

THE VALLEY OF ACHOR (JOSHUA 15.7):
A SETTING OF SIN (JOSHUA 7.24, 26),
HOPE (HOSEA 2.17), AND NEW CREATION
(ISAIAH 65.10)*

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1. *Introduction*

The Valley of Achor (עמק עכור) appears within four contexts in the Hebrew Bible:

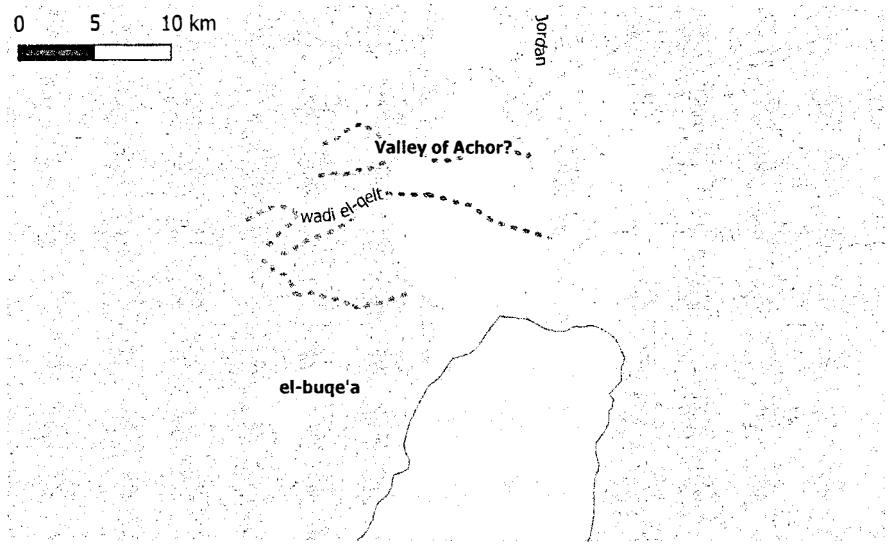
1. Josh. 7.24 and 26 as the valley where the חרם breacher Achan and his family are sentenced.
2. Josh. 15.7 as a point in the description of the northern boundary of Judah.
3. Hos. 2.17 as a setting of hope for Yhwh's people.
4. Isa. 65.10 as a place for cattle together with the Sharon plain.

Whereas the occurrence in Josh. 15.7 carries no symbolic meaning, those in Hos. 2.17 and Isa. 65.10 contrast sharply, if not completely, with Josh. 7.24 and 26; in short, positive symbolism in Hosea 2 and Isaiah 65 versus negative symbolism in Joshua 7. If no other valley or valleys with the same name exist, which is unlikely because the Valley of Achor appears to have been a known location, then this divergence is remarkable. It opens up many questions—whether there were two or more traditions relating to this valley, and whether those traditions were dependent on each other, or whether the divergence is merely coincidental? And why do occurrences of the Valley of Achor occur within the context of a new creation in Isaiah and Hosea?

* For my dear colleague Antti, whom I have known for 35 years, and with whom I share, besides the love for Bible and Judaism scholarship, playing chess—alas, I never beat him. I hope this contribution might be a little herald of good tidings.

To propose an answer to these questions, I will, after having dealt with the individual occurrences and their context, analyze the possible inter-connections between the traditions and thereafter, the motifs of hope and new creation.

The exact location of the Valley of Achor is disputed. There are two serious candidates, *wādi en-nuwē'ime* (grid reference 19.14), to the northeast of Jericho, and *el-buqē'a* (c. 18.12), to the southwest of Jericho.¹ It is important to know the exact location to understand the role of the Valley of Achor in the texts, but it is only in dealing with the texts that we can assess this question.



Map 1. Possible locations of the Valley of Achor.²

1. For *el-buqē'a*, see Martin Noth, 'Das Deutsche Evangelische Institut für Altertumswissenschaft des Heiligen Landes Lehrkursus 1954', *ZDPV* 71 (1955), pp. 2-59 (42-55). For *wādi en-nuwē'ime*, see Hans W. Wolff, 'Die Ebene Achor', *ZDPV* 54 (1954), pp. 76-81; Hans W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten 1: Hosea* (BKAT, 14/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1961), pp. 52-53; Heinz-Dieter Neef, 'Die Ebene Achor—das "Tor der Hoffnung": Ein exegetisch-topographischer Versuch', *ZDPV* 100 (1984), pp. 91-107; Erasmus Gass, 'Hosea zwischen Tradition und Innovation am Beispiel von Hos 2,16f', *ZAW* 122 (2010), pp. 169-84. The localization in *en-nebī mūsā* by Abel has not found much support; see Felix-Marie Abel, *Géographie de la Palestine. Tome II: Géographie politique. Les Villes* (EBib; Paris: Gabalda, 3rd edn, 1967), p. 48.

2. All maps were drawn in QGIS (<https://www.qgis.org/en/site/>) on the basis of geodata from the Ancient World Mapping Center (<http://awmc.unc.edu/wordpress/>).

