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Problems with the Eisodus Solved

*Regarding Apparent Contradictions
in the Biblical Narrative of the Book
of Joshua and the Israelite Invasion of
Canaan*

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THE EISODUS

There are, perhaps, no scriptures more contradictory on the surface than those referencing the giants of Hebron and Debir during the “Eisodus,” (a nineteenth-century theological term referring to) Israel’s invasion of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. These passages have been a windfall for the detractors of inerrancy.

The passages referring to them or those salient to the discussion are:

Numbers 13: 33

Joshua 10: 36 - 40

Joshua 11: 21 - 22

Joshua 14: 6 - 15

Joshua 15: 13 - 19

Joshua 24: 29

Judges 1: 1

Judges 1: 8 - 15

Perusal of these passages reveals many problems. Let’s examine them one by one.

Numbers 13: 33

“The Twelve Spies.” Some of the spies that Moses had sent from Kadesh-Barnea into the

Land of Canaan (two years after leaving Egypt) returned telling of “giants in the land.” I have qualified the previous sentence by saying “some of them” based upon Caleb’s words later (Joshua 14: 6–15) which suggest that Joshua himself, who we know to have been among the number of the spies, may not have actually seen the giants with his own eyes at that time, having probably gone another direction. These giants are called “the sons of Anak.”

Obviously, these “sons of Anak” were adults at the time because they produced dread in the Israelite spies who had seen them. If these were the same “sons of Anak” who are mentioned twice by name later, then by the time of the invasion of Canaan, they would have been quite old, at least eighty or so one could safely assume. Notwithstanding the fact that Joshua, Eleazar, and Caleb were this old as well, there are several scenarios that explain this ostensible problem.

1. Giants had extraordinary longevity. Although this is somewhat at odds with their presumed difficulty procreating, suggested by the fact that their numbers steadily declined over time.
2. Everyone was living longer then, on the tail-end of the decreasing longevity after the Flood. However, this seems unlikely in view of Psalm 90 (penned by Moses), which says that, at least by the time of the Exodus, 70 years was a normal lifespan.
3. “The sons of Anak” mentioned here are not the same Anakim characters mentioned later. This is to say, Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai

(who are mentioned in Joshua 15: 14 and Judges 1: 10) could have been the younger relatives of other Anakim who had died.

4. Anak himself could have been an ancestor rather than the actual father of Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai. He could have been their grandfather, for example.
5. There is also the possibility that the nomenclature “sons of Anak” is eponymic, this it is to say, a tribal name, in other words; such as “the children of Israel.”

There is also the possibility that the term “Anakim” predated the man named *Anak* in Joshua 15: 13 who is usually assumed to be the immediate progenitor of Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai.

Joshua 14: 15 says, “Arba was a great man among the Anakims.” Arba was Anak’s father. It seems counter-intuitive to call the tribe *Anakim* before the eponymous progenitor was born. Is the writer ascribing the famous tribal name to a group of people of an unknown name who predated them for the sake of identifying them for his audience? This was done for place names, such as *Dan*.

Generally, the term “Anakim” is thought to have been derived from *Anak*, the son of Arba, as mentioned in Joshua 15: 13. But let us agree that it is not outside the bounds of possibility that the term “Anakim” could have predated the historical personage here cited and that the “Anak” mentioned could, in fact, have been named after an ancestor named *Anak*. This was probably standard practice at the time and seems, for example,

to have been the case with several men named *Kenaz* who were relatives of Caleb. In fact, this is what led to the thought in the nineteenth century that Caleb was a gentile, related to an Edomite named Kenaz. But that's another story.

Suffice it to say, there is no evidence that the giants encountered forty years before the invasion of Canaan are the same historical characters encountered by Joshua, Caleb, and the children of Israel during the Eisdodus. But it would not be an intractable problem if they were.

Joshua 10: 36 - 40

Joshua Chapter 10 recounts the first major phase of the conquest of Canaan, the Southern Campaign. The entire conquest was divided into two campaigns, the Campaign Against the Southern Confederacy and the Campaign Against the Northern Confederacy, covering a total of seven years. The timeframe of the various engagements is a matter of debate, but there are Biblical clues.

