Lecture 9: The Book of Joshua
History-telling in the Bible

Today we turn to the book of Joshua and its story of the people entering and taking possession of their land. As you know, the book falls into two halves: the first narrates the conquest of the land under Joshua, while the second half treats its allocation among the various tribal units. As you also know, themes and features in these halves sharply differentiate them. Of course, as Campbell notes, there are differences between chapters 1-10 and chapters 11 & 12, and those differences will become important, as will the different materials in 23 & 24.

We’ll begin with the first 12 chapters, whose theme of conquest is signaled in the LORD’s initial address to Joshua: “2 My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. 3 Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to you, as I promised to Moses.”

Last session we observed some verbal links between Joshua and Deuteronomy’s outer frame, such as the command, “Do not fear or be dismayed” and the allied themes of being “strong and bold” so as to put the people “in possession of the land.” But beyond those verbal links, the book of Joshua emphasizes, similar to Deuteronomy, reliance on the Mosaic Torah, as evident in the LORD’s initial charge: “7 Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. 8 This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful.”

Not only is the “law Moses commanded you” to be the touchstone of Joshua’s actions, but that standard is referred to specifically as “this book of the law.” Moreover, the LORD’s mandate entails an exclusive obedience to this “book of the law,” consonant with Deuteronomy's demands. Specifically, Joshua is to obey the entire law of Moses, not “turning from it to the right hand or to the left.” Notice the stress on scrupulous observance with the twice-occurring charge to “be careful” to observe all the law of Moses or “all that is written,” the same stress we found in the outer frame of Deuteronomy with its command, “You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take away anything from it, but keep the commandments of the LORD your God with which I am charging you.” That idea of adhering to this set of commandments and observing them without variation is echoed in the LORD’s command to Joshua.

In keeping with this, 11.15 provides the following summary of Joshua’s leadership of the people against a foe: “As the LORD had commanded his servant
Moses, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did; he left nothing undone of all that the LORD had commanded Moses.” Of course, the result of such scrupulous observance was that “Joshua took all that land,” that in accord with the linkage between strict obedience and success already stipulated in chapter 1. And this is the central theme of chapters 1-12: as long as Joshua and the people follow unwaveringly the LORD’s commands, they meet with triumph and success.

That theme is underscored by the exceptions, the first of which is striking due to the disproportionate relationship between punishment and offense. The command Joshua gives as the people prepare to march around Jericho on the seventh day is: “18 As for you, keep away from the things devoted to destruction, so as not to covet and take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel an object for destruction, bringing trouble upon it. 19 But all silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are sacred to the LORD; they shall go into the treasury of the LORD.”

Not everyone observes this prohibition, as we’re told at the outset of chapter 7: “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.” The punishment for this infraction was a horrific defeat of Israel in their subsequent attack on Ai: “5 The men of Ai killed about thirty-six of them, chasing them from outside the gate as far as Shebarim and killing them on the slope. The hearts of the people melted and turned to water. 6 Then Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the ground on his face before the ark of the LORD until the evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads.” The LORD soon informs Joshua of the reason for this defeat: “11 Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I imposed on them. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have acted deceitfully, and they have put them among their own belongings. 12 Therefore the Israelites are unable to stand before their enemies.”

Notice that, in spite of the fact that Joshua issued the ban on taking booty – without any explicit notice that the LORD had mandated it – here the LORD speaks of this infraction as “transgressing my covenant that I imposed on them.” A likely reason for the characterization of this as a breech of the LORD’s covenant is that this practice is prescribed by Deuteronomy 13, although there applied specifically to wicked Israelite cities: “15 you shall put the inhabitants of that town to the sword, utterly destroying it and everything in it – even putting its livestock to the sword. 16 All of its spoil you shall gather into its public square; then burn the town and all its spoil with fire, as a whole burnt offering to the LORD your God. It shall remain a perpetual ruin, never to be rebuilt. 17 Do not let anything devoted to destruction stick to your hand, so that the LORD may turn from his fierce anger and show you compassion, and in his compassion multiply you, as he swore to your ancestors.”
Notice that the retention by an Israelite of anything “devoted to destruction” will have adverse effects, as proves true also in Joshua 7. The notion that a complete destruction is mandated is in accord with Deuteronomy's ideology and, even more so, accords with Deuteronomy's mandate that all foreign cities be annihilated.

