

THE DATE OF THE EXODUS-CONQUEST IS STILL AN OPEN QUESTION: A RESPONSE TO RODGER YOUNG AND BRYANT WOOD

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In my 2007 article,¹ I sought to simply set forth two lines of evidence—one biblical and the other archaeological—for considering the possibility of a late-date exodus-conquest. Young and Wood appear to believe that my short article was a response to Wood's article of 2006,² based on their notations of my failure to comprehensively respond to it. My article, however, had been accepted for publication prior to the appearance of Wood's 2006 article, and was therefore not written as a response to it. In any case, Young and Wood's critical response to my article has provided me with an opportunity to elaborate further on these matters. Since I have been invited to respond to Young and Wood's article rather than to write a full-fledged one of my own, I will limit my treatment to the topics outlined in their paper.

At the outset, I would like to clarify my intentions regarding the quest to zero in on a date for the exodus-conquest and reconstruct the Israelite settlement. Young and Wood repeatedly charge me with seeking to "discredit" the Bible, to negate its credibility, of "seeking ways to show that the Bible is not to be trusted in historical matters," and of either supporting or directly advancing "radical revisionism." These accusations about my intentions are untrue. I believe in the inspiration and authority of Scripture, and my efforts to reconstruct the background and history of the Israelite settlement are motivated by a belief that the biblical accounts reflect real events that occurred in real time, which means that historical and archaeological contexts do exist for them. The challenge for contemporary scholars is determining what those historical and archaeological contexts are. Evangelical scholars may not always reach the same conclusions regarding various historical reconstructions, but unless the methodologies or conclusions of those with whom we disagree are in direct contradiction to Scripture, we should use caution in our criticism. I will seek to show here that my methodologies and conclusions remain within the realm of possibility, despite the criticisms of Young and Wood.

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¹ "Propositions for Evangelical Acceptance of a Late-Date Exodus-Conquest: Biblical Data and the Royal Scarabs from Mt. Ebal," *JETS* 50 (2007) 31–46.

² Bryant G. Wood, "The Rise and Fall of the 13th-Century Exodus-Conquest Theory," *JETS* 48 (2006) 475–89.

I. TEXTUAL ARGUMENTS

1. *The 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1 and the chronology of Judges.* Young writes that “the 479 years of elapsed time indicated by 1 Kgs 6:1 are entirely consistent with the chronology of the book of Judges . . . whereas a thirteenth-century exodus cannot be reconciled with its time spans and sequences.” Young notes that the length of the period of the judges cannot be reconstructed by simply added up the numbers in Judges,³ but that pericopes must be distinguished based on whether they are sequenced or unprovenanced. Once unprovenanced pericopes have been identified, the interpreter must then “seek the most reasonable time to assign to the unprovenanced passages,” after which the sequenced and unprovenanced pericopes can be harmonized. Young concludes that “with the proper literal approach to the text, the pericopes in Judges are compatible with the 480th-year datum of 1 Kgs 6:1.”

I do not deny the possibility of a literal interpretation of the number 480 based on a literal harmonization of the numbers in Judges. Indeed, Robert Boling suggested that the “most plausible” solution “is one which simply adds together the first 4 years of Solomon’s rule, the 42 regnal years of Saul and David, the 136 years from Tola to Eli, the 200 years of peace under the saviors, the 53 years of oppression, and the 45 years implied in Josh 14:1. The total is 480.”⁴ This tabulation, however, is still a harmonization. The point that I was trying to make,⁵ however, and that Hoffmeier argued in his response to Wood,⁶ is that, on a straightforward reading, the lengths of time recorded as having transpired between the exodus and the beginning of construction on the Temple seem to have exceeded 480 years. Whereas Wood insists that there is a “biblical” chronology laid out with regard to the exodus-conquest,⁷ Hoffmeier argues that “biblical chronology does not provide us with an absolute date for the exodus.”⁸ I showed that a literal reading of the numbers could produce a duration of 515 years from the exodus to the beginning of construction on the temple;⁹ Block reached an aggregate total of 593 years;¹⁰ and Hoffmeier tabulated 633 years.¹¹ There was apparently confusion about the duration from the exodus to the beginning of construction on Solomon’s Temple as well. The LXX records 440 years instead of 480 (1 Kgs 6:1). Josephus gives two different numbers for the period. In his *Antiquities* he reports the duration as covering 592 years,¹² and in *Against Apion* he recounts it as

³ A point I implied in “Propositions” 35.

⁴ Robert G. Boling, *Judges: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1975) 23.

⁵ “Propositions” 35.

⁶ James K. Hoffmeier, “What is the Biblical Date for the Exodus? A Response to Bryant Wood,” *JETS* 50 (2007) 227–29.

⁷ Wood, “Rise and Fall of the 13th-Century Exodus” 475.

⁸ Hoffmeier, “Response to Wood” 226.

⁹ “Propositions” 35.

¹⁰ Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth* (NAC 6; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999) 61.

¹¹ “Response to Wood” 228.

¹² 8.3.1.

612 years.¹³ Surely the authors of the LXX were concerned to give the “scriptural” length of the period from the exodus to the founding of the temple! And surely Josephus did not want to be regarded as unreliable in his reporting. The point, however, is simply that the actual length of time spanned by this period is not as unambiguous as Young and Wood want to insist.

Young notes recent articles by Paul Ray¹⁴ and Andrew Steinmann,¹⁵ both of whom have sought to harmonize the 480 years of 1 Kgs 6:1 with the chronology of Judges. While these authors recognize that there is some degree of overlap among some of the judgeships, they seem generally to view the appearance of the judgeships in the book of Judges as occurring more or less in chronological order. On the basis of his determinations of which judgeships overlap and which do not, Steinmann even reconstructs an “absolute” chronology.¹⁶ K. L. Younger, on the other hand, notes several problems with working out a chronology for the period, including the unknown amount of overlap, the author’s use of numbers, and the inadequate historical presentation of all of the judges, especially the “minor” judges.¹⁷ Younger also notes that, though many scholars believe Eli and Samuel functioned as judges in Israel, they are not included in the book of Judges.¹⁸ These difficulties were observed long ago by the Jewish statesman, philosopher, and Bible commentator Don Isaac Abravanel (1437–1508), who noted that Samuel may not, in fact, belong at the *end* of the period of the judges.¹⁹ Abravanel also observed that the two stories at the end of the book of Judges could have taken place at any time during the period of the judges. Rabbi Felix observes the fact that the book of Judges begins with the Hebrew *vav* and suggests on that basis that the placement of 1 Samuel after Judges in the canon may not necessarily be to indicate that the events it records follow chronologically after those in the preceding book. He proposes instead that the placement of the book there may be to provide a contrast between Judges and Samuel.²⁰ Younger concludes that “it is important to remember that the book is very much a selective presentation designed to reinforce the author’s didactic message” and that “the precise chronology of the period of the judges is unknown.”²¹

2. *480 years as 12 generations.* Young argues that “the reduction of the 480 years into twelve generations of forty years fails because of [the] wrong practice of equating the ‘generation’ with a period of forty years.” Throughout

¹³ 2.2.19.

¹⁴ Paul J. Ray, “Another Look at the Period of the Judges,” in *Beyond the Jordan* (ed. Glenn A. Carnagey, Sr.; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005) 93–104.

¹⁵ Andrew E. Steinmann, “The Mysterious Numbers of the Book of Judges,” *JETS* 48 (2005) 491–500.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 498–500.

¹⁷ K. Lawson Younger, Jr., *Judges, Ruth* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002) 24–25.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* Younger notes that 1 Sam 12:11 makes Samuel’s judgeship explicit.

¹⁹ Cited by Rabbi Yehuda Felix, “Hannah, the Mother of Prayer,” in *The Tanakh Companion to the Book of Samuel* (ed. Nathaniel Helfgot; Teaneck, NJ: Ben Yehuda, 2006) 26.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 27.

