in which the twelve stones would be taken out of the river by the order of Joshua and carried to the camp on the other side, and this version would be further embellished by having the stones set up as a memorial at Gilgal. In the combination of older and later versions, the thought of a "memorial" of the miraculous crossing would become so prominent as to lead to the view that the stepping-stones would also become twelve stones "set up" (v. 9 הַקִּיָּם = הַקִּיָּם v. 20) by Joshua "in the Jordan" where "they remain to this day," without a recognition of the absurdity of a monument in a place where it would be covered by the waters. What the text originally said was that the stepping-stones on which the priests stood while the people crossed are still in the Jordan "to this day," which is at least reasonable. Furthermore, the miraculous touch was added that the crossing on the dry river-bed took place in the season when the Jordan was at its height in the spring, through the melting of the snows on the Lebanon and anti-Lebanon range, and it is interesting to note that the same detail is added in the Arabic account, though there the season of the swelling of the Jordan is in December at the time of the winter rains. To be sure, the more rapid flow in both cases would probably be the factor that caused the breaking of a mound of marl and its fall into the river. Finally, by virtue of a natural comparison of the crossing of the Jordan with the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, expressly dwelt upon in the Deuteronomic addition at the end of the account (4:23),<sup>23</sup> the waters are represented as standing up into a column (3:13 and 16—glosses in both cases) reminiscent of the "wall" (Ex. 14:22) formed

<sup>23</sup> Note the introduction of the "strong hand," reminiscent of Exodus 6: 1; 13: 3, 9 etc.

by the waters of the Dead Sea through the blowing of the strong east wind.

We can thus trace the gradual growth of the story by a perfectly natural process, until it is overladen with more or less miraculous touches and finally becomes a somewhat confused tale when through the literary process the attempt is made to weld various versions of the popular folk-tale into a semblance of unity.<sup>24</sup> This process leads eventually to such an absurdity as a "memorial" of the occurrence set up in the Jordan, by the side of the one set up at Gilgal. Either the existence of some heap of stones at the latter place, or possibly merely the play upon the name as though a repetition of *gal* "heap," formed the starting-point for the tradition about a memorial of the crossing at Gilgal.

If the identification of Şarethan with Tell es-Sarim<sup>25</sup> is correct, then the stoppage of the flow of the Jordan through some natural occurrence which underlies the tale in chapters 3 and 4 occurred some 40 miles to the north of Jericho and the entire distance from this point to Jericho and beyond up to the Dead Sea would become a dry bed across which the people might pass. This supposition would fit in with the description of the damming of the waters as "far off" (3:16),<sup>26</sup> i. e., at a considerable distance from "opposite Jericho" (3:16) where the crossing took place.

<sup>24</sup>In the Book of Joshua, as no doubt elsewhere, the theory of the combination of *written* documents (J and E, etc.) must not be pressed too hard. The confusion in such incidents as the crossing of the Jordan (chapters 3 and 4) and the fall of Jericho (chap. 6) can be more satisfactorily explained by the attempt on the part of one editor, working with only one document, to combine various versions that were *popularly* current into a single tale to which subsequently glosses and comments and editorial amplifications were added.

<sup>25</sup>Near the modern Beisan=Beth Shean. Cf. I Kings 4, 12 where the words "which is beside Şarethan" are a late gloss to Beth-Shean. However corrupt the text may be, the conclusion, at all events, appears to be justified to seek Şarethan near Beth-Shean or Beisan. Moore's objection to this location of Şarethan (*JBL.*, 13, 79 and Comment. on Judges, p. 212 seq.) rest largely on the reading Adam as a proper name in our passage and its identification with ed-Damieh. There is so much in favor of placing Şarethan near Beth-Shean, that one is disposed to advance the difficulty of locating Şarethan near ed-Damieh as another argument in favor of the Greek text which eliminates Adam from our passage altogether.

<sup>26</sup>See above, p. 56.