Whatever the origins of this story, three features of Achan's disobedience are noteworthy because they are characteristic motifs in the book. First, it incarnates Deuteronomy's tenet that while obedience to the divine command yields success, disobedience leads inevitably to disaster.

Second, the assertion that all Israel has sinned, even though just one individual, Achan, kept some of the booty, embodies a theme important in Deuteronomy that is equally stressed in Joshua: the unity of Israel.

That is why we are told that, at Achan’s execution, “Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan son of Zerah, with the silver, the mantle, and the bar of gold, with his sons and daughters, with his oxen, donkeys, and sheep, and his tent and all that he had; and they brought them up to the Valley of Achor. All Israel stoned him to death.” Just as the people as a unit suffered for the sin of Achan, so also as a unit they extirpate the crime.

Indeed, again and again in Joshua “all Israel” is the actor. Thus, when the people launch a renewed attack on Ai and feign being driven off by the defenders, we're told, “And Joshua and all Israel made a pretense of being beaten before them, and fled in the direction of the wilderness.” And yet, these are not all of Israel’s troops, since some had been left in ambush to invade the city when its warriors chased Israel’s troops. When the ruse took effect, the narrator reports, “Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city and that the smoke of the city was rising, [and] then they turned back and struck down the men of Ai.”

Throughout the battle narratives of Joshua 1-11 it is “all Israel” that enters into battle. And it is again “all Israel” that Joshua addresses at the end of the book, in a valedictory speech just before his death. This “all Israel” or “united Israel” perspective is characteristic of the first 11 chapters of the book and is met again in Joshua’s final address.

The third observation is that the battles of chapters 1-11 are portrayed as the LORD’s wars against the inhabitants of Canaan, rather than simply attacks mounted by the people, whether they fall into Campbell's "soldierly" or "sacral" categories. In fact, prior to the siege of Jericho, Joshua has this encounter: “Once when Joshua was by Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing before him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you one of us, or one of our adversaries?” He replied, “Neither; but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.” Joshua might be the leader of the people, but he is ultimately not in charge of them, except as a surrogate commander for the LORD.

In fact, throughout the reports of these battles the LORD repeatedly speaks of his
giving each city into Israel’s hands, as before the battle of Jericho, when he tells Joshua, “6 See, I have handed Jericho over to you, along with its king and soldiers.” Similarly, once Achan has been stoned and the deep reason for defeat at Ai eliminated, the LORD says to Joshua: “8 Do not fear or be dismayed; take all the fighting men with you, and go up now to Ai. See, I have handed over to you the king of Ai with his people, his city, and his land.”

Moreover, often enough this notion of the LORD handing over a city is given deeper meaning by the way the people are to capture it. Jericho is the prime example, since the military strategy is highly unconventional: “3 You shall march around the city, all the warriors circling the city once. Thus you shall do for six days, 4 with seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, the priests blowing the trumpets. 5 When they make a long blast with the ram’s horn...then all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and all the people shall charge straight ahead.”

Even though Campbell speaks of this narrative as having a "sacral focus," notice that the people are left with the dirty work of slaying all Jericho’s residents and gathering the plunder for the LORD’s treasury; what’s more, the people are required to do something to make the walls fall down. The encounter may be sacral in one sense (although Campbell never fully defines what he means by this), but it is also quite earthy. And yet, the defeat of the city gives depth to the LORD’s claim of having “handed it over to them” is more than just a statement of permission.

Even in the second attack on Ai, when the city’s citizens are drawn out by a ruse, the turning point in the battle is marked by the LORD’s declaration after the city’s warriors have fallen for the trap: “18 Then the LORD said to Joshua, “Stretch out the sword that is in your hand toward Ai; for I will give it into your hand.” And Joshua stretched out the sword that was in his hand toward the city. 19 As soon as he stretched out his hand, the troops in ambush rose quickly out of their place and rushed forward. They entered the city, took it, and at once set the city on fire.” Consequently, these battles are portrayed as the LORD’s battles; he is the one who oversees Israel’s forces and assures them of victory.

This leads me to judge that Campbell's distribution of the narratives into those with a "soldierly" focus and those that are more "sacral" is overly refined. In my opinion, these are less two different articulations of how the conquest of the land took place (as he puts it) and more a matter of two different modes under which the LORD is portrayed as handing the cities into Israel's hands.

