"and the Land Had Rest From War": A New Materialist Reading of the Effects of the Ban in Joshua 8-12

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Abstract:

Using a New Materialist approach, this paper will argue that the Israelite army (as described in the text of Joshua) went to war with the Canaanite cities and their kings not only because of the divine command of God ("…I will give them into your hand…") but also for economic gain (given the vast agricultural resources of Canaan) at the expense of the agency of both the land and animals (including humans) in the region. Using the strength of the "turn to matter" found in the broad umbrella discourse known as New Materialism, this study intends to draw upon archaeological-historiographical perspectives developed by the Davide Nadali and Jordi Vidal's *The Other Face of the Battle* (2014), in which they survey the experiences of non-combatants in other Ancient Near Eastern wars, to better understand the implications and horrors suffered by Canaanite civilians at the hands of the Israelites. The cryptic phrase "and the land had rest from war" (both in Joshua 11:23 and 14:15) provides a unique entry point to consider the material impact that the war in Canaan had on both the civilians, with respect to the genocidal command to be "devoted to the Lord," but also on the land itself, with respect to famines caused by military sieges, the disruption of economies due to war, and consumption (and slaughter) of animals. In contrast to classic studies that often favor a top-down approach, a New Materialist approach to reading selections from Joshua will provide a critically necessary insight into the capacity of agentic possibility (or lack thereof) for the land, for animals, and for civilians trying to survive in the face of absolute destruction.

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INTRODUCTION

The book of Joshua is a strange text. It sits among the texts of the Nevi'im, prophetic books like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. The contours of the story found in Joshua relate the renewal of the covenant between God and God's people and have been read in churches and synagogues for millennia. And yet this text is also filled with immense horror, destruction, and death. Often framed in a light that attempts to quickly move past words like "genocide" and "annihilation," I am concerned about the level of violence ushered in by a divine command and legitimation to utterly destroy – *ḥērem* – entire cities so that "nothing that breathed remained."[1] Since past studies tend to emphasize the lives of humans in the text of Joshua, my interest is centered on how non-anthropological material reality was affected by the violence described in the text of Joshua. My point of entry is a curious phrase at the end of Joshua 11: "And the land had rest from war." This prompted a question: what was the resulting impact of the "utter destruction" (*ḥērem*) from the invading Israelite army on the land, animals, and even the civilians in ancient Canaan? This paper's exploratory reading is an effort to answer such a question.

To answer such a broad question, I have employed three distinct areas of scholarship to better understand both the context and scope of the violence to non-human

[1] Joshua 11:11 CEB

entities in the text itself. The first area is that of New Materialism, a broad umbrella discourse that champions what many have called "the turn to matter," focusing on how non-human material realities are affected by human agency (among many other related but diverging analytical interests). The second area is the scholarship on the Hebrew term *ḥērem*. Much work has been done on this term, which many have translated as "the Ban," but my interest in this particular body of work is not in the implications for human life but for the land and the animals caught up in the warring forces of humanity. The third and final area of scholarship needed to tackle this question is an archaeological-historical perspective of war in the Ancient Near East (hereafter ANE). While most of the archaeological-historical work surrounding Joshua has been devoted to investigating the strata at various sites, Davide Nadali and Jordi Vidal's *The Other Face of the Battle* offers some insight into what civilians experienced in ANE wars. The combination of these three areas will enable me to carry out an exploratory reading centered on the plight of the land and its animals in the text of Joshua 8-12.

NEW MATERIALISM: SOME KEY CONSIDERATIONS

As mentioned in the introduction, New Materialism[2] is a broad set of discourses that emphasizes the importance and centrality of material realities from a non-anthropocentric position. While the discourses seek to address questions of ethics, they do so through several different methodological avenues. One important avenue is that of ontology.

[2] It should be noted here that many scholars writing essays on New Materialism opt for a different designation: *renewed materialism*. This distinction illustrates that New Materialism (or a renewed materialism) is not a break from the materialism of, say, the 1970s but rather a rediscovery of "older materialist traditions while pushing them in novel, and sometimes experimental, directions or toward fresh applications." (Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, eds., *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* [Durham: Duke University Press, 2010], 4.)

