

**THE THEOLOGY OF JOSHUA**

by

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The Book of Joshua occupies a key position in the Hebrew Bible. It marks the transition from Torah to Prophecy. The earliest Greek translation changes this transition to one from Law to History. Either way, Joshua introduces a new kind of literature.

Historically, the Book of Joshua marks the leadership transition from Moses to Joshua and the functional transition from wilderness wandering as punishment to land conquest as reward and fulfillment. Thematically, the Book of Joshua brings the transition from experience of covenant curse to experience of covenant obedience and renewal. In several ways, then Joshua marks a transition. The transitions lead to a unique place in Israel's literature, history, and theology.<sup>i</sup> Theologically, the Book of Joshua features the leader never punished for serious personal sin; the loyal people who realize their objective and experience divine blessing; the land given, conquered, distributed, settled, incomplete, and threatened; the law to be read, meditated on, and eventually added to; and especially the Lord who stands behind all that Israel experiences.<sup>ii</sup>

Joshua not only features important transitions, themes, and theology. It also raises controversial issues for the modern reader with ethical sensitivities. What kind of God is partial to one people over another? commands the killing of entire races of people? approves the killing of women and children to achieve His purposes? fulfills promises of long ago only to threaten to take back the promised gifts in the future? is so zealous and jealous and holy that he will not forgive sins? will consume a people after he has done good to them?

A book resulting from such important transitions and raising such controversial issues demands the attention of God's people, particularly a people who claim the Bible as the authoritative ground of all teaching and living. Yet, trends in scholarship for the last decade or so raise immediate issues as to the method or methods one may use to derive any kind of authoritative teaching from the Bible. Reactions to the excesses of historical critical study have led many scholars to abandon attempts to derive any type of historical information from the texts or to make any kind of historical conclusions about the original settings, audiences, and meanings of texts. Instead, these scholars pursue reader response methods which emphasize the power of the text to bring new

understandings to each reader. Such an approach to the biblical texts rises naturally from a history of scholarship that has led to widely differing theories about historical setting, authorship, and meaning of particular sections of Scripture. Modern scholars see in this the subjectivity of each person who reads Scripture and thus argue that the human mind cannot reach beyond its own subjectivity to come to objective conclusions about a text that can be verified by other researchers using the same methodological tools.<sup>iii</sup>

The present writer understands the frustrations that have led to such totally subjective viewpoints and methodologies. He knows that the conclusions he has previously published about Joshua are shared by few other students of Joshua. He even knows that he himself no longer agrees with some of the things he has written about Joshua. Personal subjectivity, changing scholarly trends, and personal research and reflection that leads to changes of conclusions are a real part of biblical scholarship and cannot be easily shuffled aside.

Scholars, however, cannot simply listen to the scholarly guild and follow current scholarly fashions and methods. They must also listen to the church which originally called and commissioned them and expects to benefit from their work. The church has confessed and practiced the authority of Scripture in its faith and practice long before the current scholarly fashions were invented and will continue to do so after subsequent generations of scholars have flirted with new trends and new methodologies. The church continues to ask from its biblical scholars a reading of Scripture that gives the church a foundation for its doctrines and its ethics. The church does not seek multiple theological readings from which it can subjectively choose. The church seeks a reading from which its preachers and teachers can confidently proclaim, Thus says the Lord. Only such a reading can be called biblical theology. Such a reading demands of the scholar attention to historical, cultural, literary, linguistic, and other “critical” methods that lead back as closely as possible to the original intention of the text.

Such a “historical” and “intentional” reading of the text is important for the church, for such a reading shows that the text itself represents more than a subjective opinion of one writer “once upon a time,” an opinion that can never be recovered and is not important to recover. This “historical” and “intentional” reading stands opposed to modern study that has freed the text from its original setting and now allows it to interact with the current reader in a dynamic way that moves far afield from any original intention. If this latter approach should prove to be the only admissible approach to Scripture, then the church’s search for authority and meaning is

permanently sidetracked on the rail of subjectivity, and its theology becomes absolutely individualistic and personal rather than authoritative and communal as the church throughout its history has proclaimed and taught.

The biblical text has never claimed such a nature for itself, nor has the church seen the text to be such an absolutely subjective document. The text has always claimed in one way or another to represent the word of God, a word that comes through the interaction of God and the inspired writer with the historical, cultural, and theological situation of a particular audience. The word gained its authority through its divine origin and through its divine power to speak creatively and meaningfully to the historical audience. It retains that same authority for the contemporary church of each age because it still relates to the historical situations and problems that arise in the community called the people of God. Contemporary readers find themselves raising the same kind of questions that perplexed the original community of God's people and gave rise to God's initiative through the inspired writers to address those questions.

If this is true, then the task of the biblical theologian seeking to draw out of a biblical book theological teachings applicable to and authoritative for the modern church is first to discover the questions within the people of God that gave rise to the particular piece of literature being studied.<sup>iv</sup> The literature itself should give sufficient clues to the nature of those questions that modern readers can revive those questions, see how those questions resonate in the modern community, and reflect on the answers to those questions that God gave in the particular piece of literature under examination. This approach does not demand of the student of the Bible an ability to precisely date a piece of literature, precisely describe the details of the historical situation and milieu to which the literature is addressed, or exactly identify the human author. This approach demands more simply and realizably that the modern Bible student understand the dynamic going on between the author/Author of the text and the community of God's people to whom it was first addressed.

The Book of Joshua quickly reveals vital issues plaguing the people of God when they first received the book of Joshua. These can be quickly listed and then addressed. The most biting issue is the basic theological one: what kind of God do we have to do with? Can we trust Him or not? Other questions raised by God's people and addressed by God through the book of Joshua include:

- What land belongs to us? Are we assured of possession of this land forever?
- What leader can we trust?
- What is the relationship of our written tradition, our cultic worship, and God's promises?

- What defines membership in the people of Yahweh?

A theology of the book of Joshua must at least address these basic issues. The following paper seeks to show how the biblical book of Joshua is a response to these problems within the family of God called the people of Yahweh.