This notion of the LORD as the commander of Israel’s forces is what stands behind the concept of contraband in the story of the defeat of Jericho. The reason no one is to take any of the booty is that it is rightfully the property of the leader of the victorious forces – namely, the LORD. As for Campbell's speculation that the
herem (or ban) is rooted in some sort of bargain made with the Lord before the battle, nothing in the text confirms that. It seems more likely to reflect the notion that the commander of the forces gets the lion's share.

Recall the command Joshua gives the people prior to their taking the seventh and decisive lap around Jericho: “17The city and all that is in it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live because she hid the messengers we sent. 18As for you, keep away from the things devoted to destruction, so as not to covet and take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel an object for destruction, bringing trouble upon it. 19But all silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are sacred to the LORD; they shall go into the treasury of the LORD.”

All material property that can be transported to the “treasury of the LORD” is to be deposited there – i.e. for use in the central worship site. Accordingly, Achan’s crime was pilfering some of the booty that belonged to the divine warrior.

On the other hand, because people cannot be secured for the LORD’s use in the same way, they are to be executed. The exceptions (in this case) are Rahab and her family, because she concealed the two Israelite spies on their mission in Jericho. It is, in large part, this notion of wars led by the divine warrior that accounts for Israel annihilating the inhabitants of the cities they conquer.

The image of the LORD as the ultimate strategist is advanced in a striking way in the other incident in Joshua 1-11 that accents the nexus between success and proper reliance on the LORD: the visit by representatives from Gibeon, located north and west of Jerusalem. As you know, the narrator describes the Gibeonites as terrified by all they had heard about the deeds of the LORD against Egypt and the Israelites’ triumphs, prompting them to scheme to make Israel conclude a peace treaty with them. Israel’s leaders voice their apprehensions in v. 7: But the Israelites said to the Hivites, “Perhaps you live among us; then how can we make a treaty with you?” Of course, the emissaries have a ready response: they show their dried bread and their sandals, worn out from their supposedly long journey.

I suppose we could infer that these Gibeonites are simply wise men of the world who know that any conquering foe is bound to eliminate the local population. Or perhaps they simply knew of what happened to Jericho and Ai. However, the Gibeonite representatives later reveal to the Israelites that they acted based on much more specific information: “22Joshua summoned them, and said to them, “Why did you deceive us, saying, ‘We are very far from you,’ while in fact you are living among us?…”24They answered Joshua, “Because it was told to your servants for a certainty that the LORD your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land before you; so we were in great fear for our lives because of you, and did this thing.”

These Gibeonites have a remarkable knowledge of Moses’ decrees to Israel.
Either this simply proves that bad news travels fast or we have a narrator shaping this story in light of what he knows from Deuteronomy, specifically Deut 20.10-17: 10 When you draw near to a town to fight against it, offer it terms of peace. 11 If it accepts your terms of peace and surrenders to you, then all the people in it shall serve you at forced labor. 12 If it does not submit to you peacefully, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it; 13 and when the LORD your God gives it into your hand, you shall put all its males to the sword…. 15 Thus you shall treat all the towns that are very far from you, which are not towns of the nations here. 16 But as for the towns of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you must not let anything that breathes remain alive. 17 You shall annihilate them – the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites – just as the LORD your God has commanded.” The Gibeonites took the tack they did because they knew what Moses had commanded. Undoubtedly they acquired such information only through the author who placed it in their mouths – namely, a Deuteronomic editor.

A striking feature of this story is that Joshua and the elders of Israel follow the Law of Moses scrupulously, as evident from their readiness to annihilate the Gibeonites if they prove to be from the nearby territory. And yet fidelity to the Torah in their heart is not good enough. Indeed, as he reports Joshua and the elders examining the messengers’ bread and sandals, the narrator voices a latent criticism: “14 So the leaders partook of their provisions, and did not ask direction from the LORD. 15 And Joshua made peace with them, guaranteeing their lives by a treaty; and the leaders of the congregation swore an oath to them.” Even though nowhere does the LORD step in with an explicit condemnation of the leaders’ actions, the narrator points out their fault. Scrupulous adherence to the Law of Moses by itself is insufficient, because sometimes information is needed beyond what is written in order to rightly fulfill what is written. And that is consonant with Deuteronomy, which permits Israel an ongoing means to “inquire of the LORD.”