Coming to the rescue of the Gibeonites with whom they had made a peace treaty, Joshua and the Israelites attack five Amorite kings from the Judean Mountains. Assisted by miraculous intervention of God, they route them, chasing them back to their respective kingdoms, which they besiege; including Hebron, which is the headquarters, we later discover, of the Anakim. Verse 37 says, "And they took it and smote it with the edge of the sword, and the king thereof, and all the cities thereof, *and all the souls that were therein*. He left nothing remaining, according to all that

he had done to Eglon *but destroyed it utterly and all the souls that were therein.*" (Italics mine.) Concerning Debir, the same words are used.

Is this problematic? It certainly is for some people; the point of contestation being, at this juncture at least, that Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai are supposed to have been there because this was their capital. But chronologically they appear later.

Apologists usually say that they fled. And this is probably correct; based upon Joshua 15: 14, which says that "Caleb *drove thence* the three sons of Anak, Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai, the children of Anak." (Italics mine.) In other words, the Israelites slaughtered everyone that was there. One cannot slaughter people who are not there.

There is also the possibility that the three Anakim were not there at all during the first assault upon Hebron and Debir. This line of thinking would assume that, during the Campaign Against the Southern Confederacy, there were at least two assaults on these cities. This is possible, given that the Southern Campaign may have taken as much as five years, based upon deductions of Caleb's age as stated in Joshua Chapter 14.

Joshua 11: 21 - 22

Joshua 11: 21 refers to the same event, taking place during the Southern Campaign. This is deduced because, after the narrative of the Campaign Against the Northern Confederacy, Verse 15, "As the Lord commanded Moses His

servant, so did Moses command Joshua. And so did Joshua. He left nothing undone of all that the LORD commanded Moses.” The subsequent verses of Chapter 11 are a flashback, recounting the Campaign Against the Northern Confederacy.

“Joshua *cut off* the Anakims from the mountains, from Hebron, from Debir. . .” “Cut off” is the Hebrew word transliterated *kârath* by Strong’s, the root of which literally means to “cut off,” that is, “excise,” as well as “cut down or asunder,” as a tree. By implication it came to mean “destroy” because it was used in covenant-making, specifically with reference to sacrificial animals. But it could also be used in a relatively positive sense in this vein, as in “making an alliance,” which would not be a logical application here, considering Israel’s antipathy to the Anakim. I submit that, rather than referring to the killing of the Anakim in this instance, what Joshua “cut off” at that time, largely through Caleb’s leadership, was the “power” of the Anakim. Notwithstanding the probability that Israel did kill a number of Anakim at this time, the phraseology probably refers more to the effect of the assault. He “toppled them,” “cut them asunder.” He “knocked their legs out from under them.”

How could Joshua and Caleb have “cut off” the power of the Anakim without totally exterminating them? They could have done this if some of the Anakim were not there or fled the approaching Israelites, as mentioned earlier. But, additionally, this statement could be made if the Anakim’s power did not reside wholly in their great stature and fearsomeness as warriors. Let me phrase the matter in a different way. How is

it that all the cities in the Judean Mountains had their own kings, who were presumably regular men? Yet the Anakim are mentioned with dread but seem to have no kingdom? Were the Anakim not able to dominate and rule? Of course, they were. I tell you that they did. The kings mentioned must have been puppet-kings, the Anakim ruling them probably through idolatrous religion, which is sorcery, and possibly finance.

Since the Anakim were called *Nephilim* by Moses in the Numbers 13: 33, the same term, which is used in Genesis 6 to speak of the hybrids produced by the cohabitation of humans and fallen angels, this is quite possible, I think. The Anakim ruled through spiritual enslavement and mind-control, possibly utilizing drug and sex addiction as tools.