### **Can We Trust This Kind of God?**

Joshua pulls no punches in its description of God.<sup>v</sup> It preserves the people's traditional view of God:

“the Lord our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and who did these great signs in our sight and preserved us through all the way in which we went and among all the peoples through whose midst we passed. The Lord drove out from before us all the peoples, even the Amorites who lived in the land.” (24:17-18)

The Book of Joshua immediately counters this with what is the Bible's strongest statement about the Deity Israel served:

“He is a holy God. He is a jealous God. He will not forgive your transgression or your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you after He has done good to you.” (24:19-20)

Joshua proclaims a similar two-sided view of God in chapter 23:

“You know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one word of all the good words which the Lord your God spoke concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled for you, not one of them has failed.” (v. 14)

“It shall come about that just as all the good words which the Lord your God spoke to you have come upon you, so the Lord will bring upon you all the threats, until He has destroyed you from off this good land which the Lord your God has given you.” (v. 15)

The people of God face a quandary as they relate to such a God. Can they really trust Him? Or is he as capricious as the gods of their neighbors? When can they expect the loving, giving, promise-fulfilling God to show up, and when must they expect the jealous, holy, unforgiving, destroyer to appear?

The book of Joshua addresses this issue of the complexity of the divine nature with some basic assumptions that it expects its audience to share.<sup>vi</sup> The Book of Joshua serves simply as a review or reminder of what Torah has already taught about God. The readers know their God is named Yahweh. He chose Moses to lead his people out of Egypt and then chose Joshua to take over leadership duties from Moses.

He initiated a covenant relationship with his people, a relationship he expects them to renew periodically. He chose the patriarchs from beyond the river Euphrates when they served other gods. He has a history of punishing disobedient people. He has given Israel a book of Torah or teaching that he expects them to obey. He gave Israel promises of land and nationhood and victory over enemies. He has claimed Israel for himself with the expectation that they never in any way countenance worship of or service to any other claimant to deity. He alone is Israel's God.

Not only the author of Joshua and the first readers share assumptions about God. Israel's enemies often echo the same assumptions:

[Rahab] said to the men, "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath." (2:9-11)

Similarly, the Hivites of Gibeon explain:

Your servants have come from a very far country because of the fame of the Lord your God; for we have heard the report of Him and all that He did in Egypt, and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon and to Og king of Bashan who was at Ashtaroth. (9:9-10)

Their trickery discovered, the Gibeonites explain:

"Because it was certainly told your servants that the Lord your God had commanded His servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land before you; therefore we feared greatly for our lives because of you, and have done this thing. . . ."

With its quiet assumptions about God shared by author, readers, and enemies, the book of Joshua combines an interesting literary pattern. God is the assumed hero of the book directing every action and every word, but often disappearing into the shadows while Joshua takes center stage in the action. Yet when God does appear, important teachings about him become apparent. He is God in communication with his people. He tells the leader exactly what is expected, and the leader passes the word down through the official chain of command until the people act upon it as illustrated in

chapters one and three. He is God giving gifts to his people, specifically the gift of the land. He does this by giving battle instructions to his people and then fighting for them as illustrated in chapters six and ten. He is God who has given specific teachings and instructions he expects the people to follow if they do not want to face his judgment as illustrated in chapters seven and eleven. He is God so great his reputation goes before him and frightens the enemies into submission as illustrated in chapters two and nine. He is God who removes all fear from his people as illustrated in chapters ten and eleven. He is God who has a definite living plan for his people so that he divides the land he gives into specific portions for each tribe (chs. 13—19) but calls on the tribes to act as a united front helping one another in land taking endeavors and in worship as illustrated in chapters one and twenty-two. He is the God who fulfills every promise he has ever made (11:23; 21:45; 23:14).

The climactic chapters of Joshua turn from basic historical narrative to cultic speech. In so doing, they turn to a new kind of speech about God. The positive acts for Israel in history become combined with strong demands on a people not expected to live up to those demands. Joshua, God's representative, first explores Israel's future with its dependence on other nations and their gods rather than on Yahweh. Such disobedience to God brings promise of divine punishment with the knowledge that God will fulfill his threats just as he did his promises so that the gift of the land will vanish (23:15-16). This shows a new side of Yahweh, a side that is zealous to protect his name, jealous of worship other gods might receive, and a holy God who cannot abide among a people plagued by sin (24:19). This God is not a sweet grandfather type willing to overlook the faults of the beloved children. One cannot simply live as one pleases, knowing God will love him anyway. God takes his own holy nature seriously. Blatant sin shoved in the face of God as his people worship other gods never goes unnoticed. It cannot expect to be forgiven. It draws divine discipline to itself as if magnetically. The personal God has all characteristics of a person—holiness, wrath, jealousy, determination to punish as well as love, self-giving, grace, mercy, and kindness.

Joshua thus gives a balanced picture of God. He is the Sovereign God of history who controls destinies of his people and their enemies. He is the gracious God who fights for his people to bring victory and then gives them land they have not deserved.<sup>vii</sup> He is also the God who gives commands and expects them to be obeyed. He is the God who punishes disobedience (ch. 7). He is the God who knows the future and the nature of his people to disobey. He is the God who in his holy justice can take away land as quickly as he gave it. Israel cannot choose one side of this God without

getting the other. And they must choose! Joshua forces the issue (24:14-15) and then reinforces it even more harshly, claiming they cannot serve the God he has called on them to choose to serve. Should they be able to serve him, their God would stand on equal footing with the gods of the enemies. They would know the secrets that secured fertility and blessing. They could meet the god's standards and extract promises even from the capricious nature gods of Canaan.

Yahweh was a different kind of God. In his holiness and jealousy, he stood apart. He would be no part of a pantheon of gods, not even the king of the gods. He was the only God for Israel. They must choose to serve him even while knowing they would never meet his standards. Still, they had no other viable choice, for no other god had done for them what Yahweh, the God of Israel, had done. Thus they witnessed against themselves and renewed their covenant to obey the God they could not serve because they could not meet his holy covenant standards.

So Israel asked, can we trust this God? They answered, yes, we can trust this God to be who he has always been and who he says he is and always will be. We cannot create this God in our image and serve him according to our standards or according to the traditions of this new country. We can only stand and serve him according to his covenant standards and trust him to be our God as we are his people.

