

The Doctrine of Gilgal

There are several problems here. Jiljiliah seems to be located in two different places. The campsite Gilgal might not be the most convenient location for Joshua to continue to return to. An additional Gilgal might be located north of Bethel in Ephraim, which is one area where the inner cities were not named when the area was conveyed to Ephraim. See Edersheim pp. 319–320 and Keil and Delitzsch pp. 68–69 and redo.

1. By most accounts, Gilgal is a couple of miles north of the Dead Sea on the western coast of the Jordan River. It is a couple miles northeast of Jericho. Josephus places it five miles from the river and two miles east of Jericho. According to Keil and Delitzsch, Josephus places Gilgal two and a half hours (ten stadia) from the Jordan River and a half hour (ten stadia) from Jericho.¹ By the narrative in Joshua it was west of the Jordan. Even today, Jews will reverently point to a place a couple of miles east of Jericho, which has not yet been confirmed with any archeological remains (which, given the time and circumstances of the encampment, no remains should be expected to be found).
2. The Hebrew name for Gilgal is gil^egâl (גִּלְגָּל) [pronounced *gil-GAWL*]. Here, we should take a moment and look at the difference between a dagesh forte and a dagesh lene. Six Hebrew consonants take a dagesh lene: bêyth (בּ) [pronounced *bayth* or *vayth*], gîmel (ג) [pronounced *GHEE-mel*], dâleth (ד) [pronounced *DAW-leth*], kâph (כּ) [pronounced *kawf*], pê^h (פּ) [pronounced *pay*] and tâw (ט) [pronounced *taw*]. We recall these six consonants conveniently as BeGaD K-FaT (or, Big Duck FaT²). Generally speaking, the dagesh lene hardens the pronunciation of these consonants. There is no appreciable affect on ג or ד, but the other four letters are affected; the dagesh lene gives them a harder pronunciation:

| Letter | Without a dagesh | Pronunciation: | With a dagesh | Pronunciation: |
|-----------------|------------------|----------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Bêyth | ב | <i>b_v</i> | בּ | <i>b</i> |
| Kâph | כ | <i>kh</i> | כּ | <i>k</i> |
| Pê ^h | פ | <i>f</i> | פּ | <i>p</i> |
| Tâw | ט | <i>th</i> | טּ | <i>t</i> |

We also have what is known as a dagesh forte. A dagesh forte looks exactly the same as a dagesh lene, but it has the effect of doubling a consonant in the other Hebrew consonants. In BeGaD K-FaT, the dot is always a dagesh lene when the letter is NOT preceded by vowel. It is a dagesh forte when preceded by a vowel. It would seem, therefore, we have the clumsy pronunciation *gilg-GAWL* which is often shortened to *gil-GAWL* or to *gil-GAL*. However, for this word and similar words, the gîmel is not doubled. *Gilgal* means *sacred circle of stones*. It is perhaps a wordplay of the Hebrew word gal^egal (גִּלְגָּל) [pronounced *gahl-GAHL*], which means *wheel, whirl, whirlwind*. However, we do not find this word used until the psalms and the prophets, meaning that its meaning could have been derived from the city. Strong's #1534 BDB #165. *Gilgal* is actually a word play from the word *to roll, to roll away*, which is the Hebrew word gâlal (גָּלַל) [pronounced *gaw-LAHL*], which is found and explained in Joshua 5:9 (Strong's #1556 BDB #164). *Then Jehovah said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." So the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day* (Joshua 5:9). Since *Gilgal* is mentioned in Joshua 4:19, that means that Joshua 4 was written after the events in Joshua 5:9. *Gilgal* is Strong's #1537 BDB #166. To sum up, so far: *Gilgal* was named because it was where God caused the reproach of Egypt to be rolled away from the Israelites; however, because of the stones which were set up there, it came to be known as *a circle of stones* as well. This would give more credence to the word gal^egal coming from Gilêgâl. When this area is named, we have the definite article in all places except Joshua 5:9 and 12:23.