Stephen White rightly notes that "ontology involves not simply the abstract study of the nature of being but also the underlying beliefs about existence that shape our everyday relationships to ourselves, to others, and to the world."[3] White continues by pointing out that it is these ontological commitments that wrestle with the questions of history and identity from both individualist and collectivist perspectives.[4] But perhaps the most important consideration for using a New Materialist approach to reading a biblical text is the breakdown of the binary between ethics and politics. When the ethics and politics of issues remain circumscribed to the values and experiences of humans, the conversation has lost its capacity to reimagine the concerns of the environment around us. In other words, by considering a "turn to matter," I am suggesting that, in order to better conceptualize the material struggle of the land and the animals in Joshua, I must reconstitute my ethical and political imagination to question what might be normative in terms of what qualifies as violence.

Following the lead of scholars like Diana Coole, Samatha Frost, Melissa A. Orlie, and others, the ontological reorientation to consider matter is an orientation that "conceives of matter itself as lively or as exhibiting agency."[5] This reorientation is one that places a firm emphasis on "materialization as a complex, pluralistic, relatively open process…it is an insistence that humans, including theorists themselves, be recognized as thoroughly immersed within materiality's productive contingencies."[6] It should be noted here that this so-called new ontology breaks from a Cartesian-Newtonian understanding

[3] Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, eds., *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 5.
[4] Stephen White, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 3f.
[5] Ibid., 7.
[6] Ibid.

of matter in that, rather than conceptualizing matter in passive terms in a trapped dualism against the *cogito*, it is post-Cartestian (instead of anti-Cartesian), favoring positivist and constructivist engagement that creates "new concepts and images of nature that affirm matter's immanent vitality."[7] Such a radical reorientation suggests that humans are not thinking subjects who are rational masters capable of measuring and manipulating matter for their own ends apart from dead matter. Instead, a new ontology of matter deconstructs the human agency as only one force among many rather than the highest or largest force in material reality. Coole asserts a similar point, arguing that "materiality is always something more than 'mere' matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable."[8] What is the result of such an idea? One possible answer is the disruption of human agency as the principle lens with which to access material reality. It disrupts the notion that humans have mastery over matter or even the authority to manipulate matter all while destabilizing the idea that humans are the sole agents capable of freedom and agency.[9] To utilize this disruption, I will need the help of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception.

While the scope of Merleau-Ponty's oeuvre is beyond the scope of this paper, I have found his articulation of reversible flesh, which is to say, the folding of flesh to be a useful tool to investigate the violence concerning the Ban in the text of Joshua. Between 1956 and 1960, he delivered three lecture courses entitled "Nature." In these courses, his project considered a new ontology that "must be presented without any compromise with humanism, nor moreover with naturalism, nor finally with theology…to show that

[7] Coole and Frost, *New Materialisms*, 8.
[8] Ibid., 9.
[9] Ibid.

philosophy can no longer think according to the cleavage: God, man, creatures."[10] His challenge is cast in biological terms: the "ontological leaf" which is "divided into folds, doubled, even tripled…There are no substantial differences between physical Nature, life, and mind."[11] Coole rightly notes that this folded flesh/matter is Merleau-Ponty's vehicle to avoid the collapse of these categories into one another (as so often happens in naturalist, humanist, and theological discussions).[12] His aim, then, is to subvert and resist the essentializing modernist tendencies (inherited from Descartes) that perceives consciousness and being as somehow separate (and inferior) to matter. The concept of the fold and its infinite multiplicity and reversibility demands that we perceive matter as self-generative and as radically immanent. Rather than the interiority and exteriority of matter heralded by Cartesian dualism, Merleau-Ponty's objection to such a binary can be illustrated in his quote of Cézanne: "The landscape thinks itself in me and I am its consciousness."[13] Such a statement is possible *because of* folded matter's immanently generative quality: "There is no break at all in this circuit; it is impossible to say that nature ends here and that man or expression starts here. It is, therefore, mute Being which itself comes to show forth its own meaning."[14] But most important from his work on folded matter is his writing in *The Phenomenology of Perception* where he discusses both the relationality and reflexivity of matter. Merleau-Ponty, in writing about the body-subject, says, "I am not, therefore, in Hegel's phrase, 'a hole in being,' but a hollow, a fold, which has been made and which can be unmade."[15] In the posthumously published

[10] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 274.
[11] Merleau-Ponty, *Nature* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 212.
[12] Coole and Frost, *New Materialisms*, 96-98.
[13] Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 17.
[14] Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 188.
[15] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), 215.