2. Joshua 15

As the Valley of Achor occurs within the context of other points in the northern border of Judah, this is the best starting point for trying to locate the valley. The northern border of Judah (Josh. 15.5b-11) is quite detailed with a lot of fixed points.³ It runs from east to west beginning at the 'northern tongue of the Sea, from the edge of the Jordan' (v. 5b). The sea in question here is the Salt or Dead Sea, and the edge of the Jordan is the mouth of the Jordan into the Dead Sea.⁴ The Dead Sea, however, stretched much further to the north in ancient times than nowadays, probably as far as *maḡādat haḡle* (201.136) if not further north.⁵ For our purposes, only the eastern part of the boundary is interesting, from the mouth of the Jordan to the Ascent of Adummim.

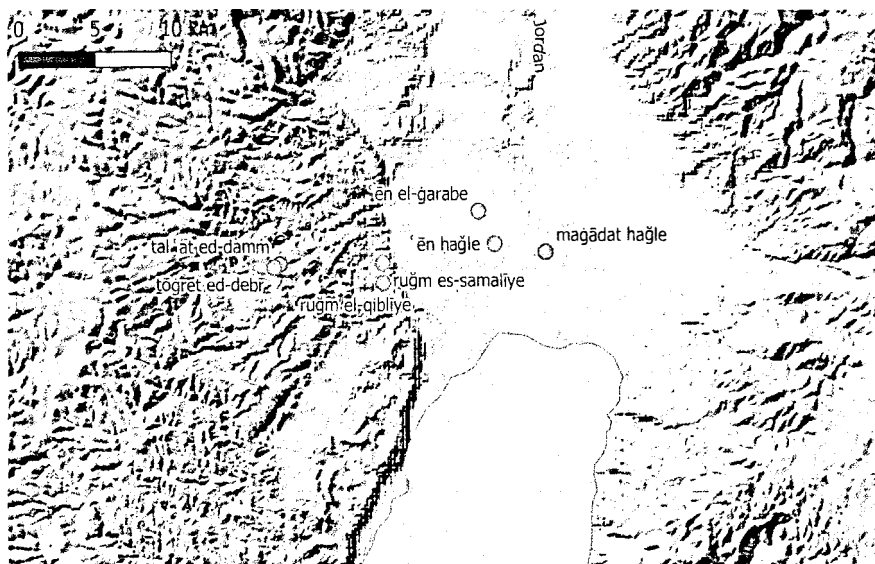
The Ascent of Adummim is the only point in the boundary which can be located with relative certainty, namely in *tal'at ed-damm* (184.136).⁶ All other attempts to pinpoint a location between the mouth of the Jordan and the Ascent of Adummim are uncertain; from east to west: Beth-hoglah, Beth-arabah, Stone of Bohan, Debir cj., Valley of Achor, Geliloth cj. (vv. 6-7). I—and many others—conjecture הגלגל, 'Gilgal', to גלילות (cf. Josh. 18.17), 'Geliloth'.

3. On the northern boundary of Judah, see Yohanan Aharoni, 'The Northern Boundary of Judah', *PEQ* 90 (1958), pp. 27-31; Albrecht Alt, 'Zur Geschichte der Grenze zwischen Judäa und Samaria', *PJ* 31 (1935), pp. 94-111; Gershon Galil, 'Geba'-Ephraim and the Northern Boundary of Judah in the Days of Josiah', *RB* 100 (1993), pp. 358-67; J. Cornelis de Vos, *Das Los Judas: Über Entstehung und Ziele der Landbeschreibung in Josua 15* (VTSup, 95; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), pp. 317-40; Adam S. van der Woude, 'Zur Geschichte der Grenze zwischen Juda und Israel', in Adam S. van der Woude (ed.), *New Avenues in the Study of the Old Testament: A Collection of Old Testament Studies* (OTS, 25; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), pp. 38-48.

4. C. Clermont-Ganneau, 'Où était l'embrochure du Jourdain à l'époque de Josué?', *Recueil d'archéologie orientale* 5 (1902), pp. 167-280; G.F. Wright, 'Geological Light on the Interpretation of "The Tongue" in Joshua 15.2, 5; 18.19', *JBL* 30 (1911), pp. 18-28.

5. C. Klein, *Fluctuations of the Level of the Dead Sea and Climatic Fluctuations in the Country during Historical Times* (ed. International Association of Hydrological Science; International Symposium on the Scientific Basis for Water Resources Management; Jerusalem, 1985), pp. 197-224; Wright, 'Geological Light', pp. 18-28.

6. De Vos, *Los Judas*, pp. 329-30.



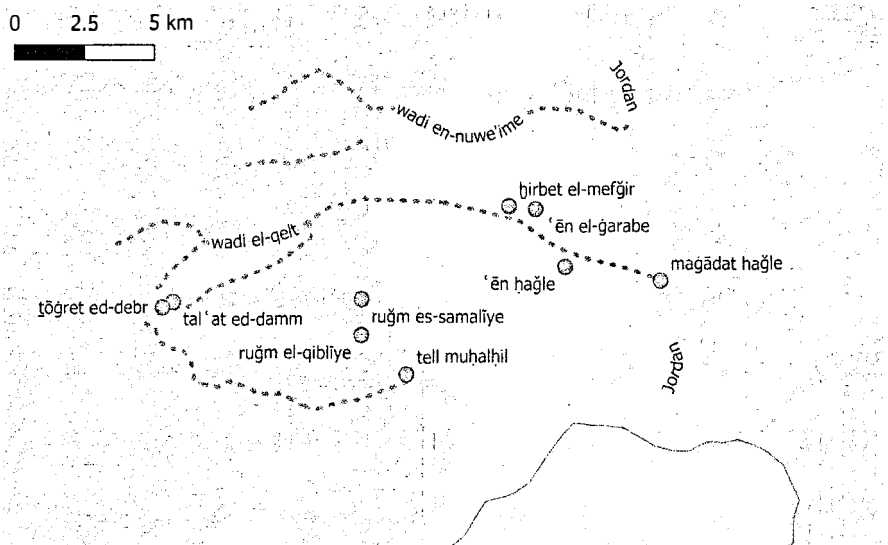
Map 2. Possible fixed points in the northern boundary of Judah—eastern section