#### **What land belongs to us?**

A nation finds identity through many characteristics and traditions gained from its history.<sup>viii</sup> A major identifying characteristic lies in its geography. Possessing land is an essential part of nationhood.<sup>ix</sup> Land gives physical reality to a nation. It locates the nation, gives room for homes and government for the nation, and determines the occupations and life-styles of the nation. Land is the identifying physical characteristic that most clearly separates one nation from another.<sup>x</sup> It is also the characteristic that tempts one nation to obliterate and replace another.

For Israel land had become a central hope rather than a living reality. As soon as Abraham in faith entered the land to which God directed him, that land became the land of promise (Gen. 12:7). It remained the land of promise for 400 years. Only a burial ground marked Israel's foothold in the land God promised them (Gen. 23). First, Jacob left and returned. Then Joseph's brothers sold him into Egypt. Soon he summoned his family there to escape famine. A new pharaoh thrust Israel into slavery. Finally, God acted to bring freedom, but freedom led into wilderness, not into permanent land. Thus for the first time with Joshua Israel becomes a nation, for now Israel has land.<sup>xi</sup>

Yet Israel with land must still ask, What land belongs to us? Where are the boundaries? Are such boundaries permanent? What if we need more land? What if we cannot conquer part of the promised land? What if an enemy takes land away? Does loss of land mean loss of land-giver? Has the god of the land-taker become victor over and thus lord of the God who was land-giver? The Book of Joshua reflects long and hard on the theme of land.<sup>xii</sup>

Most nations see land as a possession, something won in battle or something inherited from the forefathers who have always possessed land. Israel stood alone. Forefathers explicitly claimed to be a landless people. Israel's armies had always been inadequate of themselves to seize land as a possession. Land for Israel could never be rightfully claimed as possession. Land was always gift.<sup>xiii</sup> God possessed the land, for he had created it. In grace God chose to give one particular land to his people Israel. This keynote of Joshua appears in its opening verses (1:2-3). These verses impart an interesting perspective to gift of land. Gift of land is a present activity (I am giving, v. 2 with a Hebrew participle) and a past fact (I have given, v. 3 with Hebrew perfect). What Israel under Joshua experienced as a gradual process,<sup>xiv</sup> God claimed to be a one-time past event.<sup>xv</sup> This event encompassed not only the land that lay ahead of Joshua. It encompassed likewise the land that lay behind the two and a half tribes east of the Jordan (1:13-15).

Land as gift was at the same time land to be taken. Occupying nations did not want to give up the land. They knew and feared God's promises (see above). Still they strategized and connived to defend and retain land. This meant land possessed by Israel was land "dispossessed" from other nations (see Num. 13:30; 21:24,32,35; 33:53; Deut. 2:12,21-22,24,31; 4:47; 6:18). Dispossession was God's way of fulfilling promises to the patriarchs (Gen. 15:7; 22:17; 28:4; Josh. 1:11). Gift of land was call to battle, call to dispossess the land. Such call to battle remained unconventional. Israelite soldiers fought, but God did the dispossessing, the driving out of the enemy (Josh. 3:10; compare 8:7).

Gift of land was gift to all Israel. East possessed land but had to help west in their fights to dispossess land (1:14-15). Land was not fully given any tribe until all exercised possession rights (22:4,9). All participated in the rituals and the battles until the gift of land was complete (21:43), even the priestly tribe of Levi which received cities and grazing lands but no tribal territory (ch. Num. 18:20; Deut. 18:1-2; Josh. 13:14,33; 14:3-4; 18:7; 21:1-42). Gift of land was suited to the needs of each tribe, but this did not mean the wants of each tribe were fulfilled. Some tribes did not have all they wanted (17:14) and had to labor to gain more land (17:15-18).

Meanwhile, Israel knew occupation of the land was not automatic. Land promised could be land withheld. Experience of the previous generation in the wilderness had proved that (5:6). Land promised was land promised to an obedient, faithful generation. Land was part of covenant. Covenant included proclamation of God's gracious acts and proclamation of God's righteous expectations. Only a people willing to be covenant people could become land people. Present experience of presumption and greed proved that again at Ai (ch. 7). Thus Joshua had to pray:

Alas, O Lord God, why did You ever bring this people over the Jordan, only to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? If only we had been willing to dwell beyond the Jordan! O Lord, what can I say since Israel has turned their back before their enemies? For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it, and they will surround us and cut off our name from the earth. And what will You do for Your great name?" (7:7)

A disobedient nation was thus a nation accursed (7:12). They had threatened not only their existence in the land, but the glory of God's name on earth.<sup>xvi</sup> Only an obedient covenant people could expect to receive the gift of the land. Each battle experience began with Yahweh's promise to give the enemy and thus enemy's land into Israel's hand (6:2,16; 8:7,18; 10:8,19; 11:6; compare 11:8; 20:30,32). Obedience came. With it promise of land became occupation of land. Now gift of land could be located in time, space, and human activity. One problem, gift was not complete. Much land remained (13:1-6).

Possessed by Israel, land remained gift. This gift was not a gift to a nebulous entity called a nation. It was a gift to tribes, to clans, to families, a gift to be perpetuated through the generations. Too easily land could become royal fief, royal estate doled out to favorite supporters. This was not to be in Israel. Through the generations land remained tribal land, clan land, family land, not royal estate (note how King Ahab learned this lesson, 1 Kings 21).

Land as gift was also land as inheritance. God the undying, eternal God nonetheless distributed his estate to his children. This was done not in the battle phase but in the distribution phase of the Book of Joshua (chs. 13—22). Moses gave the inheritance to tribes east of the Jordan (13:8). The right to serve God and sacrifice to him constituted the Levites' inheritance (13:14,33). Joshua had to define the individual inheritance of each of the other tribes (13:7). The inheritance was defined not by human will but by divine lot (14:1-2). Such inheritance was inheritance by tribe and family, not by nation. This was true to such an extent that daughters also had inheritance rights when no sons existed to gain the inheritance (17:4-6). This was not

an ideal inheritance, but concrete real estate whose boundaries could be surveyed and written down in a book (18:4). Inheritance was the ultimate goal of Joshua's actions, for his last act was to release each of the tribes, clans, and families to occupy and enjoy their inheritance (24:28).