This would also explain the prophecy given to Abraham, “the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete”; which is to suggest that their iniquity had only reached fruition at the time of the Eisdodus, and Israel was God’s instrument of justice. It is good to remember that Babylon was used to execute justice on Israel, and indeed other nations were used in this capacity against His own Chosen People, as well. Therefore, regardless of recriminations, we find the principle that God dealt equitably. To belabor another defense of God for the Eisdodus is an exercise in futility.

There should be no problem with equating this understanding of “cutting off” with Caleb’s “driving them thence.” But the second part of the verse is more problematic, considered in light of the fact that after Joshua’s death the Israelites were still fighting giants. “Joshua destroyed them

utterly with their cities.”

This may be immaterial, but the way I understand the grammar, the words “the cities” should be grouped with the *things*, which had been “cut off” by Joshua, the mountains and the various localities, actually appearing before the pronoun “them” which references the Anakim. In any event, the “cutting off” definitely refers to the Anakim.

If this is the case, it may lend weight to the following conjecture. The term “destroy,” which is used in the second phrase of the verse, comes from the root transliterated *charam* in Strongs Concordance. Literally, here, it is *cherimam*. This is the same word used to speak of things “under the ban,” a variation of the word *cherem* used in Joshua 6: 18 in relation to the things of Jericho and in Joshua 7: 15, which details the violation of Achan during the Ai incident, and is variously translated “devoted” or “accursed.” The Law of the *Cherem* was established in Leviticus 27: 28 and Deuteronomy 7: 25, 26. It means to be “separated” for religious significance but, here, in a negative sense. If one couples this with the following verse, it is possible that this is not referring to the death of Sheshai, Ahiman, Talmi, and other Anakim at all, but could jive with Caleb “driving them thence.” Verse 22 says, “There was none of the Anakims left in the land of the children of Israel. Only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod, there remained.” This does no violence to the idea of having “driven them out.”

The phraseology here certainly does not seem to suggest that the Anakim fled to the Philistine cities, however. If there happened to have been

a profound financial component to the Anakim's power-control apparatus, it would be a safe bet that they fled for safety for a time to the Phoenicians. But this is supposition based upon the fact that ancient Hittite and Phoenician documents (*Ras Shamra* tablets) also mention the "Rephaim," characterizing them, remarkably, much as the Bible does, as military men and giants.

Lest I seem to be straining at a gnat, let us continue to the next series of verses which reference the Anakim of Hebron and Debir and try to demonstrate that they were not creatures of fantastic legend and imagination as some suggest but real giants.

Joshua 14: 6 – 15

While petitioning Joshua because he desires Hebron as an inheritance, Caleb gives a general timeframe. He says that he is eighty-five years old. By his own admission, he was eighty years old upon crossing the Jordan. This would place his petition for Hebron five years into the invasion of Canaan and essentially into the timeframe of the Southern Campaign. Presumably, the conquest of Hebron had already taken place at this time. In any event, Joshua grants his request.

This would certainly seem to put the lion's share of the seven-year term of the conquest of Canaan in the chronological realm of the Southern Campaign. Israel seems to have been occupied there for many years before the Coalition of the Northern Kingdoms takes place.

The Chapter 11 Campaign Against the North-

ern Confederacy ends with “And the land rested from war.” In other words, although Israel continued for a long time afterward to consolidate their gains, the seven-year term of the major invasion had been accomplished. Therefore, it seems clear that the northern battles were the last ones that Israel fought as a monolithic fighting force. The five-year period mentioned by Caleb, when he petitioned Joshua for Hebron, did not occur after the Northern Campaign but before it. Or at the very best, sometime during it.

Chapter 12 is a list of Israel’s accomplishments to date. Chapter 13 begins mentioning Joshua’s advanced age and how much land is yet to be consolidated. Chapter 14 is a flashback. This conclusion is based upon Caleb giving his age as eighty-five, five years into the invasion of Canaan.

Joshua 15: 13 – 19

The real question with chronology begins at this point; that is, the fine points in discerning a congruous timeline in which no contradiction exists in the Biblical narrative of Israel’s conflicts with the Anakim and their disposition vis-à-vis Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmi.

