The Other Face of the Battle

The Impact of War on Civilians in the Ancient Near East

Edited by Davide Nadali and Jordi Vidal
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War and Its Effects on Civilians in Ancient Israel and Its Neighbors

Jeffrey R. Zorn

1. Introduction

By the time the people of Israel began to emerge on the world scene, around 1200 B.C., organized warfare, with all of its attendant atrocities, had been in existence for well over two thousand years. The Israelites would also witness the rise of the Neo-Assyrian empire, which celebrated state-sponsored brutality against civilians on a lavish textual and pictorial level never before seen. Israel’s neighbors in the southern Levant, the Philistines, Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites also faced the Assyrian, and later Babylonian, juggernauts. All of these small states experienced attacks on their civilian populations during times of war. However, they were not simply victims of such attacks, textual and archaeological sources indicate that they themselves carried out policies of total war against their neighbors when such ends suited their purposes. Massacres of civilian populations, forced labor or slavery, and economic devastation were all part of the military undertakings of Israel and its neighbors. This essay will survey the evidence for these and other practices as documented in texts, archaeological materials, and in artistic depictions.

2. Definition of “Civilian”

A key issue for this study is the definition of a “civilian.” Article 41.3.1(1) of the August 1949 Geneva Convention (Definition of protected persons) describes civilians as “Persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including members of armed forces who have laid down their arms and those placed hors de combat by sickness, wounds, detention, or any other cause.” This definition is useful because it implies that combatants do not have to be part of the regular armed forces of a nation, and also includes soldiers who have been captured or who have surrendered. In other words, “civilian” and “soldier” are not black and white terms but are part of a spectrum, from those who take absolutely no part in combat, to fully professional soldiers. Just as “civilians” today can take up arms against foreign or domestic enemies and become armed, but not uniformed, combatants, so too ancient civilians either fought on their own, or aided the professional military. The case of the siege is perhaps the classic example of the blurring of civilian and regular military rolls. In

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1 I would like to thank my colleagues Aren Maier, Ami Mazar, Lauren Monore, and Gary Rendsburg for their help and advice in the preparation of this essay. Any errors in the text are mine alone. A special thanks to David Ussishkin for his assistance with the Lachish materials.

2www.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf?documentId=AE2D398352C5B028C12563CD002D6B5C&action=openDocument
such a situation the civilian population of a settlement, including older men, children, and women, would often aid in the defense of the fortifications. In the biblical narrative this blurring of roles is exemplified in the story of the would-be king Abimelech, who was mortally wounded at Thebez by a millstone thrown by a woman from the wall during the attack on a tower.3

3. Nature of the Evidence

The biblical text is the main source of data for understanding how civilians in Israel and its neighbors during the Iron Age were treated during war. However, using this body of literature is fraught with difficulties, the details of which cannot be treated in depth here. A few issues must still be acknowledged. First, like much of the literature of the ancient Near Eastern world the biblical text was largely written and edited by scribes for an elite literate audience in order to communicate a certain ideology. In essence, it is a form of propaganda with a specific underlying agenda, in this case a pedagogic, religious and nationalist agenda. However, unlike a typical Assyrian or Egyptian royal account of a military campaign, which primarily derives from the reign of the king who undertook the campaign, the biblical texts, as they exist today, were compiled from a variety of oral and literary sources, themselves often composed over centuries. The composite nature of the texts, and the shaping and reshaping of the underlying sources, present difficulties when attempting any kind of historical reconstruction. Complicating matters is the question of the historical reliability of the sources the scribes used to construct their accounts. Moreover, material favorable to a despised king may have been left out. Likewise material unfavorable to a revered king may have been suppressed. Without extra-biblical texts to fill in such gaps modern researchers will remain unaware of the data missing. For example, Ahab of Israel’s important role at the battle of Qarqar against Shalmaneser III in 853 B.C. would be completely unknown without the Assyrian account.4 As with numbers in Egyptian and Assyrian sources, the size of armies and number of casualties reported in a given text may be reasonably accurate, or exaggerated to suit the author’s purpose.5 The question of identifying when the biblical authors are using literary topoi, as in Isaiah 34:3, where mountains flow with blood, is also a problem.

Another issue to be faced when using the biblical text is that a significant number of the more detailed passages that recount the treatment of civilians in war describe events in the time of King David or earlier. It is more difficult to estimate the historical accuracy of these often colorful, even folksy, accounts than for some of the terser, almost anecdotal later references in Kings.

Fortunately for the purpose of this essay it is not crucial to establish the historicity of any specific biblical reference to the effects of war on civilians. Even if such an episode, reported in a specific passage, is chronologically misplaced, an exaggeration, or a topos, the biblical authors’ use of such material shows that the text’s audience was aware of and understood the general actuality of such events. That is, if a biblical author makes reference to cannibalism during a siege, it shows

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3 Judges 9:53.
4 COS 2, 263–264.
5 De Odorico 1995.
that that practice was understood to be a very real possibility, whether it happened during the siege in question, or not.\(^6\)

Similarly, archaeological and art historical data present their own methodological challenges. The archaeological data set contains only material that: a) survived the destruction that buried it; b) could survive centuries in the ground; c) was in the area excavated; d) was not destroyed during excavation; e) was properly recorded and interpreted by the archaeologists; and f) was made available in a site report. Furthermore, the chronological range of the archaeological material itself may be uncertain or insecure. Artistic representations, like texts, were commissioned by elites, and so portray war according to the dictates of those patrons. The king was always victorious and the enemy was almost always portrayed as already defeated. This means that most of what is depicted, outside of sieges, are pursuits, not actual field battles. Such representations may also be very conservative in terms of artistic canons; for example, technology that has already gone out of vogue may still be represented, while new equipment may not (yet) be depicted. There are also the limitations imposed by the amount of space available to the artist.