דברה מעמק עכור וצפונה, is something like ‘to Debir in relation to the Valley of Achor and northwards’ which I conjecture to דברה צפונה מעמק עכור, ‘to Debir, to the north of the Valley of Achor’, because דברה together with מן makes no sense.⁷

Now to the course of this eastern part of the northern boundary of Judah. From the mouth of the Jordan, the boundary goes up to Beth-hogla and proceeds northwards of Beth-araba. Beth-hoglah can be presumed to be near *'ēn haġle* (199.137) and Beth-arabah near *'ēn el-garabe* (197.139). Although there are no remains from the Iron Age, the locations of the two places are likely, because: (1) two springs with names reminiscent of Beth-hogla and Beth-araba are very near to each other; (2) the places are near the territory of Benjamin as described in Josh. 18.11-28; (3) both sites appear in the town list of Benjamin (Josh. 18.21, 22) which means

7. MT reads הגלגל, whereas the similar southern boundary of Benjamin reads גלילות (Josh. 18.17). Since Gilgal is the more known than Gelilot, it is most probable that הגלגל was changed into הגלילות than vice versa; see De Vos, *Los Judas*, pp. 27-28. For the conjecture on דברה מעמק עכור, see de Vos, *Los Judas*, pp. 26-27; against Martin Noth, *Das Buch Josua* (HAT, 1/7; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2nd edn, 1953), p. 84; Wolff, ‘Ebene’, p. 76.

that at a certain time they went from Judah to Benjamin or vice versa. This is most likely for places near the border between the two territories. Thus, the boundary might have followed the *wādi en-nuwē'ime*, the course of which is to the north of both sites.

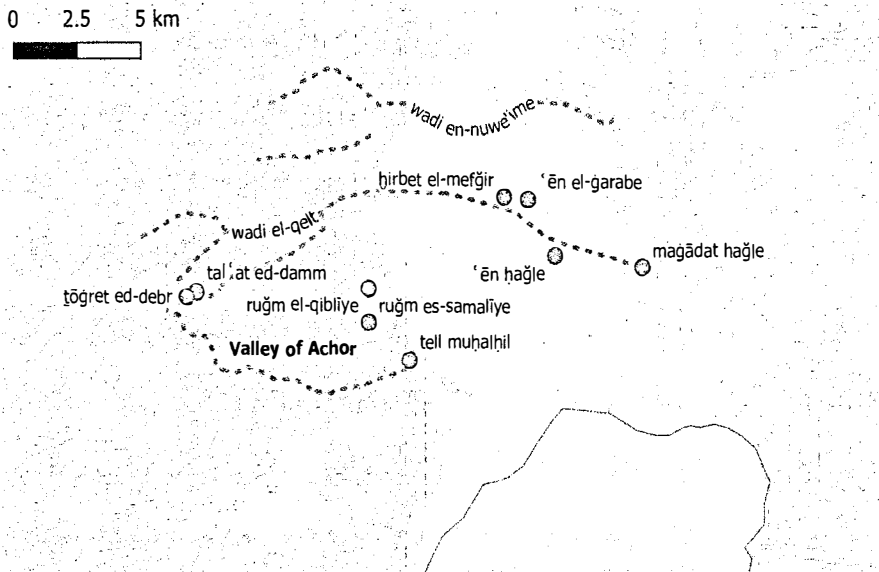


Map 3. The area near Jericho

Then, the boundary goes up to the Stone of Bohan, the son of Reuben (*ruḡm el-qibliye* or *ruḡm es-samaliye*?; see map 2). This must have been a distinctive stone structure. However, as there are many stones in this area, its identification remains unknown, though it might be at the entrance to or in the mountains. Where the boundary left the Arabah and entered the mountains is unclear. Did it further follow *wādi en-nuwē'ime* or did the boundary proceed further south through *wādi rumāmane* or *wādi el-makkūk* or still further to the south through *wādi el-qelṭ*? Only 2.5 km separate the most northern from the most southern *wādi*, so all three are possible candidates. However, since *wādi el-qelṭ* is deep enough to serve as a natural boundary between Judah and Benjamin, I presume that this is the next section of the boundary of Judah. To reach the area near the Ascent of Adummim (*tal 'at ed-damm*), the boundary had to leave *wādi el-qelṭ* and bend southward either into the *wādi tal 'at ed-damm* that led to *tal 'at ed-damm* directly, the most likely candidate (see below), or into *wādi abū ḡabā'* that led to its origin somewhat to the north of *tal 'at ed-damm*.