3. With regards to the modern placement of Gilgal, The International Bible Encyclopedia: *In 1874 Conder recognized the name Gilgal as surviving in "Birket Jiljûlieh," a pool beside a tamarisk tree 3 miles E. of old Jericho. The pool measures 100 ft. by 84, and is surrounded with a wall of roughly hewn stones. N. of the pool*

¹ Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. II, p. 44.

² Which is infinitely cooler.

bless discovered lines of masonry 300 yds. long, representing probably the foundations of an ancient monastery. S. of the pool there are numerous mounds scattered over an area of one-third of a sq. mile, the largest being 50 ft. in diameter, and 10 in height. On excavation some pottery and glass were found. These ruins are probably those of early Christian occupation and according to condor there is nothing against their marking the original site. Up to the Middle Ages the 12 stones of Joshua were referred to by tradition.³ According to ZPEB, archeologist James Muilenburg has done extensive research on this city and places it about a mile or so northeast of the ancient Jericho (which is now Tell es-Sultan). He comes to this conclusion based upon the testimony of ancient historians Josephus and Eusebius; on the testimony of the Bible; and upon an excavation which revealed some Early Iron Age remains there.⁴ I personally don't see 2 million Jews camping out a mile away from Jericho. I would see Gilgal as being much further north; at least 5 miles north of Jericho. I should mention that it is likely that Muilenburg and the ancient historian Josephus are in accord in their placement of Gilgal. However, keep in mind that Josephus himself was a millennium removed from Gilgal.

4. Since this is where the ark was kept, and where all the women and children remained during the invasion of the Land of Promise, it would have been incumbent upon the Israelites to see that troops were left behind and that it was well-fortified.
5. There are possibly several cities named Gilgal in the Bible. The geographical references would not allow there to be but one city. ZPEB estimates that there are 2–6 different Gilgal's. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia indicates that there are three different Gilgal's. Whereas, it is possible, and even probable that there will be two cities with the same name, that doesn't mean that this must be the case. Furthermore, one would suppose that most of the references in Joshua would all be to the same Gilgal. In my estimation, there are 2 (and perhaps 3) different Gilgal's. If there is a 3rd, that would be Beth-Gilgal of Neh. 12:29. Interestingly enough, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, which boasts nearly 300 maps and 9 references to Gilgal, identifies but one location for Gilgal.
6. The Gilgal best known is the one we are dealing with; the one nearest Jericho. There was no city there until the Israelites crossed over the Jordan River and set up the stones as a commemoration of the crossing of the river. Although sometimes given the meaning *circle of stones*, we do not know that the stones from the Jordan River were placed in a circle. However, it would make more sense for the stones to be placed in such a way as to draw attention rather than to heap them on top of one another.
7. Gilgal became, more or less, the base camp of the Israelites as they moved throughout the Land of Promise to conquer it. The Israelites would need a base of operations. Recall that they had with them women and children who would certainly not be carted all over the country-side as Israel went to war against the peoples of the land. Therefore, they had to stay somewhere and with them should also be a reserve force to protect them. What more logical place than there first pit stop on the other side of the Jordan? Gilgal is one of the most important early cities for Israel because this is there first encampment west of the Jordan River; it is where their males were circumcised (recall that their fathers, gen X, were disobedient, and one area of their disobedience was in not circumcising their male children) (Joshua 5:1–9). It was here the first Passover in the land was celebrated (Joshua 5:10) and where the miraculous manna ceased (Joshua 5:13). Once the ark has circled around Jericho, it would be returned to camp, presumably in Gilgal or on the southern outskirts of Gilgal (Joshua 6:11). It is from this site that the land was parceled out by Joshua to the tribes of Israel (Joshua 14:6).
8. This campsite became fairly well-known to the peoples of the land and the Gibeonites came to this campsite to speak to Joshua, so make a treaty with him (Joshua 9).
9. Now, even though many scholars indicate that there are several cities named *Gilgal*, none of these are listed in the tremendous list of cities taken by each tribe of Israel in the middle portion of the book of Joshua. This by itself is a tremendous argument for the existence of one Gilgal, a campsite, during the time of Joshua.
10. One mention of Gilgal, which is a passage which appears to call for there being a different location, is Deut. 11:30, which reads: "[Are they \[Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim\] not beyond the Jordan after the way of the going in of the sun in the land of the Canaanites, the ones living in the Arabah opposite Gilgal, beside the oaks of Moreh?](#)" Since the oaks of Moreh are mentioned with respect to Abraham in Gen. 12:6 and since they

³ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. 2; p. 1231.