Nature, he continues this line of thinking to suggest that a living being emerges from physical matter that proceeds forth into a "spatiotemporal field" – life itself now considered "a fold."[16] With all of this in mind, I now turn to consider the scholarship of the Hebrew term *ḥērem*.

ḤĒREM: THE DIVINE COMMAND FOR UTTER DESTRUCTION

The term *ḥērem* is found throughout the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. Often translated as "ban" or "utter destruction," the term can also connote something like "religious devotion" (e.g., "dedicate" in *HALOT*).[17] The word also has several Semitic cognates.[18] But like so many other terms, it is not only the meaning of the word that is important but its legacy throughout time.

Gerhard von Rad noted in his "Introduction" that as early as Julius Welhausen's *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (published in 1885), there has been a fascination and preoccupation with the signification of *ḥērem* for the ancient Israelites. Wellhausen himself claimed that "war [based on the usage of *ḥērem*] was at the epicenter of this ancient culture…It was most especially in the graver moments of history [i.e., war] that Israel awoke to full consciousness of itself and of Jehovah. Now, at that time and for centuries afterwards, the high-water marks of history were indicated by the wars it recorded."[19] Wellhausen goes on to explain that even the etymology of Israel's name can be read as "El does battle."[20] The first systematic study of the subject of war and its

[16] Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, 157.
[17] HALOT, s.v., "*hrm*," 1: 354.
[18] These range from the Arabaic *ḥaruma* (to be forbidden; to declare sacred) to the Akkadian *ḫarāmu* (to separate). HALOT, s.v., "*hrm*," 1:353.
[19] Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (Glouster: Peter Smith, 1983), 434.
[20] Ibid.

impact on ancient Israel was carried out by Fredrich Schwally in his 1901 publication of *Der heilige Krieg im alten Israel*. Schwally argued that the inextricable link forged by the covenant between Israel and God, who was a warrior God, meaning that any defense of Israel (and there also the covenant) could be "nothing other than a 'holy war…'"[21] Von Rad also contributed to this trajectory by publishing *Holy War in Ancient Israel* (1951), agreeing with both Wellhausen and Schwally that ancient Israelite wars were *only* "sacred acts" since the holy war was "an important early religious institution of Israel, and was practiced during the period of the Judges in order to defend the amphictyony."[22]

Rudolf Smend challenged the consensus offered by Wellhausen, Schwally, and von Rad by noting that the wars of ancient Israel were not a cultic extension (as argued by von Rad) but rather fueled by "political or military aspirations."[23] Smend's critique would not sway the literature being produced on "holy war" until Manfried Weippert took up Smend's argument in 1972 in a study on holy war in ancient Israel and Assyria. Weippert studied the wars linked to Mari, Hittite, and neo-Assyrian cultic activities and found that there was "no textual basis for maintaining a distinction between a 'holy war' on the one hand, and regular or profane war in these cultures on the other."[24] More damaging to the argument put forth by Wellhausen et al was that Weippert concluded that the cultic and ritual components to a 'holy war' were not unique to Israel but were "common throughout the Ancient Near East."[25]

[21] William L. Lyons, ed., *A History of Modern Scholarship on the Biblical Word ḥērem* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010), 15.
[22] Ibid., 16.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Manfred Weippert, "'Heiliger Krieg' in Israel und Assyrien," *ZAW* 84 (1972): 490.
[25] Ibid.