And so the two instances in which Israel was unsuccessful in routing their opponents are both attributed to having fallen short of what was required. And this reinforces the major theme of the first 10 chapters: that success and prosperity depends on fidelity to the LORD.

Thus far, then, we have noted the following salient themes in chapters 1-12: First, there is an emphasis on scrupulous obedience to the “book of the Torah,” parallel to the emphasis on obeying all the Torah we noted in Deuteronomy.

Second, the consequence of the people’s scrupulous obedience of the LORD is success in their exploits. This theme is underscored by the two incidents of disaster, which establish the corollary that failure to comply fully inevitably results in disaster.

Also characteristic of these narratives is the image of a united Israel: all Israel
participates in battle, *all* Israel encounters disaster due to Achan’s sin, and *all* Israel follows Joshua in strict obedience to the LORD.

Alongside this stands the theme of the LORD as Israel’s absolute ruler, which is another way of describing the conquest of the land as the LORD’s wars. This list reveals an idealized portrayal of Israel’s entrance into its land, which is also apparent in the impression these chapters leave that all Israel secured *all* their land in a single swipe: a massive campaign that overcame all resistance. Notice the triumphant statement at the end of chapter 11: “23 So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD had spoken to Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotments. And the land had rest from war.” The double assertion that Joshua took “the whole land” and that “the land had rest from war” conveys the impression that Israel’s conquest of its land was comprehensive and complete. Reading these chapters leads to the conclusion that the campaign ended successfully, with the native population subdued.

However, there are additional features in these chapters betraying them to be an idealized account, written with Deuteronomy (or Deuteronomic ideas) in view. A prime example is chapter two’s story about spies who slipped into Jericho and took shelter with Rahab the prostitute: “1 Then Joshua son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.” So they went, and entered the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab, and spent the night there. 2 The king of Jericho was told, “Some Israelites have come here tonight to search out the land.” 3 Then the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come only to search out the whole land.”

These spies have been dispatched to scout the whole land, but never make it any further than Jericho, just inside the eastern border. That evidently proves no impediment to their task, however, since they subsequently report to Joshua, 24 “Truly the LORD has given *all* the land into our hands; moreover *all* the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before us.”

Their source for this information about all the land and its inhabitants is Rahab, who has told them, 9 “I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you. 10 For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. 11 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.”

Like the emissaries from Gibeon, Rahab sounds as if she has been reading the book of Deuteronomy, and for good reason: she has been given lines that reinforce
the promises vouchsafed to the people in that book. What’s more, she, just across the Jordan, has been able to give a report about all the inhabitants of all the land.

Given these statements about “all the land,” one might expect the range of the conquest stories in chapters 1-11 to be comprehensive. Instead, the area covered by the narrative – or even the areas merely mentioned – is surprisingly restricted. Beginning with Jericho in chapter 6, the narrative has the Israelites engage in a series of battles clustered around the north-to-central regions of the southern half of Canaan. Not all of these are battles for specific cities; some are conflicts spurred by coalitions of kings that come out to oppose Israel. The major exception to that pattern, of course, are the emissaries from Gibeon and its satellite cities, which manage to finagle a treaty with Israel. In any case, the general campaign throughout the south is summarized at the close of chapter 10: “40 So Joshua defeated the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings; he left no one remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the LORD God of Israel commanded. 41 And Joshua defeated them from Kadesh-barnea to Gaza, and all the country of Goshen, as far as Gibeon.

Especially striking here is the swath of land said to have been conquered: “from Kadesh-barnea to Gaza, and all the country of Goshen, as far as Gibeon.” If we plot these territories on a map and then superimpose on them the cities involved in the conflicts narrated in chapters 6-10, it becomes evident that this campaign has been less comprehensive than the language about conquering all the land suggests.

Even more striking is the subsequent campaign in the northern territories, reported in chapter 11: “1 When King Jabin of Hazor heard of this, he sent to King Jobab of Madon, to the king of Shimron, to the king of Achshaph, 2 and to the kings who were in the northern hill country, and in the Arabah south of Chinneroth, and in the lowland, and in Naphoth-dor on the west, 3 to the Canaanites in the east and the west, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, and the Jebusites in the hill country, and the Hivites under Hermon in the land of Mizpah. 4 They came out, with all their troops, a great army, in number like the sand on the seashore, with very many horses and chariots. 5 All these kings joined their forces, and came and camped together at the waters of Merom, to fight with Israel.”