⁴ *The New Bible Dictionary*; editor J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p.470.

are near Shechem, the argument is made that there is a Gentile Gilgal near Shechem. Not necessarily the case. The phrase *the ones living in Arabah opposite Gilgal* could refer in its entirety to the Canaanites. The Canaanites lived in the Arabah; they occupied a territory which is opposite Gilgal or beyond Gilgal. Now, when Moses mentions *beside the oaks of Moreh*, we are back describing the location of Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal (see Deut. 11:29). In other words, this passage does not *require* that there be another city named Gilgal near Shechem. On the other hand, this also requires for the area where Israel is to camp to be named Gilgal prior to there being a city of any sort there.

11. Gilgal is one of the three places where Samuel held district court, the other two being Bethel and Mizpah (I Sam. 7:16). It is unclear whether this was the campsite Gilgal (which would have become a city) or another of the Gilgal's referenced in this doctrine.
12. Gilgal was a holy place where certain sacrifices were offered (I Sam. 10:8 13:8–10 15:21). Given that Israel was circumcised in Gilgal and that this was the first place in the Land that Israel celebrated the Passover, it is reasonable that Israel would have returned to here for these sacrifices. This would have been before the tabernacle (the Tent of God) was finally moved to Jerusalem by Solomon and probably after the destruction of Shiloh, where the Tent of God remained for much of Israel's early history. Where the Tent of God was during the time of these sacrifices opens up a whole new can of worms.
13. It was in Gilgal where Samuel cut Agag into pieces before the Lord (I Sam. 15:33).
14. Saul was both crowned at Gilgal and rejected as king there (I Sam. 11:14–15). It was here where Samuel and Saul parted company forever when Saul disobeyed God in the Amalekite war (I Sam. 15:12–35).
15. When David returned from exile from the other side of the Jordan during Absalom's insurrection, he met the people there (II Sam. 19:15).
16. Gilgal became a place of idolatry during the time period of the early prophets during the 8th century BC (Hosea 4:15 9:15 12:11 Amos 4:4 5:5).
17. The Gilgal mentioned in Judges 2:1 and 3:19 is likely the same Gilgal which is next to Jericho.
18. It is suggested that the Gilgal named in II Kings 2:1–4 is different, as the two prophets, Elisha and Elijah go *from Gilgal* (v. 1), *down to Bethel* (v. 2) and *down to Jericho* (v. 4): *And it came to pass, at Jehovah's taking up of Elijah in a whirlwind to the heavens, that Elijah went and Elisha, from Gilgal, and Elijah said to Elisha, "Wait, please, here, for Jehovah has sent me to Beth-El." And Elisha said, "Jehovah lives and your soul lives, if I leave you." And they went down to Beth-El. And sons of the prophets who were in Beth-El came out to Elisha and they said to him, "Did you know that today Jehovah is taking your lord from your head?" And he said, "I also have known—keep silent." And Elijah said to him, "Elisha, remain here, I pray you, for Jehovah has sent me to Jericho;" and he said, "Jehovah lives and your soul lives, if I leave you." And they came down to Jericho.* If you examine a map, from Gilgal, you would go southwest to Beth-el and then southeast to Jericho. Because of the verb used, some want to see these cities as being in a straight line from north to south. The verb which is in question here is *yârad* (יָרַד) [pronounced *yaw-RAHD*], which means *to descend, to go down*. It is often used of going from a higher elevation to a lower elevation, and that may be all that is in view here. It can also mean *to come to, to arrive at*. Strong's #3381 BDB #432. Whereas Bethel is higher than Gilgal (insofar as we know), the *going down* could refer to the initial descent down to the Wady. Therefore, there is no contradiction here; this does not have to be a different Gilgal. It would imply that Gilgal is a higher elevation than the other two cities. It is also suggested that the city mentioned in II Kings is Beth-Gilgal.
 - a. Another possible explanation which would allow this to be the original Gilgal: when all of Israel crossed over the Jordan, my thinking is that they had to be fairly far north of Jericho. It is reasonable that they camped in a flat area (as it appeared to be throughout the land surrounding the Jordan); however, given the number of people who camped there, this campsite may have extended to the mountains of Ephraim. There were apparently a lot of things which took place at Gilgal which would have required Israel to place a city there or at least some permanent structures. Then, it would be reasonable that if one were to make Gilgal the campsite into Gilgal the city, that they would have located much of it in the mountainous surroundings. Therefore, the building of a well-established city Gilgal in a more mountainous area near the original campsite of Gilgal is quite possible. This would be the city spoken of in connection with Elijah and Elisha.
 - b. It is possible that a new city Gilgal was established elsewhere. ZPEB suggests that the ancient city of Gilgal (not the campsite) which is associated with the two prophets is to be found north of Bethel, its modern-day equivalent being Jiljiliah. The ancient city could have been established long after the time of Joshua. Or, see the next point...

