

Joshua & Jericho - Part II



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So in the last segment we spoke some about the question of Jericho and what Jericho was. And we suggested that the word for *city* there could actually mean fort. And not only that, but we suggested that it may well have been small and it may well have been primarily noncombatants. And we looked at some of the language that's used, which sometimes people take to mean noncombatants. But rather, I should say, that there were no noncombatants there other than Rahab and her family. Another reason why people say, "Well, Jericho could not have been a fort, it must've been a city with noncombatants— old, older, elderly people, children, thousands, etc." is because it had a king, and kings aren't kings over forts, are they?

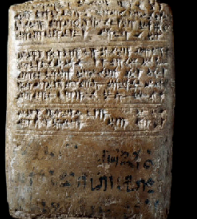
Well, let's look at the word for *king*. And when we look at it, we see the word for king in Hebrew is *melek*. It occurs three times. The word for king is used of the king of Jericho in chapter 2 and in chapter 6, where we see it's used in 2:2–3, and 6:2. It occurs five more times of the king of Jericho later on in Joshua. The traditional meaning of *king* then, if we assumed it that way, would suggest that Jericho was a kind of city, and there was a king; and Jericho would be a royal castle, and there would be a group of people living nearby who would recognize the king of Jericho as their king. But the region is pretty much otherwise uninhabited at this time. So where would the subjects live? We don't really have persons or sites mentioned in Joshua, and not a whole lot of sites are found between Adam up north of Jericho and the Dead Sea to the south of Jericho.

In that entire area of the Jordan Valley, you don't have people in it that would suggest there was a kingdom here. Well, as I mentioned to you in the first segment, I tend to enjoy looking at the ancient Near East and some of the background in order to better understand what's going on. And so I'd like to turn for a moment to what's called the Amarna correspondence. This is the largest collection of literature from the area of Israel that



Amarna Correspondence

- The largest collection of pre-Greek literature from the Israel area
- A group of over 300 letters
- Written between Canaanite princes and Egypt's pharaoh
- Written around 1,350BC



has been found before the Greek and Roman periods more than a millennium later. This is a group of over three hundred letters. You see a picture of one here. They were written in cuneiform in the Babylonian language of that era. And they were written from the princes of Canaan to their overlord in Egypt. The Pharaoh in Egypt at this time was the overlord for them, and they were written around 1,350 BC.

Now I placed the period of Joshua and the capture of Jericho towards a little more than a hundred years later, maybe 130 years later or so after these letters were written. But the society had not changed dramatically. There were still princes in Canaan, and there was still a recognition to a greater or lesser extent of an overlord in Egypt, the Pharaoh. So, these are more than three hundred letters written at this time from Canaanite princes. We have a handful of these written from the Pharaoh back to the princes in Canaan. They were discovered in Egypt, so most of the material are the letters that came to Egypt rather than duplicates of the ones that were sent out. The Pharaoh in these is most frequently called king, so that's good. "To the King, my Lord." In fact, in Jerusalem's letters, six letters come from the Canaanite king of Jerusalem, and all those letters begin this way: "To the King, my Lord, to the Pharaoh in Egypt."

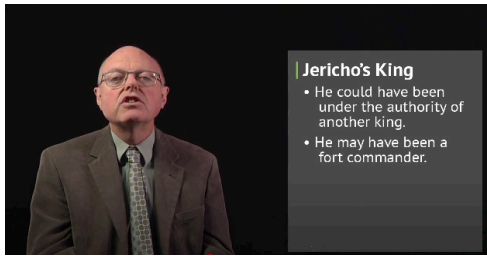
The leader of Hazor, a man by the name of Abdi-Tirsi, writes to the Pharaoh, and he also uses the term, "To the King, my Lord." Remember, this is the biggest city in all of Canaan at this time, in all of this region. But as he describes himself, he says, "This is a message I'm giving from the king of Hazor." So, he also calls himself a king using the same word in the Babylonian language, a *sharru*, in that text (the Amarna text 227). But he speaks and says, "I fall at the feet of my Lord, the Pharaoh of Egypt." So, he's not anywhere putting himself on an equal par, but he has no trouble, even though he is an underling, calling himself by the term *king*, like Abdi-Tirsi was called a king, and yet recognizes a greater king over him, the Pharaoh. So, the ruler of Jericho could have been under authority to another, whether the leader of Bethel, Jerusalem, or a coalition such as that found in Joshua 10 of Jerusalem and Bethel of various cities of the south—a southern coalition.

Jericho's king may have been a fort commander. He would have governed troops and maintained security against enemies and their agents. So, what about this? Could you have somebody who wasn't a sovereign? And, of course, the king of Jerusalem had

Amarna Correspondence

- Pharaoh is most frequently called **king**.
- Rulers in Canaan also refer to themselves as **king**.

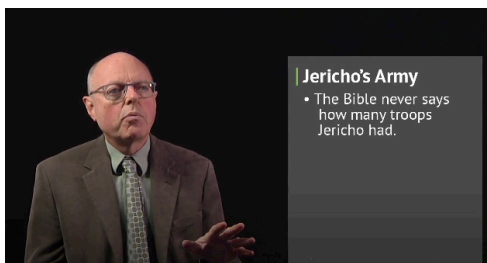
sharru
"King"



his own little kingdom there, even though he was subservient to the Pharaoh in Egypt. But could you even have more? Could you have the term *king* being used (or something like that) for somebody who was just a local appointee, like I'm suggesting we had at Jericho? Well, let's go back to these Amarna texts. There's a fellow named Piwuri, who unfortunately is murdered in the text—there's an account of his murder. But he was a commissioner of the Pharaoh. In fact, he is called a *ma-lik* of the king. And the word *malik* here is very similar to the Hebrew *melek*, which means king. And he himself was a *malik* of the king.