4. Destruction of Homes, Infrastructure and Loss of Property

The ancient Israelites were well aware that the capture of one of their towns during a siege, an assault, or as a result of a surprise attack could result in the settlement being in whole or in part set on fire and destroyed.\(^7\) While private homes were often destroyed, a settlement’s monumental infrastructure was often the special target of destruction. Besides the riches that the plundering of a settlement brought its attackers, the destruction of its fortifications, palaces and cultic installations symbolized the breaking of the power of the national elite, as in the final Babylonian attack on Jerusalem in 586 B.C.\(^8\) The archaeological record of Iron Age Israel is replete with total or partial settlement destructions. While some of these destructions may have been due to natural causes, such as earthquakes, or perhaps were accidental, the majority are usually attributed to sieges or assaults, such as the turmoil at the end of the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1200 B.C.), the invasion of the Egyptian Pharaoh Shishak toward the end of the tenth century, the Assyrians incursions toward the end of the eighth century, or the Babylonian attacks at the beginning of the sixth century.\(^9\)

An attack on a town could result not just in the destruction of civil and private infrastructure, but the victors could also carry off materials, both mundane and specialized. Among the more common materials were food stuffs, both plant and animal.\(^10\) In the short term, depriving the local civilian population of food resources would have exacerbated the effects of any famine brought on by a siege itself.\(^11\) A town might be sown with salt to render it symbolically unfit for resettlement.\(^12\)

\(^6\) This is contra Greenfield 2001, who treats the references to cannibalism in 2 Kings 6:26–29 as purely a topos.
\(^7\) 1 Samuel 30:1–3; Judges 9:45, 49.
\(^8\) Lamentations 1:4, 10; 2:5–9; 2 Kings 25:8–10; Jeremiah 52:12–14; Psalm 74:3–8; 79:1.
\(^9\) Hardin 2010, 78–83, lists major destruction strata in Israel. Some now attribute the destructions usually credited Shishak to a late ninth century campaign of King Hazael of Damascus sparsely documented in the texts; Finkelstein / Silberman 2001, 202–205.
\(^10\) Deuteronomy 28:30–34.
\(^11\) Lamentations 2:11–12.
\(^12\) Judges 9:45.
not harvested before a siege began could be exploited by the attackers. In addition, the attackers might attempt to ruin fields by littering them with stones and by blocking water sources. Trees might be cut down for siege works and equipment. The Israelites were enjoined to only cut down non-food producing trees, though this was not necessarily practiced.

More exotic goods used by elites were also a prime target of attackers. The wealth of Jerusalem was carried off on several occasions. First was Shishak of Egypt in the late tenth century, followed by King Jehoash of Israel in the early eighth century. Sennacherib claims to have carried off quantities of precious metals and stones, furniture, garments, and women of the royal family, which required Hezekiah to strip the temple and palace of their treasures. The Babylonian attacks on Jerusalem in 597 and 586 resulted in the loss of all the temple and palace treasures. Finally, people themselves could be carried off, potentially rending family ties and shrinking the population available for rebuilding the devastated society. In the case of the conquest of a national capital and the surrender of the government, there were additional long term implications such as the replacement of local rulers by others deemed more loyal to the victors, and the imposition of additional long term tribute payments. This burden was often met by increases in taxes collected by the local elites.

5. Civilian Deaths during War

Besides the destruction of all or part of a settlement’s buildings as a result of a siege or an assault, such an attack could also lead to widespread civilian deaths, including children. Many civilians could die defending their settlement or in the subsequent sack of the town, but many could also die from conditions concurrent with a siege, including combat, famine and disease. In a patriarchal society, such as ancient Israel, the death of men in battle, and parents in general during a siege and its aftermath, could leave the family’s surviving members socially disenfranchised. It is no wonder that many biblical passages urge special consideration for widows and orphans, a common end result of war.

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13 2 Kings 3:25.
16 2 Kings 3:25, where the Israelites fell “every good tree.”
18 1 Kings 14:25–26; 2 Kings 14:14.
19 COS 2. 303. Also 2 Kings 18:14–16.
23 2 Kings 15:19–20; 23:35.
25 Isaiah 13:16; Psalm 137:9; Nahum 3:10.
26 Exodus 22:22; Deuteronomy 24:17–21; Psalm 82:3; Proverbs 23:10; Isaiah 10:1–2; Jeremiah 22:3. Men who were engaged, but not yet married, might be excused from battle according to Deuteronomy 20:7.
During an invasion the size of a settlement’s population could swell considerably as people who lived in unfortified or inadequately fortified nearby towns, villages and homesteads sought protection. A sudden and sustained increase in a settlement’s population during a siege also led to a faster than normal depletion of the settlement’s food reserves, which could not be replenished easily. Food resources could be severely rationed, and items not typically part of the diet would have to be consumed, including dung and urine, foods that were less desirable or were normally fed to animals, and animal heads. One of the most horrific aspects of famine was that the settlement’s population, even the elite segments, might be forced to resort to cannibalism, even the consumption of one’s own children.