I sincerely hope that the reader does not think my hypothesis is disingenuous but will seriously consider the possibility. The interpretation is put forward on solid grammatical grounds.

The flashback continues through Verse 17, where Caleb offers an incentive to the Israelite warriors. Whoever conquers Debir, he says, he will give the hand of his daughter in marriage.

Othniel, his nephew undertakes the challenge (Joshua 15: 16-17) and is successful. This is immediately followed, in Joshua 15: 18-19, with Caleb's daughter requesting wells of water to accompany the countryside of Debir, which had been allotted to Othniel.

These two events are mentioned together twice in the Bible, Othniel's taking Debir for the hand of Achsah in marriage and her subsequent requesting of water. It first appears in Joshua Chapter 15 and the story is recounted verbatim in Judges Chapter 1. Consequently, it must hold much importance to God and the Jewish people.

Both episodes are mentioned in both accounts as a seamless romance. Naturally, they have been interpreted as contiguous, chronologically; the first having segued immediately into the other. But there is a problem with that. In Joshua they are pictured as happening before the death of Joshua and, in the Book of Judges, after the death of Joshua. This is further complicated because, prefacing the romance in the Book of Judges, the Tribe of Judah is pictured conquering the Southern Kingdoms yet again, Hebron and Debir . . . and this, after the death of Joshua.

Naturally, Biblical expositors have viewed this as a "re-conquering" of territory, which had been reclaimed by an indigenous remnant while Israel was indisposed, camped a significant distance away at Gilgal and many years later at Shiloh. This is correct, in my estimation. But there is a more significant chronological problem with the story of Othniel and Achsah. And perhaps this impinges upon the question of the "killing" of Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai as well.

Caleb is a major player in the romance of Othniel and Achsah. He is also the significant hinge upon which to determine the correct chronology. Upon determining it, we can then ascertain, by reasonable inquiry, what literary method was employed in writing the scriptures.

Joshua 24: 29

In the concluding verse of the Book of Joshua, we are informed that Joshua died at the age of one hundred ten years old. In the opening verse of the Book of Judges, we are told that he is dead.

Judges 1: 1

Joshua lived twenty-five years after the seven-year campaigns which conclude with the final verse of Chapter 11, “and the land rested from war.” Now Caleb says that he was forty years old when he was sent by Moses as a spy into Canaan. We can reasonably assume that he and Joshua were essentially the same age. Therefore, at the beginning of the Book of Judges, when Joshua is dead, Caleb would be at least 100 years old.

Judges 1: 8 – 15

The King James Version of Judges 1: 8 says, “Now the children of Judah *had* fought against Jerusalem . . .” (Italics mine.) Presumably, the translators “paraphrased” this because they assumed this passage to have been breaking the continuity of the narrative. In other words, the translators of the Authorized Version presum-

ably considered several verses following Verse 8 as having been a flashback to earlier activity; the narrative to be picked up later in Chapter 1, the “consolidation” of the territory of Judah. I say that the translators must have “paraphrased” this verse because such delicacies of tense are not in the original Hebrew.

However, if one takes the lead of the King James translators, many questions can be resolved. (The forty-seven translators often made recourse to the Septuagint to understand problematic passages.) The main issue then becomes, “Where does the narrative resume its “present-day” chronicling of the consolidation of the territory of the Tribe of Judah?”

I believe that the transition takes place between Verse 17 and 18 of Joshua 15 and Verses 13 and 14 of Judges 1, both junctures representing the same transition in the romance of Othniel and Achsah.

If one looks closely at the two episodes one will see a glaring incongruity in the circumstances, which suggest the passage of much time. That is, unless one views both episodes as having taken place where ostensibly the Book of Judges place them, after the death of Joshua.

But there are several reasons why I do not favor this view.