Having occupied their land inherited from God as his gift, Israel enjoyed God's ultimate gift: rest (Exod. 33:14; Deut. 3:20; 12:9-10; 25:19; Josh. 1:13,15). Rest (Hebrew, *nuach*) included both spiritual and physical elements. It was the condition of the person delivered from trouble (Ps. 116:7). It was a change of routine from daily labor (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:14). Rest came not to individuals nor to families, clans, or tribes in the Book of Joshua. It came only to the entire nation after all the tribes cooperated to gain the land for each and every one of the tribes (1: 15). Rest meant God had fulfilled for the nation his promise to Abraham (21:44). "Rest is not a theoretical, spiritual state enjoyed by individuals; it is a "state of the union" the nation enjoys. Rest is a lasting state measured in months and years (23:1)." (Themes, 49). That meant rest could be limited. The time of rest could come to an end. It did for Israel when Israel refused to listen to Joshua's warnings (ch. 23) and failed to keep their covenant with God (ch. 24). Rest then became something lost and regained in the period of the judges.

The Book of Joshua knows that land as gift is promise fulfilled (11:23; 21:43), but it also remained gift to be completely received, for much land remained (13:1). Gift remains a goal, a goal for a people committed to Torah of God (1:7-8) and to covenant with God (ch. 24). Joshua's advanced age and tribal failure to possess land (13:13; 15:63; 16:10; 17:12-13; compare 19:47) gave human reasons for gift to remain a goal. Human sin remained another reason. Yahweh dispossessed nations and gave land to a people who loved him (23:11). Israel could quickly transfer allegiance and ally themselves with the nations rather than with Yahweh. Then God's dispossession stopped. Israel no longer received land that remained as gift. Rather as Israel wandered away from God, she would also wander away from land into exile (23:12-13).

Thus promise of land became promise fulfilled, land received (21:43). It remained land under threat (ch. 23). A disobedient people, a people who broke covenant and served other gods could face exile.<sup>xvii</sup> This was more than loss of land. It was loss of nationhood, loss of reputation, and loss of God's reputation. The miracle of the theology of Joshua and of the theology of the Old Testament is that God could remain the Creator God of the universe, sovereign over all nations, all peoples, and all land even when his people lost all claim to land. God could prove his Godhood both by

giving land and by taking away land. In this he exemplified his absolute sovereignty. He was bound to no nation, to no temple, and to no land.

Thus Israel's land was at the same time gift, possession, and inheritance. "Gift pointed back to the promise God made to the patriarchs. Possession pointed to present ownership wrested from previous inhabitants. Inheritance pointed to claims for the future. No government or private action seeking to assure ownership of the clan's possession would ever be valid, for inheritance rights came from God, not from human agencies." (Themes, 43).

● **What leader can we trust?**

In a real sense the books of Deuteronomy through Kings wrestle with one major problem for Israel: who has the right to lead Israel?<sup>xviii</sup> Is it God alone? (Judg. 8:23) Is it a human king required by human selfishness and immorality (Judg. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). Is it a son of David? (2 Sam. 7) Or must an alternative to a self-centered, foreign god-serving son of David be found? (1 Kings 11—12) Deuteronomy and Joshua introduce the entire leadership question for Israel in three ways. First Deuteronomy acknowledges that the day will come when Israel will have a king (Deut. 17:14-20). Second Deuteronomy sets up Moses as the prophetic leader without parallel with Israel looking for a prophet like Moses to give them God's word (Deut. 18:15-20; 34:10-12). Finally, Deuteronomy describes how God arranged a smooth leadership transition from Moses to Joshua (Deut. 1:37-38; 3:21-22,28; 31:2-8,14-15,23; 34:9; Josh. 1:2-9). Joshua then becomes the example par excellence of leadership after Moses.<sup>xix</sup>

In many ways the Book of Joshua becomes a leadership manual for God's people.<sup>xx</sup> Joshua can become the paradigm of leadership, for Joshua holds no permanent, organizational position in an Israelite political hierarchy. He passes no office down to a series of successors. Rather, Joshua exemplifies the leader God's people can trust no matter what the organizational system: one of charismatic leaders like Judges; one with hereditary kings like the southern kingdom of Judah; one with consistently changing royal dynasties like northern Israel; one with no political power or position like early exilic and post-exilic Israel; or one with an increasingly priestly-dominated society like later post-exilic Israel. The system or type of government did not matter. The role of the leader did matter. Israel could trust God to provide a leader they needed. They could follow that leader when that leader became a leader not like the unparalleled Moses but like Joshua.<sup>xxi</sup>

Joshua's leadership characteristics do not follow the modern world's picture of strong aggressive leadership. Nor did they imitate the leadership patterns of his day.

In Joshua, God provided for Israel a rare leadership model, the model of one who gradually earned the title Servant of Yahweh (24:29).

First the larger story of Joshua outside the Book of Joshua shows us an account of a leader who matured into the leadership position, not one who came fully equipped. Young Joshua made his radical mistakes. He misinterpreted what he heard and reported to Moses (Exod. 32:17-18). He tried to limit God's Spirit of prophesy (Num. 11:28), though later he is described as a man with God's Spirit (Num. 27:18).<sup>xxii</sup> Young Joshua served Moses and learned as an apprentice to the master leader. He accompanied Moses on the holy mountain (Ex. 24:13). He was God's attendant at the tent of meeting (Ex. 33:11). He served as Moses' military lieutenant and learned how God directed military operations (Exod. 17:8-14). He was one of two faithful spies Moses sent to investigate the nature of the promised land (Num. 13:8; 14:5-9). Joshua was experienced in many areas of Israel's life before he became their leader. Even as he became the leader, he assumed no royal title. He was only the assistant to Moses.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Joshua became Israel's leader (Josh. 1),<sup>xxiv</sup> but he remained the leader after Moses and under Moses. His major task as leader was not planning strategy nor leading armies. His major task as leader of Israel was studying and meditating on God's Torah, the Torah of Moses (1:7-8). As such he was doing only what God through Moses had instructed Israel's leaders to do (Deut. 17:18-20). All future leaders would be judged on one criterion: Did they follow the Torah of Moses (note 2 Kings 17:34-40). Only obedience to Torah of Moses could lead to revival and hope for God's people (see 2 Kings 22—23). "Death did not remove Moses from the Israelite scene. Death only moved Moses' mode of leadership from the mortal human leader to eternal director through the Word, the inspired Torah he left behind."<sup>xxv</sup> A leader of Israel could not aspire to being Israel's greatest leader ever. That position was taken once for all. A leader of Israel had to be a leader guided each day by Torah of Moses. Following Moses was leading Israel. New paths or theories of leadership were not called for in Israel. Israel had its leadership pattern. Israel's leaders simply followed the tradition of Moses. That was not an impossible dream, an unrealizable task. Joshua heard the command. Joshua followed it. Thus the assistant to Moses became Israel's leader and finally inherited Moses' title (Exod. 4:10; 14:31) as "servant of Yahweh."