The crowding associated with a siege led to unhygienic conditions which, along with malnutrition brought on by diminished access to food and an often limited water supply, fostered the outbreak of disease. The inability of those trapped in a settlement to properly bury the corpses of those who died during a siege no doubt exacerbated such conditions. Unfortunately the biblical authors do not provide detailed enough descriptions of the symptoms of the diseases they mention to be certain what modern diseases are intended. Conditions like fever and consumption may be aspects of several diseases.

Archaeological excavations often turn up destruction layers in towns probably destroyed during war, but usually few bodies are recovered, probably for several reasons. First, survivors likely attempted to recover bodies and bury them properly. Also, some remains were likely scavenged by animals, leaving only scattered parts. Second, many people may have fled their homes if they knew an attack on their town was imminent. Usually complete human bodies in archaeological destruction deposits are found singly. For example, at Rehov, in Stratum A-3 assigned to the Assyrian destruction of 732 B.C., two bodies (one lacking its head) were found in adjacent rooms. Similarly, the mid–late 9th B.C. Stratum A3 at Tell es-Safi has produced a few skeletons under destruction debris attributed to an attack by Hazael of Damascus. In the massive destruction at Ashkelon attributed to Nebuchadnezzar II in 604 B.C. only one female skeleton, which had been clubbed in the head, was found. A few sites contain significant destruction deposits with human skeletal remains that may be associated with warfare.

Starkey’s excavations outside the northwest corner of Lachish uncovered four tombs originally cut in the Bronze Age (107, 108, 116, 120). These tombs had been

27 2 Kings 25:3.
29 Ezekiel 4:10–11, 16.
30 2 Kings 18:27 and Isaiah 36:12.
31 Ezekiel 4:9.
35 Sussman 1992, 8.
36 Jeremiah 15:3.
37 Mazur 1999, 32.
38 Namdar et al. 2011, 3475.
39 Stager et al. 2011, 11, 41.
reused at the end of the 8th century B.C. for the mass burial of as many as 1500 individuals who were dumped through the collapsed roofs of the tomb group, with most of the bodies coming from Tomb 120 (Figure 1). This is in contrast to the almost complete lack of human remains from the deposits of Stratum III itself, the stratum destroyed by Sennacherib. The bodies were disarticulated and some had suffered burning. The majority of the dead were men, but a large minority was women and children, with relatively few aged individuals. Strikingly, only one specimen displayed wounds likely inflicted soon before death. Animal bones, mostly of pigs, were subsequently dumped over the human remains.

Starkey, followed by Ussishkin, suggested that these were the remains of individuals who perished as a result of the Assyrian attack on Lachish in 701 B.C. This might be borne out by the relative balance in male/female remains. However, Risdon, who studied the bones, noted the almost complete absence of recent wounds and the lack of aged individuals, and thus concluded that the remains could not be the result of a deliberate massacre. He suggested that pestilence or deaths resulting from building collapse during an earthquake were more likely causes, but the lack of physical trauma to the bones weighs against an earthquake, and neither theory really explains the lack of bones from the elderly. Compounding the problem, Sennacherib does not mention Lachish in the annals of his third campaign, which brought him against Judah, nor any specific massacres against the forty-six cities which he captured. The only specified atrocities are against some of the nobles of Ekron. The reliefs from Nineveh, which depict the attack on Lachish, show the impaling of three individuals outside the city (Figure 2), the execution of two men by the sword, and two other men stretched out naked on the ground, possibly indicating that they were to be flayed (Figure 3). These were perhaps the officers at Lachish charged with leading its defense.

While an outright massacre of the town’s citizens seems precluded by the lack of wounds, mass death through disease and famine remains a possibility. Stratum III at Lachish is commonly held to be the settlement destroyed by Sennacherib. The top of the mound occupies an area of 7.2 hectares, suggesting an area for Stratum III of around 8 hectares. Scholars attempting to estimate the population size of ancient Israelite settlements often use a figure of 200/250 inhabitants/hectare. While this figure may be too low for tightly packed rural settlements, it may be a good estimate for centers with significant public infrastructure, and therefore a lower population density, such as Lachish. Even at 250 inhabitants/hectare the population of Lachish

40 Starkey 1936; Risdon 1939, 100–102; Ussishkin 1982, 56–58.
41 Starkey 1936, 169. Could the burning of some of the bones be evidence of cooking of human flesh during the siege?
42 Risdon 1939, 103–104.
43 Risdon 1939, 115.
44 Starkey 1936, 169.
45 Ussishkin 1982, 56.
46 Risdon 1939, 105–106.
47 COS 2, 303.
51 Jeremiah 15:2.
Stratum III would be only about 2000 people, making the mass burial approximately three quarters of the town’s citizens. The town’s population was likely swelled by refugees seeking protection inside its fortifications during the Assyrian invasion, and perhaps also by additional soldiers sent to defend it. Still, the sheer number of victims points to a horrendous local loss of life.

Several mass burials were recovered at Ashdod in Stratum VIII in Area D. One group alone amounted to at least 2,434 humans (Figure 4). All told, the various deposits amounted to about 3,000 individuals, including children, adults, the old, males and females. Some of the bodies showed evidence of having been beheaded. These remains have been associated with Sargon II’s conquest of the city in 712–711 B.C. If the entire roughly 90 hectares of the site were occupied at that time it could have had a population of about 22,000.