But before the Ascent of Adummim, the border went up to Debir, which is to the north of the Valley of Achor, if my conjecture is correct. Debir can probably be found in the site of *tōgret ed-debr*, southwest of *tal'at ed-damm* and is reached by following *wādi tal'at ed-damm*.⁸ Then the boundary turns to Geliloth that is opposite the ascent of Adummim and south of the valley. We do not know where Geliloth was but turning from *tōgret ed-debr* to the north, puts you opposite *tal'at ed-damm* and south of *wādi el-qelt*, the only *wādi* that could have such a generic name as 'the valley' (הנחל). This makes the identification of *tōgret ed-debr* as Debir likely.

Now to the Valley of Achor. It is south of Debir which excludes an identification with *wādi en-nuwē'ime* which is to the north. It is unlikely to be *el-buqē'a* as it is too far south of *tōgret ed-debr*. To the south is the *wādi* system of *wādi mukellik* and *wādi es-sidr* and its confluences. I propose this to be the Valley of Achor.⁹



Map 4. Valley of Achor

8. Against de Vos, *Los Judas*, p. 329.

9. Against de Vos, *Los Judas*, p. 329.

3. Joshua 7

Joshua 7 recounts the tale of Achan who stole from the חרם, from the things devoted to Yhwh.¹⁰ The sin of Achan led to the defeat of the Israelites at Ai. I am not going to deal with the religious and theological aspects of the חרם (cf. Josh. 22.20) and the Yhwh war but am interested in the connection of Achan and the Valley of Achor.¹¹ After Achan was found guilty:

Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan son of Zerah, with the silver, the mantle, and the bar of gold [the חרם], with his sons and daughters, with his oxen, donkeys, and sheep, and his tent and all that he had; and they brought them up to the Valley of Achor. (Josh. 7.24; NRSV)

In the Valley of Achor, ‘all Israel stoned him [Achan] to death; they burned them [*sic*] with fire, cast stones on them, and raised over him a

10. On the חרם, see, among others, Arie Versluis, ‘Devotion and/or Destruction? The Meaning and Function of חרם in the Old Testament’, *ZAW* 128 (2016), pp. 233-46; Arie Versluis, *The Command to Exterminate the Canaanites: Deuteronomy 7* (OTS, 71; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2017); Frank Crüsemann, ‘Gewaltimagination als Teil der Ursprungsgeschichte: Banngelot und Rechtsordnung im Deuteronomium’ in Friedrich Schweitzer (ed.), *Religion, Politik und Gewalt: Kongressband des XII. Europäischen Kongresses für Theologie 18.–22. September 2005 in Berlin* (Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie, 29; Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2006), pp. 343-60; Christian Hofreiter, *Making Sense of Old Testament Genocide: Christian Interpretations of Herem Passages* (Oxford Theology and Religion Monographs; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Richard D. Nelson, ‘Herem and the Deuteronomic Social Conscience’, in Marc Vervenne and Johan Lust (eds.), *Deuteronomy and Deuteronomic Literature: Festschrift C.H.W. Brekelmans* (BETL, 133; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997), pp. 39-54; Jannica de Prenter, ‘The Contrastive Polysemous Meaning of חרם in the Book of Joshua: A Cognitive Linguistic Approach’, in Ed Noort (ed.), *The Book of Joshua* (BETL, 250; Leuven: Peeters, 2012), pp. 473-88; Rüdiger Schmitt, ‘Bann und Gotteszorn in den Landnahmeerzählungen Dtn 1–3 und Jos 1–11’, in Manfred Dietrich *et al.* (eds.), *Die ‘dunklen Seiten’ Gottes* (Mitteilungen für Anthropologie und Religionsgeschichte, 21; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013), pp. 73-84.

11. For a theological evaluation of חרם and violence in the book of Joshua, see J. Cornelis de Vos, ‘Violence in the Book of Joshua’, in Jacques van Ruiten and Koert van Bekkum (eds.), *Violence in the Hebrew Bible: Between Text and Reception* (OTS, 79; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2020), pp. 161-76; Michaël N. van der Meer, Ed Noort and J. Cornelis de Vos, *Joshua* (2 vols.; International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer [in preparation]).

great heap of stones that remains to this day' (Josh. 7.25-26).¹² That this story of a punishment in the Valley of Achor is woven from the threads of many texts is particularly made clear from the shift from singular (Achan) to plural (them) and then back to singular (Achan). Besides, nothing is written explicitly about the devoted things that should also be burned (Josh. 7.12, 13). Regardless, the interest for us lies in the connection between Achan and the Valley of Achor.