Plotting these various cities on the map, we discover that they are clustered in Israel’s far northern region, and that they are even more sparsely distributed than the cities in the south. Moreover, even though Joshua is said to have defeated all these kings and captured their cities, this is the only foray reported into the northern territory, and thus seems a rather weak base for the final report at the end of the chapter, “23 So Joshua took the whole land… and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotments. And the land had rest from
war.” And that claim seems especially over-reaching when we take the long view of where the battles took place, as narrated in chapters 1-11, which shows not only a sparse hodgepodge of cities, but also a great, untouched gap in the middle.

Of course, chapter 12 provides a list of 31 cities it says Joshua captured, and adding those mentioned there (but absent from the narrative of chapters 1-11) fills in some of the gap in the middle, though hardly sufficiently to justify the claim that Joshua took the whole land. And what's more, it is clear (as Campbell points out) that this grand scheme has been hobbled together from various kinds of materials: narratives in chapters 1-10, brief summaries in chapter 11, and a list in chapter 12. In fact, chapter 12, if not also chapter 11, may well be secondary additions to the book. In any case, what was the author trying to do?

It is fairly easy to show that this scenario is a literary artifice. All we need do is compare other reports about Israel gaining its territory. E.g. within the book of Joshua, 13.13 candidly admits that “the Israelites did not drive out the Geshurites or the Maacathites; but Geshur and Maacath live within Israel to this day.” Similarly, 16.10 reports, “[Israel] did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer: so the Canaanites have lived within Ephraim to this day but have been made to do forced labor.” Despite the systematic attempt at annihilation, some native groups survived. What’s more, the comment of 16.10 about “the Canaanites who lived in Gezer” conspicuously differs with the report of 10.33 that “King Horam of Gezer came up to help Lachish; and Joshua struck him and his people, leaving him no survivors.” It’s difficult to see how a report of the annihilation of all inhabitants at Gezer can be succeeded by a report that Israel did not drive out (and thus did not annihilate) the inhabitants of that city.

Even more striking are comparisons between the first chapters of Joshua and the first chapter of Judges. Let’s notice, for example, the report of the conquest of the city of Debir in Joshua 10:38-39: 38Then Joshua, with all Israel, turned back to Debir and assaulted it, 39and he took it with its king and all its towns; they struck them with the edge of the sword, and utterly destroyed every person in it; he left no one remaining; just as he had done to Hebron, and, as he had done to Libnah and its king, so he did to Debir and its king.”

Now, here is the report of the capture of Debir in Judges 1:11-13: “From there they went against the inhabitants of Debir (the name of Debir was formerly Kiriath-sepher). 12Then Caleb said, “Whoever attacks Kiriath-sepher and takes it, I will give him my daughter Achsah as wife.” 13And Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother, took it; and he gave him his daughter Achsah as wife.” So the victory the book of Joshua attributes to Joshua, the book of Judges attributes to Othniel, nephew of Caleb.

Now, I suppose one might argue that the book of Joshua simply attributes the victory to the general commander, while Judges 1 cites the particular contingent
responsible. However, two features of these reports undercut that explanation. First, the book of Joshua says that Joshua and all Israel carried out the attack. As we have seen to be characteristic of the book, the victory is portrayed as an attack by united Israel, rather than a small contingent, as in Judges 1.

Second, and of greater significance, is that the time frame for all events in Judges one is given by v. 1: “After the death of Joshua….” Thus, according to Judges 1, not only was Debir not conquered by “all Israel,” but it wasn’t even captured until after Joshua was dead and gone.

A comparable example arises with reports of the capture of Hebron. Joshua 10.36-37 reports, “Then Joshua went up with all Israel from Eglon to Hebron; they assaulted it, and took it, and struck it with the edge of the sword, and its king and its towns, and every person in it; he left no one remaining, just as he had done to Eglon, and utterly destroyed it with every person in it.”

Now here’s the story of Hebron’s capture according to Judges 1.10: “Judah went against the Canaanites who lived in Hebron (the name of Hebron was formerly Kiriath-arba); and they defeated Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai.” Rather than all Israel participating in the attack, the tribe of Judah carries out the job alone. Moreover, this again takes place after Joshua has died, rather than under his leadership.

