THE DAY THE SUN DID NOT STAND STILL:  
A NEW LOOK AT JOSHUA X 8-15

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I

The story in Josh. x 1-27 is prima facie a reasonably coherent and seemingly unified account, obviating the need for documentary hypotheses and surgical techniques of analysis. Indeed, as one surveys the scholarly literature,¹ especially that of the post-war era, one cannot but be impressed by the extent of agreement on the question of the text’s literary unity. The scholarly consensus includes such diverse scholars as Sigmund Mowinckel, G. Ernest Wright, and Yehezkel Kaufmann, as well as the pre-eminent commentator on Joshua, Martin Noth. One has to go back to the first third of the century to find a radically different analysis based on a view of the text as composite.²

In the discussion which follows, we shall subject this consensus to a critical analysis with the purpose of demonstrating its untenability. We shall argue that Josh. x 1-27 is composed of two originally independent narratives, representing two distinct literary genres. These narratives have been secondarily grafted on to each other in such a way as to distort the meaning of one of them. The final portion of the study will draw out the literary-historical implications of the analysis.

¹ Cf. the Select Bibliography at the conclusion of the article.
² The turning point seems to have been W. Rudolph’s Der Elohist..., published in 1938. Prior thereto opinion is more or less evenly divided. Among the early proponents of a unitarian approach are J. Wellhausen (1899), O. Procksch (1906), and C. Steuernagel, Das Buch Josua [2nd edn, Göttingen, 1923]). Defenders of the composite view include H. Holzinger (1901), R. Smend (1912), and O. Eissfeldt (Hexateuch-Synopse [Leipzig, 1922]).
II

Vss 1-7 are virtually straightforward. A coalition of five Canaanite city-states, headed by the king of Jerusalem, undertakes a punitive campaign against the neighbouring city of Gibeon because of the latter’s defection to the side of the Israelites camped in the Jordan Valley near Jericho. In this respect our story continues the narrative in ch. ix. The Gibeonites, faced by this intimidating force, send an S.O.S. to Joshua who forthwith comes to the rescue with his mighty warriors.

Yet even this simple and seemingly coherent portion of the narrative raises some misgivings when closely scrutinized. Thus vs. 2 speaks of Gibeon as “a large city, as one of the royal cities, even bigger than the (city of) Ai, and all its people warriors”. This description is not quite consistent with the image of the Gibeonites in ch. ix. In fact, from the latter one has the impression that Joshua holds a grudge against the Gibeonite “con-artists” for their deception, and that the Israelites would not necessarily have risked life and limb to save them from reprisal action by their neighbours.