Again, I start with the geographical setting. The Israelites have their camp in Gilgal (probably *ḥirbet el-mefḡir*, 193.143) on the eastern border of Jericho near the Jordan on the western side (Josh. 4.19). From there they attacked Jericho (Josh. 6) and Ai (Josh. 7.1–8.29). Ai is near Beth-aven, east of Bethel (Josh. 7.2). It is *communis opinio* that Ai can be found in *et-tell* (174.147). This fortified town was founded in c. 3310 BCE and measured 27.5 acres, and as such was quite large and strong.¹³ In c. 2400 BCE the site was destroyed and laid waste for many centuries. This is the reason for its later name Ai which means 'ruin' which equates the Arabic designation *et-tell* exactly. At the beginning of the Iron Age, a little unfortified village of 2.5 acres was founded on the highest point of *et-tell*. In contrast to the biblical narrative, there was no gate (Josh. 7.5), no king (8.1), and probably not many inhabitants (8.25). There is much scholarly discussion about the question of the historical accuracy of the story told in Josh. 7.1–8.29, ranging from being a depiction of real events at the time of Joshua to a more symbolical narrative about sin. Ai, meaning 'ruin', is near Beth-aven, 'House of Sin', and the עמק עכור relates to the root עכר, 'to make trouble, to destroy' and the personal name Achan with Achor. However, the differences in the personal name עכן on the one hand, and the verb עכר and the name עכור on the other hand make it difficult to purposefully connect the two to each other.¹⁴ This difficulty aside, the tale does relate them to each other as is shown by the wordplay in Josh. 7.25: מה עכרתנו יעכרך יהוה ביום הזה, 'Why did you bring trouble on us? The Lord is bringing trouble on you today', and the etiological note in 7.26

12. H. Holzinger, *Das Buch Josua* (KHAT, 6; Tübingen/Leipzig: Mohr Siebeck, 1901), p. ix: 'in 7 25 wird Achan gesteinigt, verbrannt und noch einmal gesteinigt— das ist zu viel'.

13. Joseph A. Callaway, 'Ai', in Ephraim Stern (ed.), *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (trans. Ayelet Lewinson-Gilboa and Joseph Aviram; 5 vols.; New York *et al.*: Israel Exploration Society; Carta; Simon & Schuster, 1993), pp. 39-45 (39).

14. See on this Richard S. Hess, 'Achan and Achor: Names and Wordplay in Joshua 7', *HAR* 14 (1994), pp. 89-98.

על בן קרא שם המקום ההוא עמק עכור עד היום הזה ‘Therefore that place to this day is called the Valley of Achor’ (both NRSV).

The etymology of עכור is unknown. Maybe Achan and his family were sentenced in the Valley of Achor, maybe not. Maybe only the vague similarity of עכנ and עכר led to the connection of Achan and Achor. Additionally, the whole story about the initial lost battle might be an exemplary story about obedience, or better: disobedience to Yhwh and the danger of not performing the חרם. After this incident, Israel wins every battle in the book of Joshua.

Bethel, Ai and Beth-aven—later another name for Bethel (Hos. 4.15)—were situated in the tribal territory of Benjamin (and later in Ephraim). The Valley of Achor was in Judah as Josh. 15.7 reveals. Thus, the story about Achan becomes anti-Judahite, for Achan belonged to the tribe of Judah (Josh. 7.16-18). This might reflect the tensions that existed between Judah and Benjamin as shown by Judges 1 in comparison to the book of Joshua and by Judges 20. In any case, the Valley of Achor seemed to be generally known, as the location of Debir is described in relation to it (Josh. 15.7) and a probable Benjaminite tradition locates the stoning of Achan *cum suis* in this Judahite valley.

Where was the Valley of Achor according to Joshua 7? The camp of the Israelites was in Jericho (Josh. 7.2). Although the author/s seem to have forgotten that the Israelites had just destroyed Jericho completely (Josh. 6), it does not matter for locating the Valley of Achor, as the other (only) camp is in nearby Gilgal. From there, the Israelites ‘brought them up to the Valley of Achor’ (Josh. 7.24). ‘To bring up’ (עלה, hi.) points in the direction of the mountains. One could go up into the mountains via any of the three *wādis* mentioned. If Israel camped near Ai, then the way back to the Arabah leads through *wādi en-nuwē’ime*. However, that they camped near Ai is unlikely because it was only after they lost the attack that the Israelites proceed to Ai to prepare the ambush (Josh. 8.1-4), and Josh. 7.2 explicitly mentions Jericho as the point of departure (see above). I am not sure whether Achan, as a member of the Judahite tribe, had to be sentenced in Judahite territory. If not, *wādi en-nuwē’ime* in the mountains and *wādi el-qelṭ* after passing some confluences was on Benjaminite territory. Only the *wādi* system of *wādi mukellik/wādi es-sidr* is completely on Judahite territory. However, the same applies to *el-buqē’a* that can easily be reached by *wādi el-kanētera*. Nevertheless, the *wādi* system of *wādi mukellik/wādi es-sidr* remains the better candidate as it is in accordance with the geographical information in Josh. 15.7.

I assume that Achan and his family were stoned in their own territory. Achan was of the tribe of Judah, of the clan of the Zerahites, of the family

of Zabdi of the household of Achan son of Carmi son of Zabdi son of Zerah (7.14-16). Achan is son of Carmi who, however, is known as a Reubenite in other texts (Gen. 46.9; Exod. 6.14; Num. 26.6; 1 Chron. 5.3; different 1 Chron. 2.4, 7). This taken together with the fact that in the description of the northern boundary of Judah, the Stone of Bohan, the son of *Reuben*, preceded Debir and the Valley of Achor (Josh. 15.6-7) making it likely that the family of Achan was Reubenite and was sentenced in their own Reubenite territory.¹⁵ That Reuben is identified with a trans-Jordanian tribe does not mean this tribe did not once have territory west of the Jordan or on both sides. The Jordan was and is not really a boundary.

