

# The Doctrine of the City of Hormah

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**Preface:** Hormah is a city in Simeon, in southern Judah, where the Jews were first rebuffed when they entered into the Land of Promise. In faith and in God's time, they did defeat Hormah, and it became one of their cities. We have several questions about Hormah, several theories; and the only time that Hormah is mentioned apart from Israeli aggression is when David sends them some of the spoil which he got from defeating the Amalekites (which was probably spoil which they originally took from the people living in Hormah).

1. The Hebrew word is Chor<sup>e</sup>mâh (חֹרְמָה) [pronounced *chor<sup>e</sup>-MAW*], and it means *devoted [to God]; dedicated to destruction; cursed thing, ban, banned*. It is transliterated *Hormah* (sometimes *Chormah*). Strong's #2767 BDB #356. One website gave the additional definitions *broken rock*, which meaning I cannot substantiate.<sup>1</sup> However, we do have words with the same consonant base which were probably enunciated differently (these words mean *slit [of the nose, lip, ear, etc.]; net; perforated work*. See Strong's #2763 BDB #356 and Strong's #2764 BDB #357.
2. We find Hormah named in Num. 14:45 21:3 Deut. 1:44 Joshua 12:14 15:30 19:4 Judges 1:17 1Sam. 30:30 1Chron. 4:30.
3. Although *the location of Hormah is uncertain; some archaeologists place it about half-way between Gaza and Beersheba, while others locate it about*



Hormah is found in eastern Simeon.

This map was taken from *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; Map 4 in the very back of the Bible.

<sup>1</sup> From the website <http://www.keyway.ca/htm2001/20010730.htm>

7 miles / 11 kilometers east of Beersheba.<sup>2</sup>

4. According to my map, Hormah may be found in Southern Judah near Kadesh Barnea. This is in the portion of Judah which was given over to Simeon.
5. The first that we hear of this city, the Jews are poised to possibly invade the Land of Promise. You may recall this as the minority report, where the Jews scouted the Land of Promise and ten spies came back saying that the inhabitants were too difficult to defeat; and two (Joshua and Caleb) were ready to attack. Well, the Jews cried all that night, not wanting to invade the land and God told Moses that He was ready to destroy all of these reprobates—and Moses pleaded for their lives. Then the Jews, after being chewed out by Moses, then made an unauthorized attack against the Amalekites and the Canaanites who were there. These heathen defeated Israel and forced them back to Hormah. Num. 14
6. Moses recounts this event in Deut. 1:44.

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7. Because of their faithlessness, Israel spent 38 years in the desert wilderness. However, when they began to move again, with the intention of entering the land, they vowed to God completely destroy one group of Canaanites, which is the word *chormah*. The city (or cities) which the Jews destroyed were then named Hormah (Num. 21:1–3). This would have been very close to the city named in Num. 14:45, if not the same city. This gives us two possibilities:
  - a. The Jews were beat back to an area which they *later* named Hormah (having that name in Num. 14:45 would either be a gloss or simply so named by Moses when he later recorded these events).
  - b. The Jews destroyed a city (or several cities) near the Hormah of Num. 14:45 and named them *Hormah*.
  - c. Neither of these two options is problematic; and the first is the most likely.
8. In Joshua 12:7–24, we have the kings which Joshua and the sons of Israel defeated west of the Jordan; in Joshua 12:14, the king of Hormah is named in this group. This affords us several possibilities:
  - a. If the city of Hormah in Num. 14:45 is not the same as the city or cities destroyed by Moses and the Israelites in Num. 21:1–3, then Joshua defeated this city and this king when he invaded the land.
  - b. If these cities are the same, then somehow, it was build up again in a couple of years and Joshua defeated it again. This seems to be the least likely theory.
  - c. The destruction of Hormah alluded to in Joshua 12:14 could actually be referring back to Num. 21:1–3, which battle would have been fought by Joshua.
9. The city of Hormah was given over to Judah when the cities were divided up (Joshua 15:30).
10. This same city became a part of Simeon's inheritance (Judah gave Simeon a place to reside within Judah). Joshua 19:4
11. Judah and Simeon, the only two tribes which seemed to follow the mandate of God, completely destroyed a city named Zephath and renamed it Hormah (Judges 1:17). Again, this gives us several options:
  - a. This could have been identical to the city defeated by Joshua; that is, his taking credit for it was simply a summary of all places defeated by Israel over a period of several years (Joshua's death is mentioned in Judges 2:6–8). This is reasonable and would indicate that the reference to Hormah in Num. 14:45 was a gloss (i.e., it originally had the name of Zephath, but when Moses recorded this information, he called it Hormah, the more common name).
  - b. This could be a different city destroyed by Judah and Simeon, which was leveled and called Hormah (*dedicated to God*) and it may or may not have been built upon again.
12. David sent gifts to those who were in Hormah, indicating that, during his time, this place was occupied (1Sam. 30:30). The tribe of Simeon is not differentiated from Judah in this passage (1Sam. 30:26–30).
13. The final time Hormah is mentioned is simply as a place where Simon lived. 1Chron. 4:30
14. Summary:
  - a. There is *Hormah* and there is *Hormah*.

<sup>2</sup> From the website <http://www.keyway.ca/htm2001/20010730.htm>

- b. When Israel destroys several cities of the Canaanites when they begin their trek back into the land, they dedicate these cities entirely to God and probably level them, kill all of the inhabitants, and take nothing by way of spoil. The area that they destroy, they call *Hormah*, dedicated to God, indicating that is what they did. This was not the name of a particular city. Num. 21:1–3
- c. Israel, under Joshua, did defeat a city which was either named Hormah or they named it Hormah. This would have been the city originally given to Judah and later bequeathed to Simeon (Joshua 15:30 19:4). The defeat of the inhabitants of this city is named twice (Joshua 12:14 Judges 1:17) but probably only occurred one time. This is the city once known as Zephath.
- d. Even though there are several options and even though it is possible that I did not get all of the options just right, there is no resulting conflict or problem by taking this or that option.

I will present an overly simplified version of the Doctrine of the City of Hormah below. There are a few options which are not considered in this simplified version.

### A Summary of the Doctrine of the City of Hormah

1. Hormah was originally known as Zephath. Judges 1:17
2. Israel suffered an early defeat which pushed them back as far south as Hormah (Zephath). Num. 14:45
3. Israel later defeated this city and it was first given over the Judah, and then to Simeon (in order to equal out the distribution of cities). Joshua 12:14 15:30 19:4 Judges 1:17 1Chron. 4:30
4. Although the name of this city means *devoted to God, under the ban, devoted to destruction*; it is apparently occupied during the time of David, as he sends spoil to this city in 1Sam. 30:30.



This is the oversimplified version; there are some minor difficulties which I have glossed over which are covered in greater detail in the complete Doctrine of the City of Hormah.

Map taken from *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; Map 4 in the back of the Bible.

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