Megiddo Stratum VIA is an interesting case. Where remains were reasonably well preserved there was a great deal of destruction, much of it by fire. While some skeletons were found crushed in the debris, others were found laid out in proper burials within the destruction debris. There is debate over the cause of the destruction: earthquake or military conquest? For those accepting the latter possibility, there is debate over whether the culprit was King David, the Philistines, the Egyptian pharaoh Shishak, or non-Davidic Israelite tribes. Another possibility would be conflict among remnant independent Canaanite cities. The issue is tied into the larger debate on the chronology of Israel in the Late Iron I to Iron IIA.

6. Treatment of Prisoners of War (POWs)

Civilians and prisoners of war could face execution, or barbaric forms of punishment and torture, during and after a battle or war. The Bible is replete with such accounts. For example, after David had defeated the Moabites he is said to have executed two thirds of the survivors. At another point in his reign David and Joab are said to have launched a genocidal campaign against the Edomites, attempting to kill every Edomite male. A similar atrocity is recorded for King Amaziah of Judah who is said to have killed ten thousand Edomites by hurling them from the cliff of Sela. Usually those executed in this way are reported anonymously but sometimes specific individuals are mentioned such as the priests Seraiah and Zephaniah who, along with unnamed officials, were executed by Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah, as were Zedekiah’s sons and other officers. As mentioned above, the Assyrians at

54 Bachi et al. 1971, 92, 94.
55 Haas 1971, 212–213.
56 Isaiah 20:1; COS 2, 294, 296–297, 300.
57 Harrison 2004, 8–9, 20; Cline 2011.
58 Primarily Area CC of the Chicago excavations, Yadin’s excavations below Palace 6000, and Tel Aviv’s excavations in Areas F, H, K, L, and M; Cline 2011, 56–61.
60 Mazar 2010; Finkelstein 2010.
61 2 Samuel 8:2.
62 1 Kings 11:15.
63 2 Chronicles 25:12.
64 Isaiah 13:16.
66 Jeremiah 52:10.
Lachish impaled captives outside the city walls. Assyrian soldiers are also shown there executing captives and perhaps flaying them (Figures 2 and 3).67

Prisoners of war, if not executed, could also be tortured in various ways. One method mentioned in the biblical text involves the use of hooks, inserted into the nose, to lead captives away.68 Prisoners might also be blinded, as in the cases of Samson,69 King Zedekiah,70 and the victims of Nahash the Ammonite.71 Living captives might also face other types of physical mutilation. For example, the thumbs and big toes of Adoni-bezek were cut off,72 and the Babylonians, it was claimed, would cut off the noses and ears of their Judean captives, and perhaps even burn the survivors.73

Forced labor was a common fate for those captured during war.74 Such work could involve menial household tasks such as grinding grain75 or carrying loads of wood.76 Kings could put captive populations to work on major construction projects. For example, David is said to have put the Ammonites to work with saws, picks and axes, and also to work in brickyards.77 The Moabite Stone recounts how Israelite captives were put to forced labor hewing a shaft or moat for King Mesha.78 Judeans carried off by the Assyrians appear in reliefs from Sennacherib’s Southwest Palace, most of them dragging quarried stones in construction scenes.79 The Babylonians are said to have carried off a thousand skilled workers from Jerusalem in 597 B.C.80

Military personnel could also be carried off and might be pressed into service in the armies of their captors. That captive soldiers might willingly fight for those who had conquered them is not as odd as it might sound. In their homelands such professionals belonged to the upper rungs of society. Plying their skills for their captors would have helped them retain something of a similar status in their new, foreign surroundings, and was likely far preferred over construction work or agricultural labor. It is not surprising then to find expatriate Israelite auxiliaries,81 charioteers,82 and other soldiers83 in Assyrian service, the Babylonians carrying off

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70 Jeremiah 52:11.
71 1 Samuel 10:27–11:2.
73 Ezekiel 23:25.
74 Isaiah 31:8; Deuteronomy 20:11.
75 Judges 16:21; Lamentations 5:13.
76 Lamentations 5:13.
78 COS 2 138.
79 Barnett / Bleibtreu / Turner 1998. Plates 96 (135a), 104 (144a), 112 (152a), 122 (163, 164, 165, 167), 372 (473a), 420–422 (536a) seem to show captives wearing the distinctive turban and garments worn by Judeans at Lachish.
81 Tiglath Pileser III seems to have incorporated Israelite “auxiliary” troops into his army; see the discussion in Younger 1998, 214. COS 2, 286, 288.
83 What may be Judean archers and a spearman, based on their turban headgear, as part of the royal guard are depicted in reliefs from Sennacherib’s Southwest Palace. Barnett / Bleibtreu / Turner 1998, pls. 273 (366b), 483–489 (664a, 664b, 665, 668, 669, 670a-b); Stohlmann 1983,
thousands of Judean soldiers, and a garrison of refugee Jewish mercenaries serving at Elephantine in Egypt under the Saites and Persians.

7. Rape

Female civilians shared the same fates as their men during and after war, and, in addition, faced the likely horror of rape. It is important to remember that the biblical laws regulating marriage and sexual relations were, at least in part, intended, to establish and maintain lines of descent for determining social responsibilities and inheritance of property. Usually sons inherited property from their fathers. Any children born from women raped during wartime would have always had a dubious standing in such a patriarchal society.