So, once again, what is the author of Joshua 1-11 trying to do? First, as Nelson informs you, chapters 13-22 appear not to have been original to the work of the Deuteronomistic historian, and so I want to set aside the issue of why we have a book with conflicting internal reports in favor of asking what the historian who constructed the base story of this book was attempting to accomplish.

Moreover, I agree with Nelson's judgment that chapter 23 forms the original conclusion of this phase of the Deuteronomistic History, presenting a valedictory speech by Joshua, in which he sets before all Israel the challenge that lies ahead. In fact, it is characteristic of the Deuteronomistic History to mark the transition from one era to the next by means of prominent speeches that function in just this way. Moses gives his valedictory in Deuteronomy, Joshua gives his here, and we’ll see Samuel close the period of the Judges with a speech in 1 Samuel 12.

In the case of Joshua’s speech in chapter 23, the themes Joshua stresses can help us understand the author’s purpose in chapters 1-11. The narrator begins by indicating that the state of affairs he last reported – that Joshua took all the land and the land had rest from war - still prevails years later: “Israel has been given rest from all its enemies.” Now Joshua proclaims to all Israel, assembled to hear him, “I am now old and well advanced in years; and you have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake, for it is the LORD your God who has fought for you.” Here we have a reference back to the theme of the LORD’s wars on Israel’s behalf.
Lecture 9, The Book of Joshua – p. 11

But now notice Joshua’s next statements: “I have allotted to you as an inheritance for your tribes those nations that remain [notice: this is not about allocating already captured land, as in chapters 13-22], along with all the nations that I have already cut off, from the Jordan to the Great Sea in the west. 5 The LORD your God will push them back before you, and drive them out of your sight; and you shall possess their land, as the LORD your God promised you.” Here is a frank admission by Joshua that his campaign subdued only part of the land’s inhabitants. However, it is different from the reports in chapters 13-22, since it is not an admission that Israel has been unable to overcome some of the natives. And he promises that the people will ultimately be rid of these remaining nations.

At the very least, it seems that the author of chapter 23 did not have before him a story in which every last territory was conquered. Again, it has been suggested, with some cogency, that the summary of northern conquests in chapter 11 and even more so the list of additional conquests in chapter 12 were inserted into the book only at a late stage. The narrative of chapters 1-10 permits a portrayal of incessant victory enabled by the LORD without saying that every single Canaanite was expelled and every city conquered, without implying that such a task is beyond their grasp.

This in fact accords with the way the book of Deuteronomy anticipates the capture of the land. In Deuteronomy 7 Moses assures the people, “22 The LORD your God will clear away these nations before you little by little; you will not be able to make a quick end of them, otherwise the wild animals would become too numerous for you. 23 But the LORD your God will give them over to you, and throw them into great panic, until they are destroyed. 24 He will hand their kings over to you and you shall blot out their name from under heaven; no one will be able to stand against you, until you have destroyed them.” The anticipation is not of an immediate overthrow of all native enclaves, but a gradual, and yet inexorable conquest of the native peoples. And so Joshua's words in 23 are consistent with Deuteronomic anticipation.

Equally consistent with Deuteronomic thought is the way Joshua links this promise of eventual conquest of all the land assigned by the LORD with this exhortation: “6 Therefore be very steadfast to observe and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right nor to the left, 7 so that you may not be mixed with these nations left here among you, or make mention of the names of their gods, or swear by them, or serve them, or bow yourselves down to them, 8 but hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day. 9 For the LORD has driven out before you great and strong nations; and as for you, no one has been able to withstand you to this day. 10 One of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the LORD your God who fights for you, as he promised you. 11 Be very careful, therefore, to love the LORD your God. 12 For if you turn
back, and join the survivors of these nations left here among you, and intermarry with them, so that you marry their women and they yours, \textsuperscript{13} know assuredly that the \textsc{LORD} your God will not continue to drive out these nations before you; but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a scourge on your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land that the \textsc{LORD} your God has given you.”

The promise of the eventual conquest of the land is not unconditional; it depends on the people’s faithfulness. If the people remain faithful to the \textsc{LORD}, rather than assimilating to the natives of the land and their errant religions, then the \textsc{LORD} will enable them to complete the conquest. But if they do not, then the remaining natives will prove a thorn in their side who will deprive them of their place in the land the \textsc{LORD} has given them.