²¹ Younger, *Judges* 25.

the OT, however, forty years is considered both a generation (e.g. Ps 95:10) and an era (e.g. Jdg 3:1; 5:31; 1 Sam 4:18; etc.). As Hoffmeier noted in his reply to Wood,²² the connection with a generation probably began with such statements as: “For the people of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the nation, the men of war that came forth out of Egypt, perished” (Josh 5:6); and “For forty years I loathed that generation” (Ps 95:10). Through regular usage as such, the number forty appears to have come to mean something to the effect of “a long time,” which is how Hess recently rendered it in line 5 of his translation of the Moabite Stone.²³

Young also argues here that the word דֹר (“generation”) does not refer in any of the passages under discussion to a period of time. He explains that “this could not be the meaning in the case of Israel in the wilderness because every parent who had children twenty years old or older died together with those children; this would have been two generations dying in the wilderness if the meaning were a lapse between the birth of the parent and the birth of the child.” While the term דֹר is usually translated as “generation,” the study of the Hebrew word and its Semitic cognates suggests that it may be more accurately translated as “a lifetime” or even “a cycle of time.”²⁴ D. N. Freedman and J. Lundbom note that “with this meaning *dor* becomes a measure of time or a period of time.”²⁵ They explain that:

Like other ancient peoples, the early Hebrews dated long periods by lifetimes. They divided long periods of time into segments corresponding to the life-span of a generation. This is the meaning of *dor* in Gen. 15:16. The difficulty came in attaching numerical values to a generation, and the *’arba’ me’oth* in Gen. 15:13 were reckoned as 400 years (4 generations of 100 years each). The idea that four generations equals 400 years, which lies behind Gen. 15:13, is undoubtedly based on an artificial scheme which assigns 100 years to a generation.²⁶

The years included within a דֹר are not consistent, but vary from one passage to another. For example, in Job 42:16, four generations cover 140 years. The dynasty of Jehu is said to have included four generations, which reigned for only 70 years (815–745 BC; 2 Kgs 10:30; cf. 15:12). It appears that in these and other cases דֹר can and does describe a period of time.²⁷

3. *The 480 years as a symbolic number.* Young reads a lot into my brief mention of Burney, in which I simply noted Burney’s calculation of 480 years as having elapsed between the time of the first temple and that of the return from exile, without commenting on his methodology. Young suggests that I

²² Hoffmeier, “Response to Wood” 237.

²³ Richard S. Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007) 275.

²⁴ Cf. S. R. Driver, “Notes and Studies,” *JTS* 36 (1935) 403; W. F. Albright, “Abram the Hebrew: A New Archaeological Interpretation,” *BASOR* 163 (1961) 50–51.

²⁵ Cf. D. N. Freedman, J. Lundbom, and G. J. Botterweck, “דֹר,” *TDOT* 3:174.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ In addition, “generations” are interpreted in *1 Enoch* and in *Jubilees* as a series of weeks. See *1 Enoch* 10:12; *Jub.* 5:10.

apparently follow Wellhausen in believing that the regnal data for Solomon and his successors were “manipulated” and “falsified” to produce a “fictitious” 480 years, and that what I have proposed suggests that the regnal data of Kings are “not genuine history.” Nowhere in my article did I say that I subscribed to Wellhausen’s reconstruction of the process of composition for Kings or that I believed the data for Solomon and his successors were “falsified.” In fact, I did not cite Wellhausen, nor do I draw upon his theories for the composition of biblical books. Young himself explains the theory that an ancient editor added up the numbers from the time of the first temple to the return from the exile, derived a 480-year figure, and then projected this figure back into the time between the exodus and the start of the temple construction. In this theory, the 480 of 1 Kgs 6:1 is derived from the subsequent regnal data of 1–2 Kings. While the correspondence of the 480 of 1 Kgs 6:1 with the 480²⁸ of the period from the first temple to the return from exile may be due to the hand of an editor who wanted to draw a connection between the two eras, I do not see this as a necessary explanation.²⁹ I noted above the plausible solution proposed by Robert Boling, and others have offered similar reconstructions.³⁰ Based on the aforementioned difficulties with working out a chronology of the period of the judges, I am inclined to take it as a figurative number, an approximation of the duration from the exodus to the beginning of construction on the first temple. Regardless of exactly how the author of 1 Kings derived the number 480 in 1 Kgs 6:1, it corresponds, at least generally, to the length of the time that transpired in the subsequent period to the return from exile. This correspondence does not imply that any of the numbers are “falsifications.” As Clyde Miller cogently observed, “God, who was providentially guiding the affairs of Israel, could have so utilized [specific periods of time] as to give them symbolic significance as a result of Israel’s actual history. This certainly seems to be what God was doing with those many regulations in the law which gave the number seven symbolic significance.”³¹

Young argues, however, that “[the] problem with these schemes is that they are just too clever.” He wonders “what purpose this might serve, since the pattern had to wait until modern times to be discovered.” Young assumes that the notion that the 480 of 1 Kgs 6:1 corresponded with another period of 480 spanning the era between the first temple and the return from exile originated with Wellhausen,³² and he argues that “there is no indication that ancient readers would have understood it in any other sense.” However,

²⁸ Whether approximate or exact.

²⁹ Noth also rejected the view that the 480 years had to do with the period from the construction of Solomon’s temple to the return from exile. Cf. M. Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* (Darmstadt: Halle M. Niemeyer, 1943) 18–27.

³⁰ E.g. S. J. De Vries, “Chronology, OT,” *NIDB* Supplement (gen. ed. Keith Crim; Nashville: Abingdon, 1976) 162.

³¹ Clyde M. Miller, *First and Second Kings* (The Living Word Commentary on the Old Testament vol. 7; Abilene, TX: ACU, 1991) 140.

³² See his note 14.

Abravanel observed this correspondence over 300 years before Wellhausen, and noted that there must have been some unknown divine plan behind these time frames.³³ The contemporary rabbinic commentaries on the *haftarot* generally follow this view.³⁴ As I noted in my previous article, Nahum Sarna suggested that the plan behind this arrangement may have been to portray the building of the first temple as “the central point in the biblical history of Israel.”³⁵ Interestingly, rabbinic commentators have viewed the number 480 as recurrent throughout their history. Based on the midrashic principle that “the actions of the forefathers are a sign for the children,”³⁶ rabbinic commentators have believed that, through the story of the forefathers, the Torah also teaches the outline of what to expect in later periods of Jewish history.³⁷ According to this timeline, there were approximately 480 years from Abraham’s recognition of God until the emergence of the Hebrews as a free nation.³⁸ The same number of years then passed from the exodus until the building of the first temple in Jerusalem. After the building of the first temple, 480 years elapsed until the second one was built. Another 480 years transpired until the rebellion of Bar Kochba. After an equal amount of time, the Talmudic period ended and that of the Geonim began. After another 480 years, the Rif and Rabbeinu Gershom lived, ushering in the period of the Rishonim in Spain and Germany. This period also lasted about 480 years until the time of Rav Yosef Karo and Rav Moshe Isserles, the authors of the *Shulchan Aruch*. The production of this work inaugurated the period of the Acharonim, during which Jewish scholarship and life was centered in and around Europe. This period came to an end some 480 years later with the Holocaust.³⁹ The point is, Orthodox Jews have regarded their history as having occurred in these cycles or eras. The tendency to break history into eras has been a feature of numerous cultures from antiquity,⁴⁰ and so the possibility of its presence in the Bible should not be surprising.

4. *Young’s identification of Jubilee and Sabbatical cycles.* A large portion of Young’s half of the article is devoted to a discussion of the Jubilee and

³³ Isaac Abravanel, *Peyrush ‘al Neviy’im ri’shoniym* (Jerusalem: [s.n.], 1969) 484ff.