Soldiers who took women as prizes during war also had the option of taking them as wives. For example, Deuteronomy 21:10–14 outlines how the Israelites were to treat captured women. If a soldier decided to take such a captive as his wife she was first allowed a time of mourning. However, a soldier could also discard such a captive if she did not please him. Specially prized were virgins because there would be no question that any children resulting from such unions were the offspring of the Israelite male; non-virgins might face execution.

8. The Biblical “Ban” or Ḫērem/חרם

Perhaps the most enigmatic aspect of the treatment of civilians during war in ancient Israel is the “ban” or Ḫērem, which involves the slaughter of entire groups of people after a siege or battle at the behest of, or for the benefit of, the Israelite God. Sometimes only the men are slain, but in other situations women and children are killed as well. Often, though not always, all property, including livestock is destroyed as well. In other words, it is a sacral act in which the victims and perhaps their property are totally devoted to the deity. This is an extreme form of warfare. If the enemy and all his property are destroyed, the taking of plunder ceases to be a primary reason for war. Because of the explicit taking of human life for the benefit of the deity in a war context the Ḫērem is similar in its underlying theology to the practice of human sacrifice as a means for achieving victory in battle in Israel and Moab; the best victim, that is, a human being, is offered. Complicating the understanding of Ḫērem, however, are passages which seem to refer to such massive, sacral massacres, but without using the term Ḫērem itself; other cases where there is total annihilation,

162–165. See Cogan / Tadmor 1988, 230, for the suggestion that the Rab-shakeh in 2 Kings 18–19 was an officer of the former northern Kingdom of Israel.
84 2 Kings 24:14, 16.
85 Kahn 2007; Porten 1968, 8–16.
88 Numbers 31:17–18; Judges 21:11–12.
90 Niditch 1993, 41–42, 47, 49.
91 Numbers 31. Also the treatment of Ataroth in the Moabite stone where the inhabitants are killed for Kemosh; COS 2, 137.
but with no obvious sacral association,92 instances where it is used simply of objects
turned over for sacral use,93 where it is used as a synonym for a terrible defeat,94 and
cases where it is used as a term of punishment.95

There is debate about how often, if at all, such sacral massacres were actually
invoked in Israel. Many of the occurrences of this term appear in idealized passages
in the Deuteronomistic History related to an all-encompassing conquest of Canaan;96
others occur in prophetic or exilic/post-exilic passages where, as mentioned above,
the term seems simply a synonym for slaughter or a severe form of punishment.
However, while many scholars are unwilling to accept any specific passage as a
definitive real world example of this practice, they often accept that it did have an
actual role at some point in Israel’s history.97 The two accounts usually thought to
have the greatest connection to historical reality are Saul’s slaughter of the Amale-
kites98 and the prophetic denunciation of an Israelite king for not killing the king of
Damascus.99

This sacral/sacrificial form of warfare is not limited to Israelite literature. There
are references to ḥē rem in Ugaritic literature of the Late Bronze Age (showing that
the concept predates the emergence of Israel),100 in the Moabite stone of the ninth
century (which claims the massacre of 7000 people),101 and in a Sabaean text from
northwestern Yemen102 which may date to around the beginning of the seventh
century B.C.103

9. Treatment of the Dead

The living were not the only victims to suffer in war. The dead could also face harsh
treatment. This extended from the treatment of the bodies of those who died or were
killed during the war, to the desecration of burial sites. The Israelite ideal, at least for
those with the necessary resources, was to live a long life, and then be buried in
one’s family tomb.104 Under wartime conditions proper burial was not always
immediately possible. Those who died in battle, or from famine and disease, might
be left where they fell and were likened to dung on the ground.105 Worst of all was
that the bodies would be torn apart and scattered by scavenging birds and animals,
making proper burial completely impossible, an appalling fate mentioned throughout
the Bible.106

92 1 Samuel 27:8–9.
93 Ezekiel 44:29.
95 Ezra 10:8.
98 1 Samuel 15:3, 8–9.
99 1 Kings 20:42.
101 COS 2, 138.
102 Monroe 2007, 326, 331–335.
104 Genesis 25:8; 17; Judges 8:32; 16:31.
106 Deuteronomy 28:26; 1 Samuel 17:44–46; Psalms 79:2–3; Jeremiah 7:33; 16:4, 6; Ezekiel
Corpses could also be ritually mutilated by the victors. For example, bodies might be hung on city walls, as happened to Saul and his son Jonathan after the disastrous battle at Mt. Gilboa,\textsuperscript{107} or the bodies might be hung (or impaled) on trees (or stakes) as a form of public execution and humiliation.\textsuperscript{108} In other passages such treatment is reserved for criminals.\textsuperscript{109} Corpses could also be mutilated by soldiers who cut off body parts as a sign of valor and for a reward, a practice known throughout the ancient Near East. Usually the parts taken were hands, heads and genitals.\textsuperscript{110} An Israelite example of this practice occurs in the story of how David was required to bring to Saul the foreskins of one hundred Philistines as a bride price for Saul’s daughter Michal.\textsuperscript{111} Earlier David is said to have cut off the head of the slain Goliath.\textsuperscript{112}

Tombs were often robbed in antiquity, both in times of peace and during war. Graves, especially those of societal elites, were sources of relatively easy riches. The desecration of tombs is mentioned in a few biblical passages.\textsuperscript{113} Such treatment of the dead, besides providing some wealth, was a way for the victors to emphasize symbolically the helplessness of the vanquished.