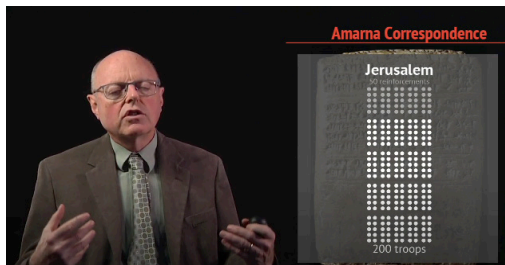


So, was he a king? No, not quite. He was in fact a commissioner. He moved around Canaan. He was in Gaza, sometimes in Jerusalem, up north in Byblos on the coast of modern-day Lebanon. And in line 31 of the text where it mentions him and his murder, he was called a commissioner. The term *commissioner* is used alongside this term of who he was. And that's very interesting. So, like Piwuri, was Jericho's *malik* a commissioner responsible to his overlord for military security in a region? Be it maybe he was responsible to the king of Jerusalem or the king of Bethel or all of them for military security, both would have been answerable to an overlord, whether the Pharaoh or the rulers in the hill country. And in this case, it would have been the rulers in the hill country for the king of Jericho. The king was, in fact, a commissioner.



Now, one other thing. What about the size of the army in Jericho? Usually this is portrayed as thousands, tens of thousands there guarding it. Is that in fact true? Well, the Bible never says how many. We don't know about the explicit size in Jericho. There are no numbers there to indicate how large, whether there are hundreds or thousands. Again, we go back to the written evidence from the fourteenth-century Canaan and the Amarna letters from this region, and the four to five city leaders in this region who request reinforcements from the Pharaoh. They request additional supplement to their army to help defend themselves: The king of Jerusalem, whose name was Abdi-Heba, the Canaanite king of Jerusalem, asks for fifty troops to defend the city. Rib-Addi also asks for fifty troops up at Byblos on the coast of Lebanon; and another city on the coast of Lebanon, the city of Tyre, which was even more significant at this time, asks for only twenty reinforcements.

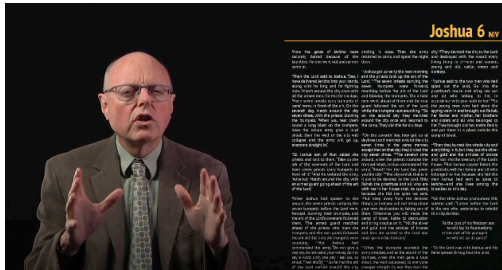
Now, Jerusalem is closest to Jericho. If he's asking for fifty additional troops to help defend Jerusalem, what was the original army size of Jerusalem? Well, fifty additional troops probably meant maybe



three or four times the requested fifty, and that the size of the army defending Jerusalem was maybe 250, 150, 200, something like that. If it had been thousands defending Jerusalem, you would only have a small percentage of an increase by asking for fifty additional troops, and that would seem to be insignificant in terms of really providing any kind of useful defense. If Jerusalem had an army of maybe two hundred troops, Jericho, which was much smaller (significantly smaller) probably had less than that. They had fewer than the number of Jerusalem given their size and their nature as a fort. They may have only had a hundred troops or even fewer. So, this is a realistic assessment of what Jericho might've looked like. A fort with maybe a hundred troops and maybe a kind of hotel or inn run by someone like Rahab and her family in order to provide for merchants or other travelers who were passing through to give them a safe place to stay.

So, it's a whole different picture, but it's an important one when we come to it being destroyed. One other thing, why then is so much attention spent and given to Jericho? There are more words describing the structure and defeat of Jericho than any other city or fort. More than Tel Hazor or Gibeon or any of the others. Well, perhaps the reason isn't because of the size of the fort of Jericho, the reason is because this was the first battle that Joshua led. Several times in the text God says to Joshua, "I am going to exalt you in the eyes of Israel at this time." In Joshua 1, God had made clear that Joshua is leader and successor to Moses. But the people needed to accept this, the Israelite army needed to accept this and be united to fight with Joshua and be guided by what he said. So, in Joshua 3:7, as they crossed the Jordan River, God says, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses."

And I want you to see this. The reason that so much attention is devoted to Jericho is it is the first miracle that God does on behalf of Joshua against the Canaanite army. And it is important because it shows to all of Israel, and beyond that to the Canaanite armies themselves and others, that God is in control, and that Joshua is God's agent, and that no one can stand against him and Israel when God leads them. Just as in chapters 3 and 4, Joshua and Israel crossed the Jordan River on dry ground through the miracle of the waters being held up. No natural barrier could stand against Joshua and Israel when God was there, as represented by the ark of the covenant, which the priests were carrying. So, no human barrier like Jericho could stand against the presence of



God symbolized by the ark of the covenant and His leading Joshua and the army of Israel.

And that's why so much attention is devoted to this. It sets the stage and it shows that this will be what will happen, whether the Canaanite armies agree or disagree. And I want to say one other thing, because sometimes so much emphasis is devoted to how nasty Joshua was to Jericho. The focus is all on the bloodthirsty killing of Jericho. But if you actually look at the number of Hebrew words in the verses in Joshua 6 that deal specifically with the battle itself, there are 102 Hebrew words. And interwoven with that is the mercy God shows to Rahab and her family to rescue them; and they are rescued and saved and delivered. And there are 86 Hebrew words in that same context that are devoted to the rescue of Rahab and her family. So, roughly the same attention is given to the salvation of Rahab and her family as is given to the destruction of Jericho and its army. And I think it's an important point for understanding that this book isn't just about destruction. It's also about mercy and salvation.