³⁴ David L. Lieber, ed., *Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary* (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 2001) 500; Michael Fishbane, *JPS Bible Commentary: Haftarot* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2002) 121.

³⁵ Cf. Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Origins of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986) 9.

³⁶ מעשה אבות סימן לבנים (Bereishit Rabba 40).

³⁷ See, for example, Rabbi David Cohen, *Templates for the Ages: Historical Perspectives through the Torah’s Lenses* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah, 1999).

³⁸ These numbers are viewed as approximations.

³⁹ Cf. Rabbi Hersh Goldwurn, *History of the Jewish People: The Second Temple Era* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah, 1982); Meir Holder, *History of the Jewish People: From Yavneh to Pumbedisa* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah, 1986).

⁴⁰ Cf. Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology: Principles of Time Reckoning in the Ancient World and Problems of Chronology in the Bible* (rev. ed.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998) 92–116.

Sabbatical cycles,⁴¹ which he argues show that the 480 years are literal years. I will discuss here the two Jubilee years to which Young points in the Talmud, as well as some of the years he claims were Sabbatical years. The first passage which Young argues points to a Jubilee year is Ezek 40:1, in which Ezekiel notes that he received a vision in the twenty-fifth year of the captivity, and that it was בְּרֵאשִׁית הַשָּׁנָה, “at the beginning of the year.” The *Seder ‘Olam* and the Talmud claim that a Jubilee year occurred at this time.⁴² While Young⁴³ asserts that Ezekiel’s notation that it was “the beginning of the year” is a reference to the seventh month of the year, Tishri, this is not agreed upon among commentators. While some commentators have understood this to be a reference to Tishri,⁴⁴ most have interpreted it as a reference to Abib (Nisan).⁴⁵ The following reasons suggest that it should be understood as a reference to Abib (Nisan):

- (1) The Torah stipulated that the New Year was to be inaugurated with Abib (Nisan).⁴⁶ In the course of the instructions about the departure from Egypt and the Passover, Exod 12:2 states that “this month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first month of the year for you.” While the year of Jubilee was to begin on 7/10, the Day of Atonement, no autumnal month is ever called the first month.⁴⁷ The custom of beginning the year with Tishri was eventually adopted, but not until long after the captivity.
- (2) It seems doubtful that Ezekiel, a priest (1:3), would have contradicted the Torah with regard to such an important issue as the liturgical calendar.⁴⁸ Hummel notes that the liturgical rituals he prescribes in Ezek 45:18–25, which also presuppose a spring New Year, confirm that he did not.⁴⁹ Hummel concludes that “even if a calendar whose year began in the autumn had already been accepted in everyday life in the OT era, there is no indication that the liturgy had ever abandoned its ancient method of beginning the year in the spring (Nisan).”⁵⁰ Keil suggests that בְּרֵאשִׁית הַשָּׁנָה “is a contracted repetition of the definition

⁴¹ Cf. R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1980); John E. Hartley, *Leviticus* (WBC 4; Dallas: Word, 1992); Baruch Levine, *Leviticus* (The JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989); Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 2001).

⁴² *S. Olam* 11; *b. Arak.* 12a.

⁴³ Following *Arak.* 12a.

⁴⁴ E.g. Keith W. Carley, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (London: Cambridge, 1974) 268.

⁴⁵ See the citations in the following four points.

⁴⁶ As observed by C. F. Keil, *Ezekiel, Commentary on the Old Testament* vol. 9 (trans. James Martin; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1865–1892) 343–44.

⁴⁷ James C. Vanderkam, “Calendar,” *NIDB* 1:524.

⁴⁸ Ralph H. Alexander, “Ezekiel,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (ed. Frank E. Gaebelein; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 953.

⁴⁹ Horace D. Hummel, *Ezekiel 21–48* (Concordia Commentary; Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007) 1194.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

contained in Ex. 12:2, ראש חֳדָשִׁים ראשון לְחֹדֶשׁ הַשָּׁנָה, and signifies the opening month of the year, i.e., the month Abib (Nisan).⁵¹

- (3) The usage of the civil calendar throughout the book of Ezekiel corresponds with an interpretation of Ezek 40:1 as a reference to Abib (Nisan) as the beginning of the year.⁵²
- (4) Young argues that the fact that the date is given as “on the tenth day of the month” is indicative that Ezekiel saw his vision at the beginning of a Jubilee year. Ezekiel’s calendrical reference, however, is not indicative, as the tenth day of the month carries importance in the first as well as in the seventh month.⁵³ Eichrodt suggests that the tenth day may have held special significance in the priestly terminology.⁵⁴ May observes that it was on the tenth day of the first month that the Hebrews entered into the Promised Land (Josh 4:19; cf. Exod 12:3). In addition, following its construction and dedication, the glory of Yahweh filled the Tent of Meeting on the first day of the first month (Exod 40:1–38), an occasion with which Ezekiel may intend to draw a parallel, since it will be on this same day that Yahweh will enter the new temple (43:1–5).⁵⁵ Keil concludes that “the tenth day of this month was the day on which the preparations for the Passover, the feast of the elevation of Israel into the people of God, were to commence, and therefore was well adapted for the revelation of the new constitution of the kingdom of God.”⁵⁶

The rabbinic traditions on which Young relies (*Arak* 12a) are attempts to resolve the chronographic indicators in Ezek 40:1, which explains the lengthy discussion among the sages attested to therein. These discussions witness to the academic speculation that took place in the Jewish academies, in which the various phrases in Ezek 40:1 were discussed and interpreted. Michael Fishbane explains that the assignment of a seventeenth Jubilee to the passage is a back-assessment, and the conclusions drawn about Ezek 40:1 are midrashic speculation, as Rabbi Eleazar of Beaugency (12th century) pointedly acknowledged in his commentary on Ezek 40:1.⁵⁷

The second Jubilee to which Young points is one that *Seder ‘Olam* and the Talmud claim was observed in the eighteenth year of Josiah.⁵⁸ The claim that a Jubilee was celebrated at this time is very weak.⁵⁹ The account

⁵¹ Keil, *Ezekiel* 344.

⁵² As observed in Walter Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970) 540.

⁵³ Cf. Exod 12:3; Lev 23:27; 25:9; Num 29:7.

⁵⁴ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel* 540.

⁵⁵ Herbert G. May, “Exegesis of the Book of Ezekiel” (IB 6; ed. G. A. Buttrick; New York: Abingdon, 1956) 284.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ March 25, 2008 letter, in the writer’s files. Cf. Eleazar De Beaugency, *Peyrush ‘al Neviy’iym ‘achroniym*.

⁵⁸ *S. Olam* 24; *b. Meg.* 14b.

⁵⁹ Young has already noted the spurious nature of the rabbinic traditions on which this is based. See Rodger Young, “The Talmud’s Two Jubilees and Their Relevance to the Date of the Exodus,” *WTJ* 68 (2006) 72–73.

in 2 Kings only records two phases of Josiah's reform: first, the purification of Judean religion (23:1–20, 24–27); and second, an effort to centralize worship in Jerusalem along with the celebration of the Passover in Jerusalem. The celebration of the Passover festival during the Josianic reform is very significant, as the text reports that this marked the first time that this holy day had been observed since the days of Joshua (2 Kgs 23:21–23). If the priests had allowed the Passover to go unobserved since the days of Joshua, it seems extremely unlikely that they would have kept meticulous track of the sabbatical and Jubilee cycles.