4. *Hosea 2*

Hosea 2.16-17 (NRSV 2.14-15) reads:

Therefore, I will now persuade her,
and bring her into the wilderness,
and speak tenderly to her.
From there I will give her her vineyards
and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.
There she shall respond as in the days of her youth,
As at the time when she came out of Egypt.¹⁶

The Valley of Achor is a פתח תקוה, a 'door of hope'. The imagery is that of a new Exodus or better: *Eisodus*. Different from the Exodus narrative in the Pentateuch, the relationship between Yhwh and Israel, here personified as the wife of Yhwh, is good. After having sinned, Israel can make a new start in the wilderness and reenter from there the land of Israel.

This was the short version. It is well known that the genesis of the book of Hosea is complicated. How much can be ascribed to the prophet Hosea and how much to a Hosea school? Which texts were originally passed on orally and which texts were originally written or even written especially for the book of Hosea? Which texts have a northern Israelite origin and

15. Ulrike Schorn, *Ruben und das System der zwölf Stämme Israels: Redaktions-geschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Bedeutung des Erstgeborenen Jakobs* (BZAW, 248; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1997), pp. 197-200.

16. For an excellent survey of the syntax and semantics of Hos. 2.16-17, see Gass, 'Hosea', pp. 172-77.

which a southern Judahite? What is the relationship between the doom texts and the salvation texts? And so on.¹⁷

Almost all scholars divide the book of Hosea into three main parts, Hosea 1–3, 4–11, and 12–14. Therefore, I will concentrate on the first part, Hosea 1–3, that contains the text about the Valley of Achor. There, we have a sequence of doom and salvation texts:

<i>Doom</i>	1.1-9	2.4-15	3.1-5
<i>Salvation</i>		2.1-3	2.16-25

Hosea 2.16-17 opens a long segment of positive statements. As the preceding verse ends with *נאם יהוה*, ‘saying of Yhwh’, and the subsequent verse starts with *והיה ביום ההוא*, ‘it will be on that day’, 2.16-18 seems to be an independent text that might have been inserted into its context secondarily.¹⁸ However, *לכן*, ‘therefore’, connects it to the foregoing occurrences of *לכן* in 2.8 and 11 and via these *לכן*’s to *ריבו ב-*, ‘plead with’, in 2.4.¹⁹ Hosea 2.4-15 is a so-called *rīb*, a lawsuit against ‘the mother of the Israelites’ who is no longer the wife of Yhwh because she is adulterous. *לכן* introduces judgment, namely the acts of Yhwh against Israel. In 2.16, however, it introduces a promise which is atypical.

I presume that *לכן* was added by a later hand to connect 2.16-17 positively to the foregoing *rīb*. The subsequent *הנה*, ‘behold’, might have been the original introduction of a former independent tradition. If this is correct, the Valley of Achor was a known location—just as in Josh. 15.7, because the location of Debir is described in relation to the valley. Furthermore, it cannot be too far from the wilderness, which by the connection with the Exodus motif is east of the Jordan. This makes *el-buqē’a* again an unlikely candidate. It is too far from the Jordan near Jericho and Gilgal.²⁰ Hans Walter Wolff proposed *wādi en-nuwē’ime* because it is near the boundary between Judah and Benjamin and it enters

17. See Susanne Rudnig-Zelt, *Hoseastudien: Redaktionskritische Untersuchungen zur Genese des Hoseabuches* (FRLANT, 213; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006); Roman Vielhauer, *Das Werden des Buches Hosea: Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (BZAW, 349; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2007).

18. For an overview of positions, see Gass, ‘Hosea’, p. 171 n. 12.

19. On the structure of Hos. 2, see David J.A. Clines, ‘Hosea 2: Structure and Interpretation’, in David J.A. Clines (ed.), *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967–1998, Volume I* (JSOTSup, 292; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 41-61.

20. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton*, p. 52.

the mountains by some sort of gate.²¹ This, however, also applies to the other two *wādis* I dealt with above, especially to the *wādi* system of *wādi mukellik/wādi es-sidr* (see, e.g., grid reference 192.113).²²

Why was the Valley of Achor used as a symbol of hope? Erasmus Gass supposes that it is a wordplay: The Valley of עכור, of trouble, becomes a doorway to hope (תקוה).²³ This presupposes—independently from the question whether Hosea knew the tradition of Joshua 7²⁴—that עכור was connected to עבר. This is possible, but the etymology of עכור is unknown (see above) and it may be the connection between עכור and עבר was seldom, if ever made, making Joshua 7 with its עכן – עכור – עבר connection a rare exception. My simple explanation is that the Valley of Achor was near Jericho and Gilgal and functioned as an entrance to the land of Israel after the new Exodus.

Now to the present context within the previous *rib* and the subsequent words of hope. לבן connects Hos. 2.16-17 with 2.4-15. לבן as in 2.8 and 11 introduces the coming acts of Yhwh, but differently. Here, Yhwh reverses the threats of 2.4-15 in that he makes a new and positive beginning with Israel. ‘The wife’ of Yhwh, Israel, that Yhwh wanted to make dry like the wilderness (2.5) is persuaded by him and led to the wilderness. From there (משם; 2.17), he will give her vineyards and the Valley of Achor as a door of hope.²⁵

Verses 2.18-25 describe a restitution of the ‘marriage’ between Yhwh and Israel, ideal and fully without any adultery, i.e., idolatry. At that time, Israel will live in peace (2.20), in righteousness, justice, love, and mercy (v. 21). The description of the covenant Yhwh makes for Israel with animals (v. 20; cf. 23-24) seems to point to a paradise-like state where humans and animals still lived in harmony with each other (cf. Gen. 1.29-30; Isa. 11.6-9), maybe even to a new creation (as against Hos. 2.14 and 4.3).²⁶ This is far more than Israel could hope for behind the ‘door’ of the Valley of Achor.