The ultimate in leadership for Israel was not to be the new Moses. It was to be God's servant, that is a slave purchased with a price and totally accountable to Yahweh, God of Israel (compare Exod. 13:3,14). At the same time servant was a highly responsible official, who advised the king and exercised strong authority (Exod. 5:15-16; 7:20; 9:20). "In his own eyes the meek Moses kneeled as God's slave. In

the eyes of Israel he stood tall, earning their complete trust as Yahweh's highest representative.<sup>xxvi</sup> Joshua, the leader after Moses, was both God's slave and Moses' slave, only then becoming Israel's respected, responsible leader. As such Joshua set the example for Israel's later kings to be called "servant of Yahweh" (2 Sam. 3:18; 7:8). He even opened the way for Israel's messianic hope in a suffering servant of Yahweh (Isa. 52:13—53:12).

Meditating on Moses' Torah was not Joshua's only source of direction. God also appeared to him (5:13) as he had to Moses (Ex. 6). There Joshua, too, had to recognize holy ground and remove his shoes. He had to acknowledge that he was a slave able only to do the Master's command (Josh. 5:14). Such humility and obedience to Torah of Moses and command of Yahweh equipped the assistant of Moses to become the leader of Israel. As leader, Joshua exemplified many leadership characteristics. He was a man of conviction and courage (1:6,18).<sup>xxvii</sup> He interceded for a disobedient people (7:6-9). He delegated authority and responsibility to other leaders (1:10; 3:2; compare 8:33; 23:2). He equipped these leaders to maintain his influence and ministry after his death (24:31). He cooperated with priestly leaders to accomplish tasks beyond his own authority, calling, and competence (chs. 3—4; 6; 14:1; 17:4; 19:51; 21:1; 22:13). He taught the people their sacred traditions with God (8:30-35; 23:1—24:27), warning them of the consequences of disobedience (ch. 23). He provided opportunities to worship and study God's law (8:30-35) and to participate in rites God had commanded (5:1-12; 24:1-27). He provided workers for the worship place (9:27).

Joshua's leadership was far-sighted. He left memorials and methods for future generations to learn and teach the traditions of God's people (ch. 4; compare 5:9; 7:24; 8:28-29, 30-35; 9:27; 10:27). He constantly kept God's law before God's people (8:30-35; 23:1—24:27). He followed God's battle plans (except for the tragic case in chs. 6—7) and acknowledged that God's action not his own courage and planning brought the victory.

Leadership as assistant of Moses and slave of Yahweh brought results. Yielded humbly to God but operating with courage and conviction, Joshua defeated the enemies in battle, gained the land promised and given by God, distributed the land to God's people, maintained unity and loyalty among God's people, and renewed God's covenant with God's people. No wonder Joshua's fame was in all the land (6:27).<sup>xxviii</sup>

We must admit one point in which Joshua's leadership appears to have failed. Whereas Moses followed God in selecting, training, and anointing Joshua as the leader after Moses, Joshua left no equipped leader behind. Elders could know and teach the

ways of Yahweh to a next generation (24:31), but the next generation had no leader like Joshua immersed in the Torah of Moses and yielded to be slave of Yahweh (Judg. 2:6-23). This new generation had no one to renew covenant and teach the meaning of memorials and traditions. This generation eventually slipped into worship of other gods and following other traditions. They led the way into the tragic generations of Judges where each did what was right in his own eyes, no one established effective control over all the tribes, and eventually one tribe was almost decimated.

Israel needed a leader they could trust. Joshua set the standard for all leaders after Moses, a leader dedicated to Torah of Moses, willing to work with the organizational leadership of the people, striving to teach and maintain the holy traditions of the people, and courageous enough to lead where God said and do what God commanded. Sadly as Israel waited for a prophet like Moses, they could not find a leader like Joshua. Coats provides a strong description of Joshua's leadership skills:

The leader in the Joshua tradition is not an automaton. He is not a meek and mild little man who folds his hands and 'waits on the Lord'. He is an aggressive leader. Moreover, the tradition does not condemn him for his aggressive leadership. Like Moses, Joshua shows no reluctance to act. Like Moses, this man demonstrates his integrity as a leader not by functioning as a mere instrument for the power of God, as a conduit that transports the spirit of God to the people and then in embarrassed humility denies his value in the process. This man demonstrates his integrity as a leader by taking charge, in the name of the Lord, of the crisis situations confronting Israel. He acts as a responsible agent of God's word, not as a passive puppet with no responsibility beyond an automatic response to the pull on the string. From the tradition about Joshua, as for the tradition about Moses, responsible servanthood to God requires responsible leadership for the people, vigorous heroic leadership that will set the hero in the middle of the life of the people.<sup>xxix</sup>

### **What is the relationship of our written tradition, our cultic worship, and God's promises?**

An inspired author, knowing Joshua and the leaders of his generation have died with much land remaining (24:29-30; 23:4-5), faced a difficult question from his audience. Without Joshua or a leader like Joshua, they had to fall back on the resources they had: the written Torah of Moses as Joshua left it to them (24:25-26),<sup>xxx</sup> the cultic worship traditions<sup>xxxi</sup> of circumcision and Passover (5:1-12), covenant (8:30-35; 24:1-27), and tribal unity (22:1-34); and God's promises to the patriarchs fulfilled in Joshua's conquest of the land (11:23; 21:43-45) and yet to be realized by the tribes (13:1-7; 23:4-5). These represented Israel's legacy from Joshua. They had another legacy, the legacy left by the previous inhabitants of Canaan. For centuries these people

had lived in the land and produced their crops. Surely they knew the secrets of the land. Should not Israel learn from them also. The inspired theologian writing Joshua had to answer the question: how do we understand God's fulfilled yet unfulfilled promises in the light of Canaan's history and Joshua's traditions?