Young identifies a number of Sabbatical years in Scripture, though none of them is identified as such in Scripture. The first case he cites is that of Jer 34:8–10, which reports a release of slaves during the Babylonian siege of the sixth century BC. After the Babylonian siege had begun (ca. 588 BC), the people made a solemn covenant to release their slaves, apparently hoping thereby to gain the favor of Yahweh. However, after some time, the Egyptians extended aid to Israel, and the Babylonians consequently lifted the siege (Jer 37:6–11). Following the cessation of the Babylonian siege, the Israelite slave owners took back their slaves. Young argues that, based on the release of the slaves, this must have been a Sabbatical year. However, the term used here is דָּרוֹר (*dror*), “release,” from the legislation in Leviticus 25 regarding the Jubilee year, instead of שְׁמִטָּה (*shemittah*) or “remission,” which is the term used for the year of remission in the legislation for the Sabbatical year (Deut 15:9). This is indeed a perplexing passage, as verses 8b–11 seem to refer to a general liberation of slaves, as in a Jubilee year (Lev 25:39–55), while verses 14–15 refer to the release of slaves who have served six years, in accordance with the legislation for the Sabbatical year (Deut 15:12–18). The release proclaimed by Zedekiah does not, therefore, conform to either passage, but seems to combine them both in a kind of mass manumission. Hyatt suggested that the action described here must have been a release by special proclamation of the king under an emergency situation,⁶⁰ much like the ancient Near Eastern practice of *mesharum* acts. Keown, Scalise, and Smothers describe the *mesharum* as follows:

The king, usually on the occasion of his accession to the throne, would declare a temporary measure of debt relief. F. Kraus's study of Old Babylonian *mesharum* texts reveals that they were not enacted at fixed intervals of years but rather in response to specific needs. They provided a way to exalt the new king as protector of the weak by alleviating excessively oppressive debt loads resulting from wartime disturbances of the economy or poor harvests. Law codes published later in the reign usually included provisions for gaining release from debt slavery. If such regulations had been followed during the previous king's reign, the *mesharum* act would have been unnecessary.⁶¹

Keown, Scalise, and Smothers suggest that Zedekiah's proclamation of release is like the Babylonian *mesharum* acts. “Neglect of the customary means of

⁶⁰ James Philip Hyatt, “The Book of Jeremiah: Exegesis” (IB 5; ed. G. A. Buttrick; New York: Abingdon, 1956) 1056.

⁶¹ Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26–52* (WBC 27; Dallas: Word, 1995) 185.

limiting the servitude of debtors (Deut 15) had created a situation ripe for the king's proclamation (v 14b).⁶² That the customary means had been neglected is made clear by verses 12–14, which reviews the law of release and then notes that it had not been followed in Israel's history:

The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah from the LORD: Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I myself made a covenant with your ancestors when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, saying, "Every seventh year each of you must set free any Hebrews who have been sold to you and have served you six years; you must set them free from your service." But your ancestors did not listen to me or incline their ears to me. (Jer 34:12–14)

Verse 15 states that the people had only recently repented of this and did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh "by proclaiming liberty to one another." Apparently, the law had been disregarded for years. The people's repentance was short-lived, however, and it was not long after the release had been put into effect before the Hebrews recaptured their slaves "and brought them again into subjection to be your slaves" (v. 16). This was a case of "foxhole religion" or "death-bed repentance."⁶³ During a time of siege, Zedekiah sought to compel the people to act in a way that reflected the values of the Law, but when the siege was lifted, they took their slaves back. If the entire passage reveals anything, it surely highlights the perpetual neglect by Israel of its Sabbatical year laws and their concomitant provisions of justice and, since these years culminated in the year of Jubilee, it also suggests that observance of the year of general manumission was also not regularly practiced in the life of Israel.

Another of Young's supposed Sabbatical years is connected with a sign offered by Isaiah in the midst of the Assyrian siege: "This year eat what grows of itself, and in the second year what springs from that; then in the third year sow, reap, plant vineyards, and eat their fruit." Young states that "this has no explanation unless that year was a Sabbatical year." The natural reading of this passage, however, followed by most commentators, is that the context for this passage has to do with the fact that the land had been ravaged by the Assyrian siege, not that it was a Sabbatical year. The sign given by Isaiah is a promise of restitution offered to a remnant of Judah and Jerusalem, with the understanding that the change in fortune would only unfold gradually, over a three-year period. Hans Wildberger writes:

It is assumed in the present case that the inaction caused by the war has hindered people from planting the fields. Since working the fields fully would not be possible in the second year either, only "wild growth" would be available for food. This would indicate that the need would be even more severe the second year, since one could expect only a very minimal harvest that would grow from the few seeds that would have fallen as the first harvest was gathered. But the third year would bring normalcy back to what had been a threatening situation. One would sow again and would get to harvest—a miracle that would be seen

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ John Bright, *Jeremiah* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1965) 224.

as a sign from Yahweh for his people, assuring them that he had turned back toward them again.⁶⁴

The second year of Isaiah's prophecy, in which the people would be dependant on volunteer growth, is probably simply an indication that the land was in a sad condition due to the occupation of the Assyrians, and there are no indications in the text that this was a Sabbatical year.⁶⁵

In the case of the Sabbatical year Young finds in the eighteenth year of Josiah, the reading of the Law (2 Kgs 23:2) was not on the occasion of a Sabbatical year since, as we saw above, Israel's ancestors had failed to implement the Sabbatical year system (Jer 34:14).⁶⁶ Instead, the text states explicitly that this was a covenant renewal (2 Kgs 23:3),⁶⁷ which also included the reading of the covenant document.⁶⁸ Far from showing the continuity of Israel's piety, the text suggests that the contents and commands of this newly discovered document had long since been forgotten and had therefore gone unobserved. Brueggemann persuasively explains that,

The negative counterpoint of this act, implied and not stated, is that over long years of carelessness and indifference, covenantal dimensions of life have been forgotten and neglected, so that through ethical carelessness, religious indifference, and theological heterodoxy, Israel's peculiar identity and vocation in the world have been abandoned. Thus, the narrative presents Josiah's act as an act of such profound importance that it parallels the founding act of Moses at Sinai and the renewing act of Ezra. This act is nothing less than the recovery of a lost destiny.⁶⁹

As in the case of Zedekiah's *mesharum* act, rather than showing the people's piety, this occasion reinforces the fact of Israel's neglect of the Law and the revolutionary nature of Josiah's reinauguration of its observance. Young's other postulated Sabbatical years are either inferred or depend entirely on rabbinic tradition. Just as is the case with the Jubilee years, "there is no direct reference to a sabbatical year being observed in the OT period."⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 28–39* (A Continental Commentary; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002) 430.

⁶⁵ Most commentators subscribe to this view. E.g. Franz Delitzsch, *Isaiah: Commentary on the Old Testament* vol. 7 (trans. James Martin; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1865–1892) 367–68; Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 13–39: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974) 396–97; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39* (NIC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 664–65; Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 498–501.

⁶⁶ Or, if they had implemented it at all, they had failed to follow it for very long.

⁶⁷ E.g. T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings* (WBC 13; Waco, TX: Word, 1985) 332; Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings* (NAC 8; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995) 387; Volkmar Fritz, *1 & 2 Kings* (ACC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) 402–3; Donald J. Wiseman, *1 & 2 Kings: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993) 299–300.

⁶⁸ George E. Mendenhall and Gary Herion, "Covenant," *ABD* 1:1179–1202; P. R. Williamson, "Covenant," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003) 139–55.

⁶⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000) 554.

⁷⁰ Christopher J. H. Wright, "Sabbatical Year," *ABD* 5:860.

5. *Young's use of his hypothetically identified Sabbatical year and Jubilee cycle data.* On the basis of the two Jubilees he has identified in the Talmud, Young then points to Lev 25:1–10, which states that the Israelites were to begin counting tithes, Sabbatical years, and Jubilees upon their entrance into the land of Canaan.⁷¹ On this basis, Young counts backward from the seventeenth Jubilee (Ezek 40:1) in increments of 49 years⁷² to 1406 BC as this inaugural date. There are at least three problems with Young's methodology and conclusions.