10. Refugees

Another byproduct of war is refugees, those civilians attempting to flee an active war zone. Burke has described refugees as “risk-initiated self-migrants”.\textsuperscript{114} War, of course, is not the only situation which can give rise to a refugee crisis. For example, disease or famine might uproot populations. Biblical patriarchs like Abraham and Jacob are described as seeking refuge in Egypt from famines afflicting Canaan,\textsuperscript{115} while Isaac seeks famine relief in the land of Gerar.\textsuperscript{116} A famine afflicting Israel in the days of the judges, and the flight of a Bethlehemite to Moab, is part of the background to the story of Ruth.\textsuperscript{117}

The biblical text provides many references to civilians attempting to escape war. Often they are described as those who flee/have fled, who have been scattered to neighboring regions, or who are survivors or fugitives.\textsuperscript{118} While scattering might also include forced deportations or exile, it is often clear that the scattered are those who

\textsuperscript{107} 1 Samuel 31:9–10; 2 Samuel 21:12.
\textsuperscript{109} Numbers 25:4; 2 Samuel 21:6–13; Ezra 6:11.
\textsuperscript{110} For some, among many, examples from Assyria of tallying heads see Barnett / Bleibtreu / Turner 1998 pls. 83 (102a), 131–132 (193a), 252–254 (346a–c). For Egypt see the biography of Ahmose son of Abana in Lichtheim 1976, 12–15. Also see MH 1, pls. 22–23, 42, 54A for examples of severed hands and genitals.
\textsuperscript{111} 1 Samuel 18:25–27; recapitulated in 2 Samuel 3:14.
\textsuperscript{112} 1 Samuel 17:51. Later, the Philistine’s beheaded Saul’s corpse; 1 Samuel 31:9.
\textsuperscript{113} Jeremiah 8:1–2; Amos 2:1.
\textsuperscript{114} Burke 2012, 265. This work, and Burke 2011, present anthropological-archaeological models for identifying refugees in the material culture record.
\textsuperscript{115} Genesis 12:10; 47:4.
\textsuperscript{116} Genesis 26:1.
\textsuperscript{117} Ruth 1:1.
\textsuperscript{118} Isaiah 10:3–4, 27b–31; Jeremiah 6:1; Lamentations 4:15–16.
have simply fled a crisis zone. 119 Sometimes the flight is not to another country, but to fortified settlements within one’s own land. 120 The Babylonian attacks on Judah, which ultimately led to the destruction of Judah in 586, not only resulted in the deportation of a significant number of Judeans to Babylonia, 121 but also at least two waves of refugees. During the last invasion Judeans fled across the Jordan and sought refuge among the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites, returning only once Gedaliah, the Babylonian appointed ruler, had established a new capital at Mizpah. 122 Later, after the failed coup of Ishmael, a second wave of Judean refugees, fearing a Babylonian reprisal, fled to Egypt. 123 Even King David can be counted as a refugee, since he and his entourage had to flee Jerusalem during his son Absalom’s revolt. 124

The biblical text not only mentions the plight of Israelite refugees, but also refers to refugees from surrounding lands. For example, Isaiah refers to Moabite refugees, 125 as does Jeremiah.126 Isaiah also refers to Philistine refugees. 127 Jeremiah 49 lists a host of countries and peoples whom God will punish by various means. Among these punishments is turning the survivors of wars into refugees. Refugees included in this chapter include the Ammonites, 128 Edomites, 129 Damascus, 130 Kedarites from northern Arabia, 131 and Elamites. 132 Later, Jeremiah speaks of refugees from Babylon.133

The biblical authors admonish their audiences to come to the aid of such foreign fugitives 134 and condemn those who are hostile to those attempting to flee a war zone. 135 Such refugees are described as exhausted, 136 like weak and startled birds, 137 and as those who weep as they flee. 138

11. Exile and Deportation

The threat, or actuality, of forced deportation or exile is a motif that runs throughout Hebrew scriptures, being found in the legal books, 139 historical works, 140 prophetic
text. Indeed, without the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile Judaism as it is known today, would not exist. The creation of the present form of the Hebrew Bible was, in part, a literary catharsis for those Judeans wrestling with the destruction of their God’s city and temple. Exile was not just a punishment visited on the Israelites, but also on their neighbors. For example, the Moabites and Egyptians and Ethiopians are likewise threatened with this fate. It was not only the major Mesopotamian powers that carried out such polices. The Iron Age inscription of the Cilician King Azatiwada narrates how he defeated his foes and settled them on the eastern borders of his land.