21. Wolff, ‘Ebene’; Wolff, *Dodekapropheton*, p. 52.

22. Not to be confused with פתח תקוה at 137.116.

23. Gass, ‘Hosea’, pp. 178, 180-81.

24. Gass (‘Hosea’, p. 178) denies that Hos. 2.16-17 knew Josh. 7.

25. On ל in לפתח תקוה as ‘as’, see Ernst Jenni, *Die hebräischen Präpositionen: Bd. 3: Die Präposition Lamed* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2000), p. 44; Gass, ‘Hosea’, p. 179 n. 6.

26. Michael Deroche, ‘The Reversal of Creation in Hosea’, *VT* 31 (1981), pp. 400-409 (405-407).

5. *Isaiah 65*

The last occurrence of the Valley of Achor is in Isa. 65.10. It appears within the two last chapters of Isaiah, which belong to the final layers of the book and seem to conclude the whole book of Isaiah. I consider the last part of Isaiah, chs. 56–66, not to be originally independent (‘Trito-Isaiah’), but as a *Fortschreibung* of chs. 40–55 and even 1–55.²⁷ In contrast to chs. 40–55, salvation becomes conditional in chs. 56–59 and 63–66. In Isaiah 65–66, salvation is reserved for the so-called servants of Yhwh (עבְרֵי יְהוָה),²⁸ for those who search for God. There is a sequence of potential salvation and salvation versus curse in both chapters. The pericope Isa. 65.1-7 starts with potential salvation. Yhwh is there for those who do not search for Yhwh (vv. 1-5a). Then, Yhwh promises to repay all evil deeds (vv. 5b-7). A new pericope begins with בְּה אָמַר יְהוָה, ‘thus says Yhwh’ in v. 8, the content of which is positive until v. 10, showing Yhwh will not destroy all Israel. This culminates in the promises:

I will bring forth descendants from Jacob,
and from Judah inheritors of my mountains;
my chosen shall inherit it,
and my servants shall settle there.
Sharon shall become a pasture for flocks,
and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down,
for my people who have sought me. (Isa. 65.9-10 NRSV)

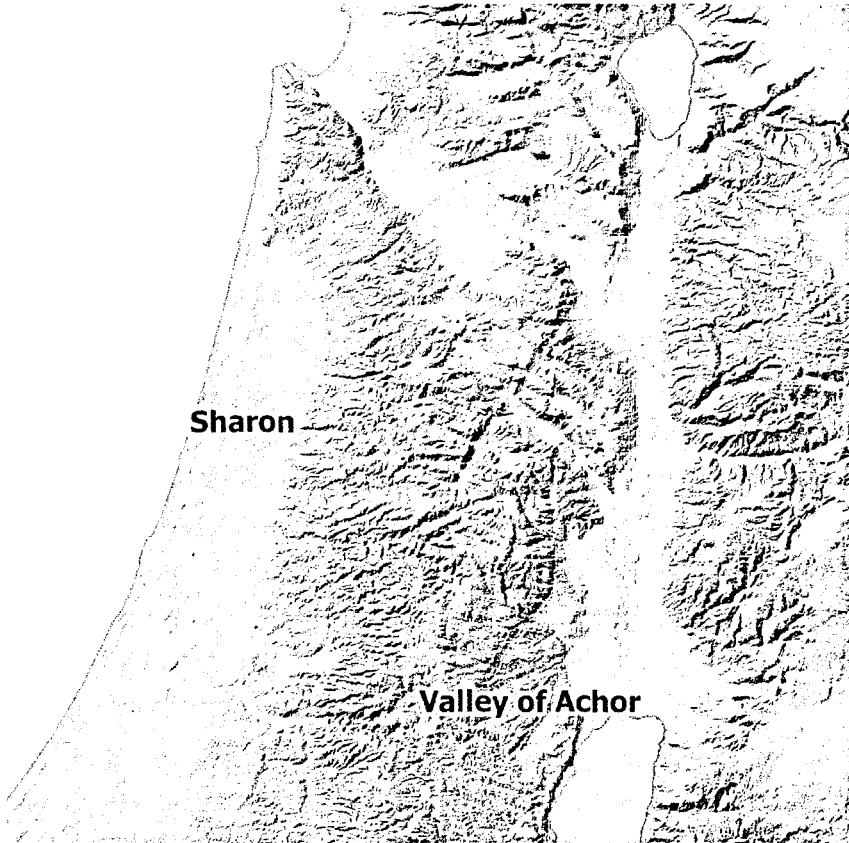
The subsequent verses deal, again, with retribution against those who forsake Yhwh. The unit itself, vv. 9-10, is led by the settlement motif: יָרַשׁ, ‘to inherit’ (twice), and שָׁכַן, ‘to settle’, in v. 9, and the mentioning of two areas for cattle as an expression of fertility of the land and abundance.²⁹ Jacob and Judah, representing the north and the south stand for the whole people of God. ‘My chosen’ and ‘my servants’ are synonymous but not tantamount to whole Israel. They are those ‘who have sought’ Yhwh

27. See the many intertextual references to Isaiah 1; 6; 11 and so on, in Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 40–66* (FOTL, 19; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), pp. 379-84.