First, the conclusions Young draws from the dating are not in accordance with the rabbinic chronology that serves as the basis of his work. Based on the postulated seventeenth Jubilee of Ezek 40:1, which Young dates to the Day of Atonement, Tishri 10 of 574 BC, Young counts backward to 1406 BC, at which he places the Israelite entrance into Canaan. Since Israel was to start counting the cycles when they entered the land of Canaan (Lev 25:1–10), Young dates this as the first Jubilee and counts forward accordingly. This is not in accordance, however, with the rabbinic materials which Young claims substantiate his early-date exodus-conquest. According to the *Seder 'Olam Rabbah*, the Israelites did not begin counting Sabbatical and Jubilee cycles until fifteen years after their entrance into the land of Canaan:

One has to say that 14 years Israel spent at Gilgal, seven when they were conquering and seven when they were distributing. After that (Jos. 18:1) "All the congregation of the Children of Israel assembled at Shiloh and there they put up the Tabernacle." At that moment, they started to count years for tithes, sabbatical years, and Jubilee years. (Jos. 22:1–2) "Then Joshua called the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the semi-tribe of Manasse and said to them: you kept everything that Moses, the Servant of God, had commanded you; you listened to my voice for all orders that I gave you." Joshua sent them to their tents and blessed them. On their return they built a big altar for view. Joshua celebrated with them the first sabbatical year; he died before he finished the second one.⁷³

An interesting problem emerges here. The author(s) of the *Seder 'Olam Rabbah* note that fourteen years passed after the Israelites first entered Canaan, and then state that Israel "started to count years for tithes, sabbatical years, and Jubilee years." *Seder 'Olam* seems to say that what occurred upon the Israelites' entrance into Canaan was that they began counting, not that they celebrated a Jubilee year. The injunction in Lev 25:1–7 has also been variously interpreted. Verse 2b states that, "When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land shall observe a Sabbath for the Lord," and the following verses go on to explain how the regulations for the Sabbath year are to be observed:

⁷¹ Young and Wood, "Critical Analysis" 15.

⁷² Young argues that the Jubilee cycle was 49 years in length, rather than the 50 years that is typically assumed. See Young, "The Talmud's Two Jubilees" 75.

⁷³ Heinrich W. Guggenheimer, *Seder Olam: The Rabbinic View of Biblical Chronology* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2005) 116–17.

Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land, a sabbath for the LORD: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your unpruned vine: it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. You may eat what the land yields during its Sabbath—you, your male and female slaves, your hired and your bound laborers who live with you; for your livestock also, and for the wild animals in your land all its yield shall be for food. You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years. Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month—on the day of atonement—you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land. And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family. (Lev 25:3–10)

Some interpreters have understood Lev 25:2 as saying that, upon entering the land of Canaan, Israel immediately celebrated a Sabbatical year.⁷⁴ In this case, “it resembles the practice of the *mīšarum* issued by the Babylonian kings during the year of their accession to the throne.”⁷⁵ It seems more natural, however, to understand Lev 25:3–8 as an explanation of how the Sabbath mentioned in verse 2 was to be carried out. If this is correct, then “the principle of Sabbath rest is now applied to a seven-year period in which the final year is to be observed as a Sabbath to the Lord.”⁷⁶ If *Seder ‘Olam Rabbah* is correct that that the Israelites only “started to count years for tithes, sabbatical years, and Jubilee years” after they had been in the land for fourteen years, and if they began counting the first year of the first Sabbath year cycle in the following year, then they would not have celebrated a Jubilee until they had been in the land some sixty-five years.

In any case, Young counts backwards from a hypothetical Jubilee year in 574 BC, based on Ezek 40:1, to 1406 BC, the year in which he argues that Israel entered Canaan. The date of the exodus according to *Seder ‘Olam Rabbah*, however, has been calculated to about 1313 BC⁷⁷ or 1312/1311 BC.⁷⁸ Subtracting 40 from 1312/1311, the rabbis reached a date of about 1272/1271 BC for the entry into Canaan.⁷⁹ The rabbinic chronology is not, in fact, in accordance with the early date.

The second problem has to do with Young’s methodology for utilizing the rabbinic materials. Young admits that rabbinic calculations were inaccurate,

⁷⁴ Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27* 2152.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Harrison, *Leviticus* 224.

⁷⁷ Roger T. Beckwith, *Calendar and Chronology, Jewish and Christian: Biblical, Intertestamental and Patristic Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) 257.

⁷⁸ Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (rev. ed.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998) 111.

⁷⁹ Edgar Frank, *Talmudic and Rabbinical Chronology: The Systems of Counting Years in Jewish Literature* (New York: Philipp Feldheim, Inc., 1956) 19.

noting, for example, that “rabbinical calculation methods were not capable of correctly calculating that there were forty-nine years between Josiah’s eighteenth year and Ezekiel’s vision,” and yet he argues that their traditions regarding the Jubilee are correct. Young accepts as historical the rabbinic traditions that support his argument, while ignoring the many egregious errors in rabbinic chronology. The scheme of *Seder ‘Olam Rabbah* begins at creation and ends with the destruction of the temple in AD 70. The chronology is very condensed, with the length of the Egyptian sojourn abbreviated by taking the figure in Exod 12:40 to include the patriarchs’ years in Canaan. Its dates for the exile are inaccurate by over a century and a half, dating the exile to 423 BC. The discussion of the post-biblical period in *Seder ‘Olam Rabbah* is controlled by Daniel’s 70 weeks, or 490 years,⁸⁰ in which the Persian period is allotted only 34 years, abbreviating it by some 165 years.⁸¹ The idea that *Seder ‘Olam* contains “genuine historical memory” is very weak. The fact that it depends on biblical numerology (especially Daniel’s prophecy of the 490 years) to calculate reign lengths and other figures both demonstrates its author’s lack of extrabiblical historical information and leads to egregious errors. I have already mentioned the problems with the Talmudic materials. Young argues that these rabbinic materials “can be taken as a historical reference independent of the scriptural record, the same as if some ancient document from the Near East mentioned a date that could be tied independently to a biblical date.”⁸² There are very serious problems with using a source from the 5th century AD (or later), namely the Babylonian Talmud, to determine the date of events that took place in the late second millennium BC.⁸³ The bottom line, however, is that “rabbinic and/or Talmudic information is almost never considered reliable for chronology.”⁸⁴ Not only that, but their traditions about the Jubilee cannot be considered as reliable. The fact is that “there is simply no evidence of a national jubilee in the extant historical documents of Israel.”⁸⁵ The silence of the historical documents does not prove that it never happened, but it does prevent us from reconstructing a biblical chronology on that basis.

⁸⁰ Neither Young nor Keil take the 70 weeks, or 490 years, mathematically. See C. F. Keil, *Daniel, Commentary on the Old Testament* vol. 9 (trans. M. G. Easton; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1865–1892) 725–60; E. J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 201–21.

⁸¹ Cf. Judah M. Rosenthal, “Seder Olam,” *Encyclopedia Judaica* 2d ed. vol. 18 (ed. Fred Skolnik; Jerusalem: Keter, 2007) 235–36.

⁸² Rodger C. Young, “When Did Solomon Die?,” *JETS* 46 (2003) 601.

⁸³ Young appears to want to regard the rabbinic traditions the same way archaeologists and biblical scholars would regard a material or inscriptional discovery contemporaneous with some biblical event as providing a contemporary, independent witness to that event. The Talmudic materials, however, are not contemporaneous with the events under discussion here (the exodus and conquest), but are removed from them by about a millennium and a half. They are the product of another age and culture, and their purposes for writing and their understanding of history and its uses are all different from those of the biblical authors. See Jacob Neusner, *The Idea of History in Rabbinic Judaism* (The Brill Reference Library of Judaism vol. 12; Leiden: Brill, 2004).