Notice that in giving this warning, Joshua commends the people for a sterling record to date: “hold fast to the \textsc{LORD} your God, as you have done to this day.” The challenge is to continue this pattern of obedience that yields success.

And therein lies what I would suggest is the purpose of the author in writing this story of Israel’s early battles. The image of Israel united, under the leadership of a single leader who saw to it that the people walked in the commands of the \textsc{LORD} and thereby found victory over their foes is the Deuteronomistic historian’s portrait of Israel at its finest. It is a consciously idealized story, for the author is well aware of a different Israel, as he makes plain in the book of Judges. But the point of this narrative is to play out exactly what Deuteronomy promises: if the people follow the commands of their God, the land will be theirs.

Finally, we need to take on the question Campbell presses: how did this book’s author(s) expect his/their production would be used?

Campbell raises that question in connection with chapters 3 & 4, which, as he notes, are filled with a number of peculiar twists and abnormalities. Noting that literature in the ancient world was typically mediated to the masses through a story-teller or other specialist, he suggests that the various stories laid side-by-side were meant to provide alternatives for recitation of the story.

While that is an intriguing proposal and might explain why the author was satisfied with juxtaposing different stories, it fails to explain why he didn't mark the alternatives better. E.g., you might recall from your reading that Joshua 8 preserves two different accounts of Joshua preparing for the attack on Ai, including setting up two different ambushes. Campbell contends that the author anticipates that the story-teller will pick up one version or the other, but not both. He suggests that v. 13b, in which Joshua spends yet another night before battle in a different place than the first night "may be a signal to the story-teller...of what is happening," although he admits that "we may judge it a most unclear signal." That is, indeed, the problem with seeing these as options A and B for the story-teller.
In fact, another example Campbell gives, in which all Israel returns to Joshua at the camp at Gibeon, followed by the report of the kings trapped at Makkedah and then all Israel returning to the camp there, does not involve merely optional tellings, since the return of the people to Makkedah is the starting point for the next leg of the narrative. Clearly some kind of blending of traditions is involved, but not the sort that merely provides story-tellers with optional paths. The author has directed the reader down a certain path: from Makkedah on.

What's more, Campbell's hypothesis finds little support from some of the more elaborate instances in which the author has integrated material into his narrative. E.g., 3:1-6 contain some peculiar features that are typically whitewashed in translation so as to eliminate confusion for the reader. For instance, v. 1 reports that "Early in the morning Joshua rose and set out from Shittim with all the Israelites, and they came to the Jordan. And they camped there before crossing over" The Hebrew phrasing of the first sentence is more accurately represented this way: "And Joshua rose early in the morning and they set out from Shittim with all the Israelites, and they came to the Jordan. And they camped there before crossing over" The Hebrew phrasing of the first sentence is more accurately represented this way: "And Joshua rose early in the morning and they set out from Shittim with all the Israelites, and they came to the Jordan. And they camped there before crossing over" The Hebrew phrasing of the first sentence is more accurately represented this way: "And Joshua rose early in the morning and they set out from Shittim with all the Israelites, and they came to the Jordan. And they camped there before crossing over" The Hebrew phrasing of the first sentence is more accurately represented this way: "And Joshua rose early in the morning and they set out from Shittim with all the Israelites, and they came to the Jordan. And they camped there before crossing over"

The Hebrew tries to make up for this by adding, "he and all the Israelites." This sort of phrase is used elsewhere to include more subjects than the original one, but only if there have been no plural verbs preceding it. I.e., the statement, "And Joshua rose…and set out…and came" could be followed by "he and all Israel," but not "Joshua rose…and they set out…and they came." This puts the spotlight on a peculiarity in this narrative: namely, it is not Joshua who gives orders for the conduct of the confrontation, but the officers. Only after they have done so does Joshua step onto the stage for a generalized exhortation of the people and instructions to the priests. The role for Joshua here is marginal and points to it being a secondary insertion into the passage. But if that's so, then the author has not simply provided options for story-tellers, but has woven elements into the story so as to elevate Joshua to the central character. It seems that he is trying to fashion a story that – while perhaps not smooth-flowing or integrated in all respects – is meant to form a narrative rather than a potpourri of story-telling options. This points more in the direction of the author constructing a history than a story-tellers manual. But the narrative doesn't end here.

So, how does Judges continue this story and what intent does it have? We'll see next time.