28. An answer to the question who the servant was or the servants of Yhwh were can be found in Antti Laato, *Who Is the Servant of the Lord? Jewish and Christian Interpretations on Isaiah 53 from Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (SRB, 4; Turku: Åbo Akademi; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012).

29. Oded Borowski, ‘The Sharon—Symbol of God’s Abundance’, *BRev* 4 (1988), pp. 40-43.

(v. 10). Together with most exegetes, I consider Sharon and the Valley of Achor to be a merism for the whole land of Israel fitting the whole-Israel perspective. My identification of the Valley of Achor with the *wādi* system of *wādi mukellik/wādi es-sidr* would fit the merism better than an identification with *wādi en-nuwē'ime* as it sets a clearer opposition between southeast–northwest from the beginning:



Map 5. Valley of Achor and Sharon

Thereby, the thought of a new Exodus and *Eisodus*, now from Babylon, is suggested, first by the settlement motif in v. 9, second by the choice of the Valley of Achor as the eastern ‘door’—to use the word of Hos. 2.17—to the land of Israel, and third because the new Exodus is a leading motif from Isaiah 40 onwards (see esp. Isa. 43.16-21). Chapter 65 continues positively for the chosen and culminates in the words about Yhwh creating the new heavens and the new earth (v. 17) and the new

Jerusalem. This is less a real new creation—as in Revelation 21—than a renewal and an amelioration of the former circumstances. Yhwh is on the brink of ‘creating’ a situation of joy and delight—for the chosen ones—a situation in which the wolf and the lamb and other animals shall even feed together (v. 25; cf. 11.6-8) as they did before the flood.³⁰ The geographical centre of the description is Jerusalem (vv. 18-19), Yhwh’s holy mountain (v.11). This holy mountain can be seen after having passed the Valley of Achor, from the west of the Ascent of Adummim (Josh. 15.7). Thus, the Valley of Achor not only functions as the ‘door’ to the land after the new Exodus from Babylon, but also as a symbol of the ante-diluvian peace between humans and animals and between animals and animals, and as an entrance to Yhwh’s holy mountain in Jerusalem, the centre of Yhwh’s new creation, or better, restauration of a peaceful situation.

6. *Dependent Traditions?*

At the beginning I posed the question whether the traditions about the Valley of Achor are interdependent. There is no tradition behind the occurrence in Josh. 15.7, only that it is a known and probably significant location. Three traditions remain, that of Joshua 7 on the one hand, and that of Hosea 2 and Isaiah 65 on the other. Because of the textual growth of the three texts, it is hard to date the individual layers, and it is even harder to relate those layers within the texts to layers in the other two texts. Though, Isaiah 65 might be the youngest text as it closes the whole book of Isaiah. There is no evidence in Isaiah 65 that it knew Joshua 7. The same applies to Hosea 2. Only if we surmise that there is a wordplay between עכור and עבר that was transformed into something positive, the פתח תקוה, could there be an implicit allusion to Josh. 7. But the wordplay can also function by itself—if it was a wordplay at all. The traditions do not need each other for the texts to be understood. The tradition behind Joshua 7 might be an historical reminiscence enriched by a wordplay on עכור – עבר – עכן. For the other two texts, the geographical position of the Valley of Achor speaks for itself.

30. O.H. Steck, “...ein kleiner Knabe kann sie leiten”: Beobachtungen zum Tierfrieden in Jesaja 11,6-8 und 65,25”, in Jutta Hausmann and Hans-Jürgen Zobel (eds.), *Alttestamentlicher Glaube und Biblische Theologie: Festschrift für Horst Dietrich Preuss zum 65. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1992), pp. 104-13.

7. Summary

The best identification of the Valley of Achor in the description of the northern boundary of Judah (Josh. 15.7) is the *wādi* system of *wādi mukellik* and *wādi es-sidr*. This valley was the (former) tribal area of Reuben. It was an enclave in the tribal area of Judah. Achan who sinned against the אֱלֹהִים was, therefore, claimed as a member of the tribe of Judah in Joshua 7, whereas his predecessors seem to be Reubenites. Achan and his family were stoned in their own tribal area, the Valley of Achor, thus becoming a setting of sin and retaliation.

The Valley of Achor is explicitly referred to in Hosea 2 and Isaiah 65. In both chapters, the valley functions within an eschatological setting. In Hos. 2.17, the Valley of Achor becomes a 'door of hope' leading to a 'monogamous matrimony' between Yhwh and his 'wife' Israel. It even leads to peace between animals, a reminiscence of the ante-diluvian situation.

In Isaiah 65 this allusion is even clearer. The Valley of Achor is the entrance into the land after the new Exodus from Babylon, and together with the Sharon it symbolizes the whole land of Israel; further, it symbolizes fertility and animal peace, and it leads to Yhwh's holy mountain in Jerusalem, the starting point of Yhwh's new creation in which there will be no distress, but only peace and joy. In these last two chapters, the Valley of Achor is a herald of good tidings.

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