Beginning in the 1980s, scholars have sought alternative readings of *ḥērem* in order to recuperate the apparent violence. Millard C. Lind, a Mennonite, wrote *Yahweh is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel* (1980) to argue for an "exegetical basis for a pacifist interpretation of the Pentateuch, the Deuteronomistic History, and ancient Israelite war narratives" that conceives of God fighting on Israel's behalf as the "normative mode of military engagement in the Old Testament."[26] Philip Stern's work (*The Biblical Ḥērem: A Window on Israel's Religious Experience)* reconceptualizes the term *ḥērem* away from its violent connotations. For him, *ḥērem* was "a means of obtaining land and restoring 'ordered existence.'"[27] The harshest critique on the interpretation of *ḥērem* comes from Gerd Lüdemann (*The Unholy in Holy Scripture: The Dark Side of the Bible*) in which he devotes significant space to condemning the violence associated with *ḥērem.*[28] Yet in each of these publications (and those not mentioned here), the emphasis of the study of the Ban itself is rigidly anthropocentric. The focus is either on the cult itself, the relationship between God and humans, and the effect of the Ban on humans. It is curious, then, that the editor of the Deuteronomistic history decided to ensure that Joshua 11:23 and 14:15 remained in the text: "…and the land had rest from war." Yet prior to conducting my exploratory reading of some of the instances of the Ban in Joshua, I must first survey Jeffrey Zorn's archealogical-historical work on how civilians were impacted by Ancient Near Eastern wars.

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[26] Millard C. Lind, *Yahweh is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1980), 170.
[27] Philip D. Stern, *The Biblical ḥērem: A Window on Israel's Religious Experience* (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1991), 49.
[28] Lüdemann devotes an entire chapter to critiquing the Ban found in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament ("Unholy Violence Against Others"). His conclusion ("A Criticism of my Church") contains his recommendation for moving forward – a "creative break" that condemns using "the Word of God" to sanction the pain of violence (e.g., the Crusades, etc.). Gerd Lüdemann, *The Unholy in Holy Scripture: The Dark Side of the Bible,* John Bowden, trans., (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 133-36.

ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN WARFARE: A VIEW FROM BELOW

Since bioarchaeology is mostly limited to the study of skeletal remains at excavation sites, the best point of entry to investigate the impact of war on the land and the animals from antiquity is to assess the archaeological and historiographical pieces of what life was like for civilians caught up in a war. Jeffrey R. Zorn's chapter "War and Its Effects on Civilians in Ancient Israel and Its Neighbors" found in Davide Nadali and Jordi Vidal's important publication *The Other Face of the Battle* sheds some light on the suffering experienced by both humans and other living beings.

Zorn notes that the military campaigns of Israel (and its neighbors) included "massacres of civilian populations, forced labor or slavery, and economic devastation."[29] The assault on a city would often result in the loss of infrastructure and property, usually in the form of animal and plant life.[30] A siege against an embattled city, after it had been raided for animals and plants, would often result in a famine in the land in and around the city. In the case of Judges 9:45, the text indicates that the famine was made total by the sowing of salt "to render [the city] symbolically unfit for resettlement."[31] The land itself was often weaponized against those trapped inside the city: "…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."[32] This form of warfare reached its zenith, however, when it weaponized the helpless civilians against the land itself by leaving their corpses to rot in the open. Whether from battle or from disease or famine,

[29] Jeffrey R. Zorn, "War and Its Effects on Civilians in Ancient Israel and Its Neighbors," in *The Other Face of the Battle*, eds. Davide Nadali and Jordi Vidal (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), 79.
[30] Ibid., 81.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., 82; Jeremiah 6:6. Eph'al 2009, 53-54.

"the bodies would be torn apart and scattered by scavenging birds and animals…"[33] An important aspect of the desecration of corpses factors into my interest in how the land was treated: ritual mutilation. The Hebrew Bible/Old Testament records examples of ritual mutilation as a feature of war: "For example, the bodies might be hung on city walls, as happened to Saul and his son Jonathan after the disastrous battle at Mt. Gilboa [in 1 Samuel 31:9-10]."[34] From these few pieces of information, we can begin to glimpse a clearer picture of the land and animals under the effects of war. Before I begin my reading of the instances of the Ban in Joshua, I will linger on Zorn's comments on the Ban to better understand the ideological ramifications of a total destruction of those considered to be the enemy.