⁸⁴ Marc Brettler, March 23, 2008 letter, in the writer’s files.

⁸⁵ Christopher J. H. Wright, “Jubilee, Year of,” *ABD* 3:1028.

A third area which I would identify as problematic in Young's argument is the idea that symbolic numbers can not be used in a narrative. Young began his discussion of the Jubilee and Sabbatical cycles by suggesting that only scholars influenced by redaction criticism would "seek to impose a non-literal 480 years in the midst of an otherwise historical account." The inclusion of a symbolic number in the midst of a historical account would not, however, be evidence that a document had been redacted. Indeed, biblical materials regularly incorporate genre changes.⁸⁶ In the midst of the narratives of the conquest, we have nine chapters comprising a series of border descriptions (Joshua 13–19);⁸⁷ in the midst of the narrative of Abimelech's attempt to establish a monarchy, we have a fable about trees (Jdg 9:7–15). Prophetic books often contain passages belonging to different genres, even within the same chapter. For example, Isaiah 5 begins with a poem (vv. 1–7), shifts to a series of oracles of woe (vv. 8–23), turns next to a series of proclamations of divine judgment (vv. 24–25), and concludes with a poetic description of the Assyrian army (vv. 26–30). The NT is no different. In the midst of narratives about the life of Jesus, we have sermons (e.g. Matt 5:1–7:28), prayers (e.g. Matt 6:9–13), and even fictional parables (e.g. Matt 22:1–14). Bruce Chilton notes that "throughout the Bible, differing genres often appear within individual works, which indicates that genres do not represent fixed types of communication to which biblical books can be made to conform."⁸⁸ Arguing that a symbol cannot occur in the midst of a historical account is unreasonable.

6. *Conclusions.* At present, it seems to me that two possible options present themselves as the best contenders for understanding the 480 years of 1 Kgs 6:1. The first is that the 480 years constitute an Israelite *Distanzangabe*, or given distance,⁸⁹ a term denoting a large block of time linking the founding of a temple or the restoration of a cult to earlier events. Hoffmeier points to the case of Tukulti-Ninurta's declaration that 720 years had elapsed between the time of the initial construction of the Ishtar temple in Ashur and his own reconstruction of it at the beginning of his reign. Julian Reade suggests that the reference to 720 years is probably not literal, but that it may derive either from "12 times 60" or from multiplying the number of kings listed in the king list between the two monarchs, which is 45, and multiplying that number by 16, thought to be the average reign

⁸⁶ Cf. John Barton, "Form Criticism (OT)," *ABD* 2:838–41.

⁸⁷ Cf. Richard S. Hess, "Asking Historical Questions of Joshua 13–19: Recent Discussion Concerning the Date of the Boundary Lists," in *Faith, Tradition & History: Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context* (ed. A. R. Millard, J. K. Hoffmeier, and D. W. Baker; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994) 191–205; Z. Kallai, *Historical Geography of the Bible: the Tribal Territories of Israel* (Jerusalem: Magnes/Leiden: Brill, 1986) 277–325.

⁸⁸ Bruce Chilton, "Genre," *NIDB* 2:556.

⁸⁹ As suggested in Hoffmeier, "Response to Wood," 237–39. Cf. Wiseman, *1 & 2 Kings*, 104; K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 307–8; idem, "Chronology," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* (ed. Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005) 181–82.

length, thus producing the number 720.⁹⁰ Hoffmeier concludes his discussion of the number 480 with these questions:

Could it be that the 480 years of 1 Kgs 6:1 is an Israelite *Distanzangabe*? If so, its purpose was not to provide a historical datum *per se*, but rather to create a link between the building of Israel's temple and the event that led to YHWH becoming the God of Israel. The same is true of Assyrian and Egyptian *Distanzangaben*. The connection of all these texts to the construction of a temple must be taken seriously. Is the 480-year figure in 1 Kgs 6:1 an example of the use of a large symbolic number rather than a literal number and does it represent a "convention of the penman's milieu"?⁹¹

The second option is the previously discussed idea of the number 480 as a product of 12×40 . In a recent discussion of this, Dale Manor has noted that a careful reading of Chronicles, in combination with Exodus, reveals that there were 12 generations from the Exodus to the high priest who presided over the construction of Solomon's Temple.⁹² Based on the possibility that 12 generations were involved, Manor notes the prospect that the number 40, instead of always functioning as an arithmetic number, may have sometimes functioned as a metaphor for a generation. Noting that some Egyptian sources indicate that his twenties would often be the time when a man would father a child,⁹³ Manor suggests that if one rounds the number to 25 and multiplies it by 12 generations, the result is 300 years. Adding 300 years to the fourth year of Solomon's reign produces a date of about 1266 BC, "well embedded in the reign of Rameses."⁹⁴ These two approaches are closely related, both viewing the number 480 as designed to constitute an "era" between the time of the exodus and the beginning of the construction of the first temple.

II. ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS

In my original article, I discussed the Mt. Ebal structure under the heading of "new archaeological evidence." In Wood's critical analysis, he puts "new" in quotations, calling this description into question. Even though the Mt. Ebal site was discovered over 20 years ago, it is still "new" in that its material remains are still being processed by The Zinman Institute of Archaeology at the University of Haifa. A final report has not yet been published for the Ebal site, because work is still being carried out there. A new, small-scale excavation season was launched in 2007 in order to collect C-14 samples

⁹⁰ Julian Reade, "Assyrian Kinglists, The Royal Tombs of Ur, and Indus Origins," *JNES* 60 (2001) 3–4, cited in Hoffmeier, "Response to Wood" 238. Reade also discusses other examples of *Distanzangabe*.

⁹¹ Hoffmeier, "Response to Wood" 239.

⁹² Cf. Dale Manor, "Joshua," in *Old Testament Introduction* (ed. Mark Mangano; Joplin, MO: College Press, 2005) 216–18. Manor points to 1 Chr 6:3–10 and Exod 6:16–25, which imply that Phineas was alive when the exodus commenced.

⁹³ Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 3: *The Late Period* (Berkeley: University of California, 1980) 168.

⁹⁴ Manor, *Joshua* 217.

for the final publication report. Unfortunately, this expedition was canceled by the Israeli army due to security conditions in the area. The Ebal data is also “new” in the sense that, for a variety of reasons, few are familiar with it. There has never been a scholarly colloquium held regarding the Ebal materials, nor has it received any sustained examination from the academy. In addition, new insights continue to arise from archaeological surveys, which are still being carried out.⁹⁵

1. *Settlement data and the emergence of Israel.* Wood argues that “the Iron I settlement data . . . undermine Hawkins’s thesis since the material culture of the Iron I settlers exhibits continuity with the previous Late Bronze culture, indicating they were not newcomers at all, but had been in the land for a considerable period of time.” Wood states that “this continuity is best seen in the pottery.” Wood apparently agrees with Dever’s understanding of the Israelite pottery forms as having evolved from Canaanite predecessors.⁹⁶ Based on the affinities he finds between the Late Bronze prototypes and the Israelite pottery, Dever concludes that the Israelites must have originated from among the Canaanite population that lived in the coastal areas of Canaan.⁹⁷ While the Pentateuchal sources and Joshua both speak of an entrance into Canaan from the east, across the Jordan, Dever argues that “there is simply no archaeological evidence that ‘Earliest Israel’ was ever in Transjordan.”⁹⁸ Dever proposes instead that ancient Israel was made up of disaffected Canaanites who withdrew to the hill country during and following the LB/Iron 1 transition.⁹⁹ Recent studies of the settlement patterns and accompanying archaeological data demonstrate that there was an increase in settlement in central and northern Transjordan in the Late Bronze II.¹⁰⁰ The process of sedentarization is evidenced by the establishment of a series of both walled and unwalled settlements, which increased in the early Iron Age I.¹⁰¹ Collared-rim jars and four-room houses appeared at a number of

⁹⁵ See Ralph K. Hawkins, review of *The Manasseh Hill Country Survey* vol. 1: *The Shechem Syncline*, by Adam Zertal, *Culture and History of the Ancient Near East* 21 (ed. R. Halpern, M. H. E. Weippert, Th. P. J. van den Hout, and I. Winter; Leiden: Brill, 2004), in *NEASB* 51 (2006) 50–51.