19. In Joshua 12:23, we have a continuation of a list of conquered kings of the various areas of the Land of Promise. The Septuagint reads: *...the king of the Goiim in Galilee...* and the Masoretic text reads: *...the king of the Goiim of Gilgal.* The other kings mentioned in context are kings from the northern area, indicating that *this* Gilgal must be further north. First of all, the Gilgal that we are studying could be further north than indicated (as far north as Adam, in fact), as the Israelites were aware that was where the water was cut off; and that would solve the problem in the previous point and the problem in this point; in other words, the Gilgal we are studying and the Gilgal of these two points are likely the same city. Realize, however, that the Gilgal mentioned in the beginning of Joshua was not occupied by enemy forces. That is, it was just a place where no one lived near Jericho, which is why there is no conquering which took place there. Therefore, this Gilgal is likely a different Gilgal from the original campsite of the Israelites, as we have a king mentioned here. *Gilgal* is a likely transliteration from the language of the resident gentiles. This passage seems to identify Gilgal with the city of Dor, which is guessed to be upon *the maritime plain*. *Dor is identified with "Tantura," while Conder identifies this Gilgal with "Jiljúlíeh," 30 miles S. of Dor and 4 miles N. of Anti-patris.*⁵ It is likely that this is the Gilgal alluded to in Deut. 11:30, as this is a recorded speech of Moses prior to the crossing of the Jordan. If this city is not named until Joshua 5:9, several months later, and since Moses gives this city as a known city during this speech, this would be the same Gilgal as Joshua 12:23. One might call this the historic or the Gentile Gilgal. This city could be equivalent to the city named above. The Gentiles perhaps had a different name for it, but one which sounded like Gilgal, so the Hebrews called it *Gilgal*. The only problem with this, is that no city named Gilgal is transferred into the hands of one of the twelve tribes of Israel when the cities are distributed. One possible explanation is that this is a city which fell off one of the lists (there were several of those).
20. In the partitioning of the land, Joshua 15:7 reads: *Then the border [of Judah] went up to Debir from the valley of Achor, and turned northward toward Gilgal, which is opposite the ascent of Adummim, which is on the south of the valley; and the border continued to the waters of En-shemesh, and it end at En-rogel.* The northward turn does not necessarily include Gilgal here, but points the direction out as this is the northern most point of the border. The relative pronoun *which* could therefore refer to the valley of Achor; with this understanding, this does not have to be a different Gilgal, nor does this distort or confuse the boundaries of Judah.
21. We have managed to show that all the references in the Bible, save, at most, two, could be to the selfsame Gilgal.

[<<Return to Top of Page>>](#)

[<<Charts>>](#)

[<<Site Map>>](#)

[<<Return to the Doctrinal Index>>](#)

Bibliography

1. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. II; p. 1231.
2. Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 2, p. 44.
3. *New American Standard Bible, Study Edition*; A. J. Holman Company, ©1975 by The Lockman Foundation.
4. *The New Bible Dictionary*; editor J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; pp. 469–470.
5. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*; James Strong, S.T.D., LL.D.; Abingdon Press, New York.
6. *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 2, pp. 725–726.

⁵ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. 2; p. 1231.