Zorn's discussion on the term leads him to conclude that *ḥērem* is a "sacral act in which the victims and perhaps their property are totally devoted to the deity."[35] He also rightfully notes that such an act should be designated "an extreme form of warfare."[36] He argues that if the enemy and everything they possess is annihilated, the primary motivation for going to war – which is often material gain – is no longer on the table. If the precondition for victory is complete destruction of all the people in a city, Zorn states that the military action has transitioned away from acquiring more resources to that of human sacrifice.[37] He concludes his section on *ḥērem* by reminding the reader that the term is often ambiguous since its usage varies from references to sacral acts without death to instances of "total annihilation but with no obvious sacral association."[38] It is

[33] Ibid., 88; Deut 28:26; 1 Sam 17:44-46; Psalm 79:2-3; Jer 7:33; 16:4, 6; Ezekiel 29:5; 39:4, 17-20.
[34] Zorn, "War and Its Effects," 89.
[35] Ibid., 87.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Zorn, "War and Its Effects," 88.

this latter type that has preoccupied my interest with the Ban in Joshua: a story that depicts brutal slaughter of all living, breathing things without any indication of a sacral association. Bearing in mind Merleau-Ponty's work, the history of the term *ḥērem,* the implications for all life in an Ancient Near Eastern context of war, I now turn to Joshua to conduct my New Materialist reading.

THE EFFECTS OF THE BAN ON THE LAND

Returning to the question of the introduction, I am interested in a close reading that investigates both the agency and the suffering of the land and animals in the chapters of Joshua 8 through 12. Beginning with the sack of Ai, these five chapters contain some of the most distressing aspects of the entire biblical book. My interest in the land and animals should not be understood as a disdain for the human life that was lost in these incursions. In fact, my attention to the death experienced by the land and the animals offers a view from below that can only add existential weight to *all* life. For this reading, I will survey sections of chapter 8, chapter 10, and chapter 11.

Picking up in the middle of chapter 8, Joshua raises his weapon,[39] which is the signal for the ambush to commence, continuing to hold his weapon in place until the entire population of Ai has been slaughtered.[40] According to the text, twelve thousand people died that day. Unlike the narratives that will follow, the animals ("cattle and other booty", Josh 8:27) were not slaughtered this time. But the land itself was not so lucky. Joshua 8:28 tells us the fate of the land: "Then Joshua burned Ai. He made it a permanently deserted mound…" The JPS translation of the same verse is even more

[39] Some translations list "dagger" – others use "javelin."
[40] Joshua 8:18-29 CEB

chilling: “Then Joshua burned down Ai, and turned it into a mound of ruins for all time, a desolation to this day.” The land’s agency has been terminated and its survival has been seared shut. Since the designation of a city often included the area directly around the city proper, the land in and around Ai may have been scorched badly enough to the point where the lack of vegetation would mean that severe erosion would take place over the coming years – earth being separated from earth by wind and water.

Joshua 10:28-43 lists the so-called victories in the southern regions of Canaan where the text presents a rhythmic formula of the Israelite extermination of kings and cities. In each location, God gives power to Israel so that Joshua and his army can completely destroy the settlement, its people, and everything within the area. The text often reassures the reader that the annihilation is total with the repeated phrase – “…until there were no survivors left.”[41] Though they are not mentioned here, the destruction at Ai leads the reader to assume that the no-survivor Ban offered to God was more than likely applied to the land and the animals. This is somewhat confirmed in a later verse in this section. In Joshua 10:40b, the text reads: “[Joshua] wiped out *everything that breathed* as something reserved for God, exactly as the LORD, the God of Israel, had commanded.” The significant word in this phrase is the word for “breath” since it is the exact same term used for the “breath” of life breathed into humanity in Genesis 2:7.[42] Here we see the triadic challenge of Merleau-Ponty’s new ontology on full display: the breath of life is the same breath of humanity which is also the breath of living things. The French philosopher’s words ring with horrible accuracy that this breath is rather “hollow” and can be “made and unmade.” This breath that is extinguished was breath that had emerged

[41] Josh 10:33
[42] נִשְׁמָֽת

into that spatiotemporal field - life that emerged from matter - much like the waters that were delegated the power to bring forth life in Genesis.