The biblical text refers to six deportation episodes carried out by the Assyrians and Babylonians, from the end of the eighth to the beginning of the sixth centuries B.C. These deportations often accompanied the transformation of the affected areas into imperial provinces, which itself had implications for the population that remained in the land. The earliest deportation events occurred under Tiglath-Pileser III, about 732 B.C., and involved Israelites from the coastal plain, Galilee, and Gilead. Over 13,000 people from the Lower Galilee alone seem to have been sent into exile. Another round of deportation occurred under Sargon II, probably in 720 B.C. Sargon claims to have carried off either 27,280 or 27,290 Israelites at this time. At a later point he deported Arabs into Samaria, and also settlers from Babylonia. In the course of his third campaign Sennacherib counted as spoil 200,150 Judeans, only a bit less than the 208,000 people from hundreds of towns and villages he deported from Babylonia in his first campaign. Archaeological survey data, combined with population densities based on ethnographic parallels, suggest a population for Judah at the end of the eighth century B.C. of from 110,000 to perhaps 250,000, depending on the coefficient used. While Judah did indeed experience devastation and a precipitous population decline as a result of the Assyrian invasion, it seems unlikely that virtually the entire population was exiled. Either the Assyrian figures are gross exaggerations, are a tally of all the Judeans captured but not deported, are simply in error, or there are problems with the archaeologically derived population estimates. While an exile of some number of Judeans was likely carried out by Sennacherib, how many people it involved must remain uncertain.

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141 Jeremiah 15:14.
142 Psalm 137; Lamentations 1:3.
143 Jeremiah 48:46.
144 Isaiah 20:4.
145 COS 2, 125, 149.
146 On Assyrian deportation policies, including those directed against Israel and Judah, see Oded 1979.
150 COS 2, 295–296.
152 2 Kings 17:24; Na’aman 1993, 110–111.
153 COS 2, 303.
154 COS 2, 302.
155 Broshi / Finkelstein 1992, 51–52, for the lower estimate. See however the comments in Zevit 2007, against the lower figure of 250 inhabitants per hectare.
The final round of deportations, recorded only in the biblical narratives, occurred under Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon. The deportations are mentioned in both 2 Kings and in Jeremiah, but with differences in the total number of deportations, and in the number of people exiled. 2 Kings records that it was the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar, and that as many as 10,000 citizens were carried away, including 7,000 soldiers and 1,000 craftsmen.\textsuperscript{157} No specific figure for the number of deportees is mentioned in the 2 Kings account of the second exile in 586 after the final siege of Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{158} Jeremiah reports 3,023 deportees for Nebuchadnezzar’s seventh year, 832 for his eighteenth year, and 745 for a third deportation in the twenty-third year, making a final total of 4,600. Reconciling these differences is problematic, but clearly a significant number of Judeans were deported in the early sixth century.\textsuperscript{159}

\textbf{12. The Militia and Professional Army}

Before the rise of the Israelite and Judean Kingdoms local military forces were made up from tribal levies.\textsuperscript{160} In pre-industrial societies most people, as much as 90% of the population, made their livings as agriculturalists.\textsuperscript{161} Drawing upon the tribal militia meant taking away the men of military age from these duties. Moreover, if a battle was lost and a rout ensued, many of those fleeing would be cut down, leading to a potentially significant loss for the agricultural workforce.

Biblical texts associate the rise of full time professional troops with David, who employed Gittites along with Cherethites and Pelethites as his royal guard, while continuing to employ the militia.\textsuperscript{162} It is likely that over time the size of the professional military, loyal to the king, would have increased in size, though still have been relatively small. As noted above, the percentage of Israelites who were freed from agricultural duties for more specialized activities (religious, administrative, industrial, military, etc.) likely amounted to only 10–15% of the population. In the 8th century kingdom of Judah, with a population of ca. 110,000–250,000 the professional military would therefore have amounted to no more than a few thousand at most.\textsuperscript{163} These soldiers then had to be supported by taxes levied on the civilian agriculturalists.

\textsuperscript{157} 2 Kings 24:10–16.
\textsuperscript{158} 2 Kings 25:8–12.
\textsuperscript{159} Miller / Hayes 2006, 479–481.
\textsuperscript{160} Judges 4:10; 5:13–18; 7:23–24; 12:1.
\textsuperscript{161} Scheidel 2007, 81 suggests no more than one person in eight in the Roman state was predominantly involved in non-agricultural activities. For the late Roman Empire Grey 2011, 4 suggests around 20% were non-agriculturalists. The CIA maintains a web site listing countries and what percent of their populations are involved in agriculture, industry and services. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2048.html. Even today there are a significant number of countries where ca. 85–90% of the population is involved in agriculture.
\textsuperscript{162} 2 Samuel 15:18; 8:18; 20:7, 23.
\textsuperscript{163} By comparison, the standing army of the Roman empire is estimated to have been 230,000–270,000 strong (Bang 2012, 412) and was drawn from a population of 60,000,000–70,000,000 (Scheidel 2007, 48). This is a mere 0.4% of the total population.
13. Benefits of War for Civilians

While warfare could be disastrous for a losing civilian population, triumph, however, could bring many benefits to the victors. First was the plunder carried off from the defeated.\textsuperscript{164} While much of the choicest material would go to the king and the elites surrounding or supporting him\textsuperscript{165} a certain amount was expected to go to the troops\textsuperscript{166} themselves and their dependents at home.\textsuperscript{167} Such loot could include livestock, precious and common goods, and human captives.\textsuperscript{168} Such plunder might result from the capture of an enemy city,\textsuperscript{169} the plundering of a camp,\textsuperscript{170} or stripping bodies in the field.\textsuperscript{171}

A victorious king might force his defeated adversary to grant him access to markets in his country, which may have benefited merchants at home. For example, the defeated Ben-hadad granted markets in Damascus to the Israelites, just as the Israelites had previously granted the Arameans such markets in Samaria.\textsuperscript{172} The Assyrians established special markets in Gaza on the border with Egypt.\textsuperscript{173}