⁹⁶ William G. Dever, *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 121–25.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 121.

⁹⁸ William G. Dever, “Archaeological Data on the Israelite Settlement: A Review of Two Recent Works,” *BASOR* 184 (1991) 77–90.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 191–221.

¹⁰⁰ C.-H. C. Ji, “Settlement Patterns in the Region of Hesban and ‘Umeiri, Jordan: A Review of 1973–1992 Archaeological Survey Data,” *NEASB* 43 (1998) 1–21; Ø. S. LaBianca and R. W. Younker, “The Kingdoms of Moab and Edom: The Archaeology of Society in Late Bronze/Iron Age Transjordan (ca. 1400–500 BCE),” in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (ed. T. E. Levy; London: Leicester University, 1995) 399–411; E. J. van der Steen, “Aspects of Nomadism and Settlement in the Central Jordan Valley,” *PEQ* 127 (1995) 141–58.

¹⁰¹ C.-H. C. Ji, “Israelite Settlement in Transjordan: The Relation between the Biblical and Archaeological Evidence,” *NEASB* 41 (1996) 61–67; E. J. van der Steen, “Survival and Adaptation: Life East of the Jordan in the Transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age,” *PEQ* 131 (1999) 176–92.

these sites, a fact which, though it does not prove the ethnicity of the inhabitants of these sites, is characteristic of the Israelite settlement in Canaan.¹⁰² Larry Herr has noted the strong similarities of the material culture of Tell al-ʿUmayri with that of the highlands of Cisjordan.¹⁰³ Tell al-ʿUmayri is one of the earliest Iron I sites in Palestine, contemporary with Mt. Ebal and Giloh, contains the same limited repertoire of pottery and finds as highland sites in Cisjordan, and shares a material culture most similar to the hill-country north of Jerusalem, particularly from the region of Shechem. The most frequent bowl type at ʿUmayri is the “Manasseh bowl”; two collared-rim storage jars bear the same potter’s mark as some jar rims from Ebal; some of the seals from ʿUmayri are similar to trapezoidal seals from Ebal; and over 30 seals are similar to a kind of Cisjordanian seal.¹⁰⁴ It appears that finds from Tell al-ʿUmayri, along with those of a handful of other sites in the Madaba plains, bear a striking similarity and may represent “a contemporaneous regional cultural entity.”¹⁰⁵ Rainey has recently published a chart that demonstrates the derivation of the Cisjordanian pottery forms not from Canaanite predecessors, but from Transjordanian forms.¹⁰⁶ The archaeological data suggests that the Hebrews came into Canaan from east of the Jordan before and during the LB/Iron Age I transition, and that they brought some of their material culture with them, not that they had been in the Cisjordanian central hill country since the 15th-century BC, sharing the material culture of the Canaanites.¹⁰⁷

2. *The Ebal structure and Joshua 8:30–35.* I never specifically stated that the Ebal structure was, in fact, Joshua’s altar. The presence of the structure on Mt. Ebal, however, does beg the question of whether or not it has any association with the biblical account. In any case, Wood’s criticisms are aimed at three aspects of my discussion of the Mt. Ebal site: date, location, and size. I will respond to each of these in turn.

a. *The chronological problem.* Wood states that “in order to relate Zertal’s altar to Joshua, Hawkins, by necessity, must date the entry of Israel to ca. 1200 BC, the time when the altar was constructed.” I did not assign a specific date for the Israelite entrance into Canaan, though I did note that the two

¹⁰² C.-H. C. Ji, “The East Jordan Valley During Iron Age I,” *PEQ* 129 (1998) 19–32.

¹⁰³ Larry G. Herr, “Tell el-ʿUmayri and the Madaba Plains Region During the Late Bronze-Iron Age I Transition,” in *Mediterranean Peoples in Transition: Thirteenth to Early Tenth Centuries BCE* (ed. S. Gitin, A. Mazar, and E. Stern; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1998) 251–64.

¹⁰⁴ Larry G. Herr, “The Settlement and Fortification of Tell al-ʿUmayri in Jordan during the LB/Iron I Transition,” in *The Archaeology of Jordan and Beyond: Essays in Honor of James A. Sauer* (ed. L. E. Stager, J. A. Green, and M. D. Coogan; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000) 175–76.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 177.

¹⁰⁶ Anson F. Rainey, “Whence Came the Israelites and Their Language?,” *IEJ* 57 (2007) 51.

¹⁰⁷ For more archaeological data that points to an Israelite migration into the land of Canaan in the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age I, see Ralph K. Hawkins, “The Survey of Manasseh and the Origin of the Central Hill Country Settlers,” in *Critical Issues in Early Israelite Origins* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming).

scarabs from Mt. Ebal establish a *terminus post quem* of the mid-to-late 13th century BC.¹⁰⁸ I would date the exodus to sometime after 1279 BC and the beginning of the conquest/settlement to sometime before 1210 BC, when, as Wood notes, the Merneptah Stele attests to its presence in Canaan.

b. *The location problem.* With regard to the issue of location, Wood raises legitimate concerns. It is not on the very peak of Mt. Ebal; instead, it is located on the second of four terraces descending the eastern side of the mountain. Mt. Gerizim cannot even be seen from the site. This may seem to be in contradiction to the injunction of Deut 11:29–30 and 27:2–8. However, as Zertal noted, while Deut 11:29 does state that the curses are to be read עַל-הָרֵי עֵיבָל, or “on Mount Ebal,” Deut 27:4 and Josh 8:30 state that the structure is to be built בְּהַר עֵיבָל, or “in Mount Ebal.”¹⁰⁹ Zertal suggested that the use of the ה rather than עַל may hint “that Joshua’s altar was not at the top of the mountain.”¹¹⁰ Indeed, Pitkänen noted that the ceremony need not have taken place at the site of the altar.¹¹¹

Another factor that may have a bearing on the issue of the location of the Ebal structure in relation to Mt. Gerizim is the possibility that the traditional location of Mt. Gerizim may be incorrect. This is not a new suggestion, but is connected with the ancient debate about the Samaritan Pentateuch’s version of Deut 27:4, which reads “Mt. Gerizim” in place of the Masoretic Text’s “Mt. Ebal.”¹¹² Eusebius believed that the Samaritan identification of Jebel et-Tor as Mt. Gerizim was incorrect.¹¹³ Indeed, no Iron Age remains have been discovered on Jebel et-Tor.¹¹⁴ Zertal has recently proposed an alternative identification of Mt. Gerizim with Jebel Kebir, the mountain adjacent to Ebal on its eastern side, in the direction of the Jordan River.¹¹⁵ If this identification is correct, then the Ebal structure would be visible to parties standing both on Mt. Ebal and on Mt. Gerizim.

c. *The size and shape problem.* Wood notes that the Ebal structure is “monumental” in proportion and rectangular in shape, “not square as prescribed by Mosaic law.” Wood overlooks the fact, however, that Mosaic Law mentions and gives legislation for multiple kinds of altars, including an earthen altar (Exod 20:24), an altar of unworked stones (Exod 20:25), and

¹⁰⁸ “Propositions” 39–45.

¹⁰⁹ The preposition ה (beth) has “in” as its primary meaning. Cf. F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1979) 88.

¹¹⁰ A. Zertal, “Has Joshua’s Altar Been Found on Mt. Ebal?” *BAR* 11 (1985) 43.