The author of Joshua made one thing perfectly clear. Canaan's history, Canaan's worship, and Canaan's fertility practices had no meaning for Israel. God had one ominous weapon against these practices, a weapon used by other nations in Israel's environment and yet strongly commanded and endorsed by the God of Israel. This weapon has caused ethical concern among God's people almost ever since the time of Joshua. How can a loving, caring God place a holy ban on the entire population of a country including its innocent women and children? How does one incorporate such a violent, vengeful practice into one's theology? Is not this a part of the theological traditions of Israel, and especially of the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua, that we should evaluate in light of other Scripture and let subside into the waste heap of borrowed pagan practices, ongoing progressive revelation, and superseded Old Testament law? Surely, Israel's ban or *cherem* is not a legitimate part of biblical theology.<sup>xxxii</sup>

The Book of Joshua will not let us adopt such a simplistic theological methodology and approach.<sup>xxxiii</sup> The Book adopts and affirms the Torah of Moses as the basis of leadership and life for God's people. Both Torah of Moses (Deut. 7 with its emphasis upon God's love) and Book of Joshua (6:17; compare 7:1) demand the ban as God's method of warfare in Canaan. The battle summary to the book takes the ban one step further. God hardened Canaanite hearts so he might annihilate the population of Canaan without mercy (11:20). The ban is not just an incidental part of battle description. It is an integral part of the theology of the books of Deuteronomy and especially Joshua.<sup>xxxiv</sup> It is not just a description of a theology of warfare. It is a basic part of the divine plan to fulfill his promises to Israel. This plan involves both protection of Israel from the seductive religion of the inhabitants of Canaan (Deut. 7:1-5, 16; Josh. 23) and punishment of the wickedness of those Canaanites (Deut. 9:4-5). This makes the ban a significant entry in the characterization of God himself. We moderns ask, Why?

The Bible says this is an integral part of biblical theology from beginning to end, Genesis to Revelation. God uses violent means to achieve his judgmental purposes against sin and his saving purposes for his people. One might say that Noah's flood and the total destruction of Sodom and Gomorra represent the first instances of the ban. One must not overlook the fact that God exercised the ban on his own people in the

wilderness and came close to the same with the northern kingdom. Mark 13 and Revelation abound with terminology and teaching issuing from ban theology. God has always set out to place all evil under the ban.

That is fine and good for many people. Joshua still stands out as distinct. Here more than evil is placed under the ban. Innocent women and children are included. The problem here is our definition of innocent. Precisely the women provided the problem for Joshua. Israel's men would marry Canaan's women who would corrupt Israel's worship by importing to Israel the religious tradition of Canaan, slyly intermingling worship of Baal with worship of Yahweh. This is precisely what happened in the period of the judges and on a more universal scale in the kingdom of Solomon (1 Kings 11).

The holy ban was God's warfare method at one time in human history as he tried to establish a pure people for himself in a land that was far from virgin. The ban was never a universal method of warfare, nor was it a method inscribed in law for all future situations of war. The ban was God's method to fulfill his promise of land to the patriarchs, to establish worship of him and of him alone in that land, and to protect his people from overwhelming temptations of imitating a much older, seemingly successful people. It was one more example of God's wrath against all types and expressions of sin. It is not something we are called upon to practice today or to condone as permissible in today's warfare. It was God's weapon of war against enemies and evil at one time in history. Should not God's people bow to the authority of Scripture and confess the freedom of God to realize his purposes among and for his people in ways he chooses and affirms? To evaluate and eliminate significant portions of Scripture, especially portions that are repeated in different books and appear in basic theological summary statements such as Deuteronomy 7 and Joshua 11:20, is to establish not only a canon within the canon but also a canon outside of the canon, namely my personal ethical preferences and my personal desires concerning the nature and activity of God.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Discussion of the ban illustrates the dilemma of both Israel and of ourselves. How does one integrate biblical tradition and worship into modern life? Israel took over ancient worship places such as Shechem, Shiloh, and Jerusalem. They intermingled with and married Canaanites who had long worship and agricultural experience in the land. Yet they had strong Israelite teaching in the Torah of Moses that demanded total separation from ancient traditions. Was such total separation possible? Was it desirable? Could not God's people learn both from the sacred traditions of Torah and worship and from the practical world's traditions of agriculture and fertility cult? The

Bible consistently refuses such universalistic, relativistic, and non-exclusive thinking. Israel is inclusive in the sense that aliens are invited to join in their worship (8:33). Israel is totally exclusive when it comes to recognizing the validity of worship practices outside the teaching of Torah. God's people are to hear the entire word of God and pledge themselves in covenant renewal to obey the entirety of that law. Any giving in to exceptions results in practices that alienate Israel from God and stick her to foreign gods and foreign practices.

The explanation for this is quite mysterious and yet radically essential for Israel's relationship with God. Israel must choose between ancient gods of the fathers and the very present Savior, Yahweh the God of Israel (24:14-15). Having chosen to serve Yahweh, however, Israel must learn they cannot serve him (24:19).<sup>xxxvi</sup> Canaan and other of Israel's neighbors knew how to carry through rituals and practices that placated their gods and brought forth weather and fertility they wanted. They could carry out practices in the fertility cults imitating practices of the gods of their ritual texts and be satisfied they had properly served and worshiped God.