Victory in battle might also allow the victor to acquire new lands for his people, regain territory previously lost, or reassign territory from one kingdom to another. Indeed, much of the narrative from Exodus to Judges is set against the backdrop of a military campaign to acquire Canaanite territory for the Israelites to settle.\textsuperscript{174} Usually the bulk of the indigenous population remained in the land,\textsuperscript{175} though some massacres and forced deportations might occur. An example of such territorial and population losses is in 1 Kings 15:20, which recounts the loss of Israelite territory, and so civilian population, in the Huleh valley to Damascus in the early 9th century. Later in the 9th century the northern kingdom lost its territory east of the Jordan River to Damascus.\textsuperscript{176} When the Assyrians arrived in the latter part of the 8th century many Levantine kingdoms, including northern Israel, were turned into imperial provinces.\textsuperscript{177} A similar destiny awaited Judah after Zedekiah’s revolt, when Jerusalem was destroyed and a new administration was installed at Mizpah. In his 701 B.C. campaign Sennacherib carved off some number of Judean settlements and transferred them to the control of neighboring loyal Philistine rulers.\textsuperscript{178} It is likely that the population growth in Jerusalem in the latter part of the 8th century was due to influxes of refugees fleeing Assyrian control of northern Israel, and those either fleeing from

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\textsuperscript{164} Psalm 68:12–13; 1 Samuel 30:22.
\textsuperscript{165} Judges 5:12, 1 Samuel 30:26–31, 2 Samuel 8:11–12.
\textsuperscript{166} 1 Samuel 14:30, 32.
\textsuperscript{167} Numbers 31:9–54; Judges 5:7; 1 Samuel 30:16–26; Isaiah 9:3.
\textsuperscript{169} Deuteronomy 20:10–14.
\textsuperscript{170} 1 Samuel 17:53; 2 Kings 3:23–24, 7:8–16.
\textsuperscript{171} 1 Samuel 17:54, 31:8; 2 Samuel 23:10.
\textsuperscript{172} 1 Kings 20:34.
\textsuperscript{173} COS 2, 291, 293.
\textsuperscript{174} Numbers 21:21–35; Deuteronomy 3:8–17; Joshua 1–12; Judges 1:1–26.
\textsuperscript{175} 2 Kings 25:12, 22; Jeremiah 52:16.
\textsuperscript{176} 2 Kings 10:32–33.
\textsuperscript{179} COS 2, 303.
Philistine control in the Shephelah, or those forced off their lands as the Philistines assumed control.\(^{180}\)

The Mesha Stele (lines 13–14) provides an example of local seizure and occupation of conquered lands outside of Israel. After Mesha, the Moabite king, conquered Ataroth he relocated there settlers from Sharon and Mahrit.\(^ {181}\) Similarly, once Azatiwada had defeated and deported some foes he resettled the area with Danunians.\(^ {182}\)

14. Conclusion

As this brief survey of the data has shown, the Israelites were well aware of both the negative and positive effects of war on civilians. Sustaining an army required the annual expenditure of the kingdom’s finite resources. A great victory in war could bring riches through plunder, additions to the work force through slaves, and potentially new territory to exploit, all at the expense of the losers. However, even a successful war was likely to mean that some men of the militia would die, affecting agricultural production at home, and hence resources available to the king through taxation. A defensive war at home, even if was successful, often meant more military deaths in battle, and also possibly deaths among “civilians” called in desperation to defend their settlements. Many others might die through starvation and disease. Normal patterns of social behavior (for example, the proper burial of the dead) and institutions (families) might break down. Segments of society would be uprooted and become refugees, fleeing to nearby fortified towns, or even to other countries. Crops, orchards and vineyards might be ruined or consumed by the attackers. Water sources might be blocked and tombs robbed and defiled. A defeat could lead to even more deaths, as well as to torture, rape, execution, and forced labor for the survivors. The destruction of homes and public infrastructure and the loss of wealth were also likely outcomes of a siege. The ruling class might be changed and thousands of civilians might face deportation to regions hundreds of kilometers from their homelands. For a society like ancient Israel, functioning often at a subsistence level, war, any war, came at a terrible price.

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\(^{181}\) COS 2, 138.
\(^{182}\) COS 2, 125, 149.
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Fig. 1: Skulls from late eight century B.C. mass burial at Lachish associated with Sennacherib’s assault. Reproduced with the permission of the Trustees of the British Museum and the Wellcome Foundation.
Fig. 2: Assyrian soldiers impaling captive Judeans outside the city gates of Lachish. From the reliefs depicting the siege of Lachish found in Sennacherib’s Southwest Palace at Nineveh. Photograph by Avraham Hay. Adapted from Fig. 81 in Ussishkin 1982 and used with the author’s permission.
Fig. 3: Assyrian soldiers beheading Judean captives (right) and possibly flaying other prisoners (left). From the reliefs depicting the siege of Lachish found in Sennacherib’s Southwest Palace at Nineveh. Drawing by Judith Dekel. Adapted from Fig. 70 in Ussishkin 1982 and used with the author’s permission.

Fig. 4: Close up view of human remains found in Locus 1114 at Ashdod, a mass burial associated with Sargon II’s late eighth century campaign. Adapted from Pl. XXXIX.3 in Dothan 1971. Used with the permission of the Israel Antiquities Authority.