The land, too, is under attack in this final section of Joshua 10. Joshua 10:40a reads: "Joshua *struck* at the whole land: the highlands, the arid southern plains, the lowlands, the slopes, and all their kings. He left no survivors." Though the antecedent of "survivors" is likely referencing "kings," there is no reason it cannot also reference the land masses listed. The Ban, this religiously devoted act to God, sacrifices humans, animals, and entire lands to the deity. The agency of the land is canceled and foreshadows its relegation to a long cycle of occupation and destruction at the hands of other imperial powers for the rest of ancient Israel's time in the Levant.

While most animals were either completely destroyed (e.g., when "everything that breathed" was put under the Ban) or were taken as plunder (e.g., in the cases of Ai and the cities surrounding Hazor in Joshua 12), there is one account where Joshua and the Israelites directly attack an animal. In Joshua 11:6, God speaks to Joshua saying, "Don't be afraid of them. By this time tomorrow, I will make them all dead bodies in Israel's presence. *Cripple their horses!* Burn their chariots!" Joshua, then, fulfills this command against the king of Hazor and his allies in Joshua 11:8-9: "…they struck them down until no survivors were left. Joshua dealt with them exactly as the LORD had told him. He *crippled their horses* and burned their chariots." The verb for "cripple" is *'qr*,[43] meaning approximately "uproot" or "hamstring."[44] The brutality of these translations do not illustrate the violence done to these living beings. When used in the context of horses or bulls, *'qr* is the act of severing the pasterns (the space between the hoof and the fetlock).

[43] **עקר**
[44] HALOT

Modern veterinary procedures identify pastern lacerations as medical emergencies that, if left untreated, the horse could become "chronically lame" or even "require euthanasia."[45] By severing the pasterns of the horses, Joshua ensured that these horses not only could never stand again – they were consigned to death. It is important to note at this painful juncture that throughout Joshua 8-12, every single act of destruction of the Ban was done "without mercy" – 11 times in total.[46] The destruction of the people – those fighting and those civilians – was done without mercy. Setting fire to the land of the cities, leaving corpses to rot and spread disease, severing the pasterns on horses, butchering the living beings that provided milk and worked alongside humans – all sacrificed under the Ban and without mercy.

This reading reveals some problems in the text. First, if Merleau-Ponty is correct that the line between nature and humanity is blurred, that "mute Being" shows forth its own meaning, of what value is the agency of the land and animals in Joshua? The nexus of God-humanity-creatures remains firmly in place in the text of Joshua with God ordering the complete destruction, Joshua carrying out the command, and the creatures (which is to say the land, the animals – the matter that produces life) are materially unimportant apart from the decree and power of the God-humanity alliance. The self-generative and radically immanent qualities of matter are not permitted any hope in the space of Joshua 8-12. Second, the resulting effects of the Ban seem irrational. The land that was promised to Israel lies in ruins. While acknowledging that chapter 13 lists the unconquered territories of Canaan, most of the land listed in Joshua 8-12 is destroyed, burned, and utterly wiped of people and animals. From a purely pragmatic standpoint:

[45] http://igrow.org/livestock/horse/pastern-lacerations/
[46] Josh 8:24; 10:28, 30, 32, 35, 37, 39; 11:11-12, 14, 20.

why burn down the home that was promised? The answer to such a question is far from clear, especially given the complicated sacral implications of the Ban. Finally, I am haunted by Merleau-Ponty's quote in light of what happened to the land and the animals in these texts: "The landscape thinks itself in me and I am its consciousness." How is it possible for the landscape to think itself while in a state of oblivion? What is the ethical and political responsibility of the body-subject that bears the consciousness of the land? If we cannot easily discern the line between "physical Nature, life, and the mind" and if it is "impossible to say that nature ends here and [humanity] or expression starts here" – we must radically reconsider humanity's ethico-political relationship to an active, living, generative, and immanent matter, a folding of flesh that is contingent with our own material reality.