¹¹¹ P. Pitkänen, *Central Sanctuary and Centralization of Worship in Ancient Israel: From the Settlement to the Building of Solomon’s Temple* (2d ed.; Gorgias Dissertations 6, Near Eastern Studies 4; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2004) 227.

¹¹² Debate about the SP’s presumed change from Ebal to Gerizim is quite ancient. See Josephus, *Ant.* 13.3.4, secs. 74–79.

¹¹³ *Onom.* 65.

¹¹⁴ I. Magen “Gerizim, Mount,” *NEAEHL* 2:484–92.

¹¹⁵ See Adam Zertal, *A Nation is Born: The Altar on Mount Ebal and the Emergence of Israel* (Tel Aviv: Yedioth, 2000) 225–39 (Hebrew).

the tabernacle altar (Exod 27:1–8). With respect to the altar of unworked stones, completely lacking are “any specifications concerning the dimensions of the altar, its length, width, and height, whether it was round, square or oblong, whether its base and the top were equal or there was a gradual decrease of its size, and whether there were horns.”¹¹⁶ The only concern the text does specify is the height of the stone altars, which would preclude the maintenance of modesty during their ascent. In order to address this problem, the text stipulates that steps not be used (Exod 20:26). This explicit prohibition “implies that another means such as a ramp would be acceptable.”¹¹⁷ The Mt. Ebal structure is most evocative of the altar of unworked stones.¹¹⁸ The command for the building of the Ebal altar in Deut 27:5–6 repeats the prohibition of Exod 20:25 against working the stones to be used in its construction. Likewise, Josh 8:31 specifically cites Exod 20:24–25 in its account of Joshua’s fulfillment of that command. Zevit concluded that the Ebal structure “may be considered a most elaborate example of the stone field altar.”¹¹⁹

Wood seeks to compare the Ebal structure with two “contemporary” Israelite altars, the tabernacle altar, and the altar at the Arad sanctuary. Neither of these, however, is contemporary. The tabernacle altar only survives in the literary record, which places it in the Mosaic period, which would date to the Late Bronze Age I (1550–1400 BC) or the Late Bronze Age II (1400–1200 BC), depending on whether one followed the early or late date for the exodus. The Arad altar, which dates to Iron Age II (1000–586),¹²⁰ is similar to the Ebal structure in terms of its construction. It is built of unhewn stones with a fill. The Arad construction, however, is a medium-sized altar and does not have the special characteristics of the larger structure at Mt. Ebal.¹²¹ Wood states that the Ebal structure “would have been totally out of keeping with known Israelite altars of the period.” The fact is, however, that there are no known Israelite altars contemporary with the Ebal structure.¹²² The

¹¹⁶ Paul Heger, “Comparison and Contrast Between the Two Laws of the Altar: Ex. 20:22 *כִּי חִרְבַּךְ הַנֶּפֶת* and Deut. 27:5 *לֹא תִנֶּה עֲלֵיהֶם בְּרוּל* in Consideration of Their Historical Setting,” in *Proceedings of the Twelfth World Congress of Jewish Studies, Jerusalem, July 29-August 5, 1997* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1999) 106.

¹¹⁷ Ziony Zevit, *Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallaxic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001) 199.

¹¹⁸ Ralph K. Hawkins, “The Iron Age I Structure on Mount Ebal: Excavation and Interpretation” (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 2007) 260.

¹¹⁹ Zevit, *Religions in Ancient Israel* 199–200.

¹²⁰ Wood dates it to Iron Age I. The dating of the sanctuary has been vigorously debated. For recent discussion, see Anson F. Rainey, “Hezekiah’s Reform and the Altars at Beer-sheba and Arad,” in *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King* (ed. M. D. Coogan, J. C. Exum, and L. E. Stager; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994) 333–54; William G. Dever, “Were There Temples in Ancient Israel? The Archaeological Evidence,” in *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion* (ed. G. Beckman and T. J. Lewis; Providence, RI: Brown University, 2006) 300–316.

¹²¹ For Ebal’s special characteristics, see Hawkins, “The Iron Age I Structure on Mt. Ebal” 34–100.

¹²² See *ibid.* 181–216. “Manoah’s altar,” near Zorah, and the four-horned altar near Shiloh, may date to the Iron Age I.

site is essentially anomalous in terms of physical parallels. However, when one compares the Ebal structure with the literary traditions of the Hebrew Bible and extra-biblical Second Temple sources which include descriptions of ancient Israelite altar sites, it appears that the central structure conforms to most of the biblical principles of Israelite altar architecture.¹²³ Based on the altar typology outlined by Robert Haak,¹²⁴ the construction on Mt. Ebal most closely resembles the type Ib open-air altar in that it is unassociated with a sacred building, though it was constructed of unworked stones instead of carved from the natural rock.¹²⁵

Finally, Wood writes that "it makes little sense that Joshua would erect an altar as large as Zertal's for a one time ceremony." However, altars played an important role in centralizing peoples in the ancient world.¹²⁶ According to the discussions in Deut 27:1–10 and Josh 8:30–35, the cultic site on Mt. Ebal played a central role in crystallizing ancient Israel's national consciousness at this early stage in their history. A monumental altar was warranted by the momentousness of this event.

III. CONCLUSIONS

Young and Wood conclude their article by suggesting that my arguments for a late-date exodus-conquest "do not hold up to critical analysis." In this rejoinder, I have sought to show that the date of the exodus-conquest is still an open question. As one can see from my discussion of the settlement data and the Ebal site, I am inclined at present toward the later date. I agree, however, with Hoffmeier, who wrote that, "should . . . new evidence emerge that would support the 15th-century theory, I would shift my position, because I am not ideologically committed the 13th-century date."¹²⁷ Hoffmeier concluded his article by urging evangelical scholars "not to expend all their energies on defending a date for the exodus when the real debate today is whether the books of Exodus-Judges contain any history at all and if there was a sojourn and an exodus."¹²⁸ The Mt. Ebal site, which has largely been ignored by the scholarly community, has much to contribute to our understanding of early Israelite society. If the structure on Mt. Ebal was an Israelite cultic site—whether Joshua's altar or not—then it may attest to social organization, centralization of cult, and a crystallizing national consciousness at this early stage in the people's history.¹²⁹ The origin of the Ebal site is also "consistent with the dramatic settlement activity in the central hill country

¹²³ See *ibid.* 224–67.

¹²⁴ Robert D. Haak, "Altar," *ABD* 1:162–67.

¹²⁵ An example of the type Ib open altar is Altar 4017 at Megiddo, though it is fundamentally different from the Ebal structure in its shape and design. The Ebal structure also resembles the Iron Age I structure at Giloh, which may be a *bamah* or other cultic structure. For a brief discussion, see Ralph K. Hawkins, "Giloh," *NIDB* 2:574.

¹²⁶ Haak, "Altar" 162–67.

¹²⁷ Hoffmeier, "Response to Wood" 247.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Hawkins, "Iron Age I Structure on Mt. Ebal" 268–83.

early in the twelfth century B.C.”¹³⁰ These are important implications that may substantiate the biblical portrayal of early Israel as a people unified by their faith in Yahweh even in this early period when they entered the land of Canaan.¹³¹ These data should stimulate further inquiry into Israel’s early history with a view toward the recovery of the OT past.¹³²

¹³⁰ George L. Kelm, *Escape to Conflict: A Biblical and Archaeological Approach to the Hebrew Exodus and Settlement in Canaan* (Fort Worth, TX: IAR Publications, 1991) 280.

¹³¹ See Ralph K. Hawkins, “From Disparate Tribes to ‘All Israel,’” *NEASB* 50 (2005) 27–39.

¹³² I would like to thank Anthony J. Tomasino and James K. Hoffmeier for reading preliminary drafts of this article and offering useful suggestions for improvement. Any errors are solely my responsibility.