

Charting the Kingdom
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Josh 19:7

(BHS)	(RSV)
עֵין רִמּוֹן וְעֵתֶר וְעֶשֶׂן	En-rimmon, Ether, and Ashan
עָרִים אַרְבַּע	—four cities
וְסָצְרֵיהֶן:	with their villages

The simplest Hebrew word is the conjunction: ו. It separates the cities in line 1: En-rimmon, and Ether, and Ashan. Three names separated by two *waws*. Straightforward, right? (“Waw” is pronounced “vav”).

RSV is one of the few versions that doesn’t emend line 1 because of line 2. TLB just leaves out line 2. CEV (and Septuagint) adds an extra (obscure) city in line 1, like a placeholder, to make four. But most simply assume a third *waw* dropped out in line 1. In support of this is 15:32, which cites Ain (i.e., “En”) and Rimmon as two distinct places, at the very end of a list of Judean cities. Take a look at 15:21 – 32↓

15:21b	Kabzeel, Eder, Jagur	3
22	Kinah, Dimonah, Adadah	3
23	Kedesh, Hazor, Ithnan	3
24	Ziph, Telem, Bealoth	3
25	Hazor-hadattah, Kerioth-hezron	2
26	Amam, Shema, Moladah	3
27	Hazar-gaddah, Heshmon, Beth-pelet	3
28	Hazar-shual, Beersheba, Biziothiah	3
29	Baalath, Iim, Ezem	3
30	Eltolad, Chesil, Hormah	3
31	Ziklag, Madmannah, Sansannah	3
32a	Lebath, Shilhim, Ain, and Rimmon	4
32b	in all, twenty-nine cities with their villages	29

Okay, but the sum is 36, not 29. Go on, do the math yourself. Verse 32, that we cited to justify adding a *waw* to 19:7, also has an inexplicable total!

19:30 tallies 22 cities; I count 24. I can’t find 19:38’s 19 cities. I have no idea what’s happening in 19:15. What is going on with these puzzling lists?

The problem isn't simple copying error or textual corruption like dittography or homeoteleuton. The discrepancies are systemic and characterize much of the book. The Septuagint usually just leaves out the sums altogether.

I think the best explanation is to read Joshua as a layered text. Imagine old lists, perhaps dating to Joshua himself. They were subject to later revision, but the totals stayed the same. So the totals might authentically preserve the number of cities in original lists, while the lists themselves got out of sync with their totals. (Unlike in Excel, on scrolls sums don't automatically update.)

(Early) 19:1 – 9 lists the cities of "Simeon." But 15:21 – 32 (Hezekiah's time?) calls the same region "south Judah." By this era the tribe of Simeon had been absorbed into Judah. *Same geographical area, different political reality.* This explains why border towns belong to different tribes in different lists: Zorah is in Dan (19:41) and Judah (15:33), Shechem is in Ephraim (21:21) and Manasseh (17:2), Heshbon is in Reuben (13:17) and Gad (21:39), etc. Contradictory lists sit uncomfortably with each other (and their totals) since *they try to keep up with an ever-changing map.* Yet the division of the land into the traditional tribal units retains the authority of Joshua.

And this is par for the course. The kingdom of God has always had a dynamic configuration. Imagine how it must have felt to be an ordinary Israelite in the days of, say for example, the wilderness. Israelites were wanderers with no land of their own, having been recently delivered from bondage. Or, imagine what it was like under Solomon, when Israel was the top of the world. Or think what it was like when Nebuchadnezzar carried Judah into exile. When they later returned to the land, the kingdom of God—understood as the people of Yahweh—occupied a territory about the extent of a medium-sized county in South Carolina.

In the fullness of time, the Messiah came. He taught that the kingdom is like a seed that starts very small, but vibrantly grows into a great tree. The kingdom is like yeast, gradually permeating the whole lump.

Imagine how it must have felt to be a Christian when, for example, Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity. The future of the church must have seemed very promising. Or, imagine what it felt like at the fall of Constantinople to Muhammad II, when he marched into the great cathedral of St. Sophia and thanked Allah for giving his forces victory over the Christians.

Imagine how it might have felt to hear a reformed and revitalized faith preached by John Calvin in Geneva. Or to hear Genesis read from the Moon.

How does it feel for you in the EPC today, seeing traditionally Christian lands rapidly abandon the gospel—while all over the world diverse peoples come to Christ in great numbers? The [landscape](#) keeps shifting, all under the sovereign authority of the new Joshua: Jesus.

The kingdom of God is ceaselessly varying, spiritedly developing into the New Israel comprised of “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Rev 7:9). So be encouraged, Christian people! Pray and work for the very diverse Kingdom without reservation! Its contour keeps altering, yes, but don’t be dismayed by today’s declining faith in some parts of the world: Christ is Lord and the Shaper of the volatile Map.

Amen! Come Lord Jesus, King of the Kingdom!