1. The age of Caleb.

He would have been too old to “drive them thence.” While I can admit that it is not outside the bounds of credulity to suggest that other Israelites of the Tribe of Judah could

have done the fighting in the name of Caleb, their great general, this seems unlikely to me in view of the fact that he boasts of his prowess, quoting his age, eighty-five years old, and yet saying that he remained strong as he was when he was forty. This suggests that he intended to fight for his own territory and that in fact he did so. This is certainly the plain-text reading of the material. It is also the way Christians and Jews have naturally understood his statement.

2. Dating the romance of Othniel and Achsah.

Furthermore, placing the entire romance during the time of the Judges would necessitate that the Anakims of Hebron and Debir were initially engaged *only* by Joshua. There would have been only one assault on these cities during the time of Joshua in this interpretation; and Caleb would not be pictured in it. But the simple fact is that he is pictured requesting Hebron from Joshua; and, following this, the text says that he “drove them thence,” which is different language from “they slew Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai” from Judges Chapter 1; they referring, of course, to the Tribe of Judah as a whole and not any particular person. (Granted, this is not conclusive proof, in itself.) The romance of Othniel and Achsah, in which Caleb is a player and featuring the conquest of Hebron and Debir, which is mentioned in Joshua 15, would, under these circumstance, have to have been inserted, after the fact, into

the Joshua narrative as foreshadowing of a yet future event, but one must keep in mind the relative phrasing; “drove thence” versus “killed.” In any event, I am not aware of a precedent of the literary device of preempting information this way being used in the Old Testament; except in terms of typology.

3. The ages of Othniel and Achsah.

While the ages at which these characters became betrothed are not known, and there is room for a wide range of possibility, it would seem most logical to view Othniel, although the son of Caleb’s younger brother, as being a member of the third generation from the Exodus. The first generation had died in the Wilderness. Joshua, Caleb, and Eleazar’s generation had been born in Egypt, but most of them had also died in the Wilderness. Some of their children could well have been forty years old upon entering Canaan, given that Joshua’s generation had children around the time of the Exodus, which is probable. Even given a huge disparity of age between Caleb and Kenaz his brother, Othniel could easily have been twenty years old or more during the initial stages of the Exodus. Since Caleb was seventy-five years old or more and Achsah was his youngest daughter; she could easily have been a teenager during the first years of the Exodus.

These considerations suggest to me that the two were of marriageable age early on, in any

event. If, however, they remained single for thirty years, until the time of the Judges, they would have been ridiculously old. It is certainly possible that Caleb could have sired Achsah in his old age and even that Othniel could have been sired in old age, his father being even dramatically younger than Caleb. But it is unlikely that their mothers could have held up as well. There isn't much evidence of polygamy among the Israelites at this time. This militates for the earlier date.

In the first two verses of the romance, Othniel is conquering Debir and winning the hand of Achsah. In the later two verses, they are presumably in the land, having difficulty finding water. So Achsah approaches her father, asking for springs of water, which adjoin someone else's property.

Under the circumstances, it definitely seems as if there were a total of three assaults on Hebron and Debir.

1. Joshua's "cutting off" of the Anakim during the blitzkrieg of the Southern Campaign. Surely Caleb played a decisive role in this.
2. Caleb requesting Hebron (five years into the Eisodus) and a subsequent conquest of Hebron and Debir as the Southern Campaign dragged on with vacillations. At this time Othniel wins the hand of Achsah.
3. After Joshua's death, the Tribe of Judah, probably under military leadership to some degree or other of Othniel (under the spiritual leadership of Caleb who is still alive, though very old), again conquers the territory, this time killing Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai,

who have been a thorn in Israel's side.

Incidentally, Othniel goes on to become a largely overlooked but clearly significant Judge of Israel. He defeats Chushan-Rishathaim, King of Mesopotamia (Judges Chapter 3), who presumably conquered Israel, ruling over them for eight years. This would be Babylon, a world-class power any way you look at it. It is quiet possible that Othniel headed up the assault in which the three Anakim brothers were "killed."

It is at this time that Othniel takes possession of his property in Debir, and his wife, Achsah, approaches her father, the very aged Caleb, and requests from him watering holes.