Israel stood in no such secure position. Israel had to come to their God with a confession of their own sinfulness. They could never meet the exclusivistic, perfectionistic covenant demands of their God.<sup>xxxvii</sup> They would never be holy as Yahweh is holy. They could not carry out worship as experts knowing precisely what they were doing and how to do it properly with the proper results. They must humbly come before their God, confess their sins, bring proper sacrifices desiring that God would atone for their sins. They must repeatedly renew covenant vows to a God they could not serve. This radically different attitude to the religions around them separated Israel completely from their neighbors. Israel's first commandment forced them to live apart from and different than their neighbors. Israel had to ask, is experiencing the grace and love and salvation of God as well as the holiness and jealousy of God sufficient reason to serve him if only inadequately? or is the security of knowing how to serve the Canaanite gods, enjoying the sensuality of their worship, and expecting the rewards they promise more inviting?<sup>xxxviii</sup>

The Book of Joshua thundered forth answers. Meditate on the Torah of Moses day and night. Learn the demands of your God. Learn the salvation history of your God among you. See the love of your God for you. Trust him even if you cannot serve him. Circumcise your boys. Keep the Passover. Go to the place God chooses for your worship. Renew your covenant with him. Believe what he has written for you. He keeps all his promises. He expects you to keep your promises and worship him in ways he has prescribed. Then obedience to written tradition and observance of

identity-giving worship practices will lead to an experience with your God in which you will join the Book of Joshua in proclaiming: God has fulfilled every one of his promises just as he spoke to Abraham and to Moses.<sup>xxxix</sup>

- **What defines membership in the people of Yahweh?**

A people who cannot serve their God face one final basic question: how do we know we are God's people? or What defines membership in the people of God?<sup>xl</sup> This is the summarizing question for the book of Joshua and perhaps for all biblical theology.

At first glance, membership in Israel seems clear. Israel came from Egypt, descended from Abraham and the twelve sons of Jacob, agreed to the covenant at Sinai, gained new population and identity in wilderness, and joined Joshua in conquering and inheriting the promised land of Canaan. Such quick definition ignores the nuances of the biblical narrative, and especially, of the Book of Joshua. Already with the Exodus, a mixed multitude joined Israel (Exod. 12:38). Joshua quickly adds a number of possibilities of people who may or may not be part of Israel: ethnic Israelites who live across Jordan and thus in traditional terms outside the land of Canaan (chs. 1; 22), resident aliens with a history of helping Israel and being devoted to their God (ch. 2), people who meet all the qualifications but do not keep covenant (ch. 7), people who deceptively work their way into the community (ch. 9), families with no males to inherit (17:3-6), priests without land (ch. 21), accidental murderers (ch. 20), members of Israel who fear alienation (ch. 22).<sup>xli</sup>

The Book of Joshua gives several qualities that define the people of God.<sup>xlii</sup> First, people of God are people of promise. The traditions of the forefathers are different from those of other religions. They do not describe actions of the innumerable gods, actions that need to be repeated in the ongoing cults. Rather, ancestors have passed down traditions of divine assurances. God has a plan for his people and lets his people know that plan. The central part of the plan for Joshua's day was the promise of land. Such promise Joshua fulfilled, yet land remained. Promise of God is already/not yet in character.<sup>xliii</sup> Promise of God gives concrete reality and meaning in its fulfillment for the present generation, yet it calls for continued faithfulness and further fulfillment in the future. People of God are people of promise.

Second, people of God are people of present history. God is a God who acts in sovereign majesty over every aspect of human life. He is not a god who one time established his dynasty by defeating other gods in battle and then retired as the cult repeated the ritual each year. He is not a god who is constantly changing and evolving

as his people learn better language to describe him, or as human achievements demand more of him, or as an expanding universe requires a different kind of god. God was, is, and will be the God who planned human history and directs it towards his eternal goals. For Joshua's day this meant involvement in the blood and gore of warfare and in the anger and frustration of disagreements among the people of God (see especially ch. 22). God is not a theological ideal whose characteristics a person learns and masters. God is a Person who personally involves himself in all human activities. This calls forth all sides of the divine Being: love, mercy, and grace as well as holiness, anger, and jealousy. People of God learn of the nature of God because God involves himself in history even to the point of incarnation and death on a cross.

God is the God of covenant. God relates to his people with demands on their daily lives as well as demands on their cultic lives.<sup>xliv</sup> Covenant begins with a confession of the God of history, the God who has created people of God with specific historical acts in the past. Covenant continues as people of God hear recited the covenant expectations of God and pledge to obey them. Covenant reaches toward the future as it promises God's blessings in specific ways on an obedient people and threatens God's curses on a people who refuse to maintain covenant commitments. For Joshua this meant looking back at promises to the patriarchs and saving acts in Egypt and the wilderness. It meant reciting covenant demands in the Torah of Moses and pledging to serve the God who could not be served. It meant knowing God promised the land to an obedient people but threatened exile and destruction for a people who neglected covenant and sought to make God share their worship with other gods.<sup>xlv</sup>

Finally, people of God are people of Torah. They know covenant and covenant requirements because they know Torah. They maintain an existence separate from that of their neighbors because they incarnate Torah in their lives. Torah is not something they praise and worship. Torah is lifestyle they meditate on and practice. Torah leads to obey God and love God. Torah leads to love neighbor and observe neighbor's rights. Torah leads to solving disputes and unifying people of God. Torah leads to humble service of the God that cannot be served. Torah leads to the creation of a people of God who are called servants of Yahweh.

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<sup>i</sup> Robert G. Boling and G. Ernest Wright, *Joshua*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 6 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1982), 34, conclude "it is not an exaggeration, therefore, to say that the traditions of the Book of Joshua must stand in the very center of any consideration of biblical religion. A proper commentary on the book is centrally

a theological task, one made the more difficult by the fact that no such commentary has been produced in modern times. During the last two centuries, when the movement of historical criticism reached maturity, the theological counterpart of historical evolution was 'progressive revelation.' During this period the Book of Joshua has been considered the most primitive rung on the ladder of progress."

<sup>ii</sup> For the theology of Joshua laid out under these themes see my work in *Joshua, Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 7 (Waco, Tx: Word Books, 1983), xxv-xxvii and expanded in *Understanding the Basic Themes of Joshua* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991). Other commentators pick up most of these same themes in different format. Volkmar Fritz, *Das Buch Josua*, Handbuch zum Alten Testament 1/7 [Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1994] is so concerned to show the editorial processes and the unhistorical nature of the book that he merely glances over theological introduction by noting the emphasis on Joshua as the only carrier of the action in the entire book, on the conquest of the land through holy war theology, and on the distribution of the land gift as inheritance. Martin Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1981), 26-39, emphasizes the theological task of the biblical commentator as seeking "to acquire the knowledge of God which the literature imparts to the reader who is guided by the Spirit," for "theological reflection must concern that which God says about himself" (p. 27). Woudstra sees (p. 32) the fulfilment of the promise made to the forefathers regarding the possession of the land of Canaan as the "keynote" of the book, while its "primary purpose" (p. 33) was to "stress the truth of the everlasting faithfulness of God." Likewise, "a major component of the book . . . is the focus on the land" (34). Some theological details then include: God and his revelation, cultus, Israel and the nations, Joshua's view of sin. Richard S. Hess, *Joshua*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 6 (Downers Grove, Il, 1996), 42-53, begins (20-25) with the person of Joshua and then under "Theology" discusses holy war and the ban, the land as an inheritance, the covenant between God and Israel, and the holy and redeeming God. Richard Nelson, *Joshua*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 15-20, lists as theological themes: land, conquest, the enemy, the ban, and obedience. He separates "The Figure of Joshua" out in a separate section as "a forerunner for the ideological role played by later kings, and especially for the expansionistic and reforming policies of Josiah" (21-22). J. Maxwell Miller and Gene M. Tucker, *The Book of Joshua*, The Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 14-17, touch only briefly on theological issues and then so much in the context of the "Deuteronomistic History" that the distinctive voice of Joshua is in part muffled. They say, "The central theological statement is that the Lord has fulfilled his promises to the forefathers of Israel by granting a land to their descendants. . . . The first two 'chapters' of the story (Deuteronomy and Joshua) laid the foundation" (p. 15). They point quickly to other themes: word of God, acquisition of land, God's organization of life in the land, and covenant renewal. They see the possibility (16) that "one function of the book of Joshua in this context is to remind the exiles that the land which they have lost is theirs by the promise, and they may regain it. The point, however, is never made explicit." In a recent literary study investigating the literary "reliability" of Moses, Joshua, Elijah, and Elisha, Paul J. Kissling, *Reliable Characters in the Primary History*, JSOTS 224 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 69-95, investigates four basic themes: the land, divine presence, and the encouraged becomes the encourager. Adrian H. W. Curtis, *Joshua*, Old Testament Guides (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 76-80, looks at divine promises, land, holy war, Israel's faithfulness, God's act of grace, leadership. David M. Howard, Jr., *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1993), 89-90, finds four central themes in the book: land, rest, covenant, and purity of worship and then subsumes the first three under "The Promise-Keeping God."

<sup>iii</sup> Curtis, 81-85 surveys recent literary approaches to Joshua and then asks probing questions: To what extent do they engage in exegesis and to what extent do they indulge in eisegesis? Are they seeking to discover the original purpose of the writer or redactor, or to analyze what a latter reader may discern in the text or how that reader may respond to the text? To what extent was it the concern of the book to produce a rounded literary piece, or to preserve a variety of traditions about Israel's sacred past? There can be no doubt that there is a tension between fulfilment and non-fulfilment in the book of Joshua, but is this a conscious literary ploy or the result of a real tension between history and theology?" He concludes: There may be theological implications in the acceptance of some of the suggestions noted above. If the book of Joshua is really about obedience to monarchical authority, this must to some extent challenge the view that it is about obedience to divine authority. If the claims for complete success in the occupation are ironic, then their theological significance as assertions that, despite what appears to be evidence to the contrary, God *is* in control and *does* fulfil his promises appears to be diminished. In a book in which God is in fact the leading protagonist it would be surprising if the primary interest were not theological."

<sup>iv</sup> Notice the approach of Terence E. Fretheim, *Deuteronomic History*, Interpreting Biblical Texts (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), who suggests we would be naive to think that we can hear these narratives with the same

clarity that the first hearers did. An equal naiveté, however, would be to suggest that we have no access to their situation or that it is irrelevant to know how the texts originally functioned. One way to proceed is to juxtapose narratives with issues faced by the people of God in the context to which the narratives were addressed. . . . This approach has the advantage of avoiding an abstract concern about what the author might have ‘intended.’ Rather, in the juxtaposition of context and text, we are concerned about what issues faced by the audience might have been addressed.” For the Deuteronomistic history, Fretheim (46-47) identifies the issues of identity, guilt, theodicy, hope, divine faithfulness, divine presence, divine power, idolatry and syncretism, purity, continuity and change, beginning again, and leadership.

<sup>v</sup> Boling and Wright, 4, acknowledge that “since the Enlightenment Western intellectuals have not generally read the Book of Joshua in this manner (as call to freedom). Here one reads for himself in sacred writ about war, cruelty, and the killing of the defenseless, all evidently at God’s command. If God is anything, his primary relation is to love and the good. How does one find such an idea in Joshua when what one reads appears to be another gross example of man’s inhumanity to man, religion being used as its buttress? There thus has come about a rejection of the God of Joshua, and even more of the God of Israel, as a God of wrath, war, and judgment. Such a God contrasts with the God of love, the divine Father of the New Testament. Regardless of the fact that Judaism, not to speak of modern scholars of ancient Israel’s life and faith in her own world, finds no such deity in the literature of Israel as a whole, many humanists and Christians have adopted this simplistic view of the Bible. The stories in chaps. 6—12 are not liturgical reading for us, and the gap between the biblical understanding of them and our own is wide indeed.

<sup>vi</sup> Boling and Wright, 3, begin their commentary: “The Book of Joshua is one of the Bible’s critically important historical and religious works. It is one of Israel’s greatest testimonies to the power and grace of the Sovereign Lord of all mankind. . . . Slaves and wanderers for whom the world’s justice and powers had no time were delivered, redeemed, rescued, formed into a nation, and given a land in which to live with their own government.”

<sup>vii</sup> Fretheim, 82, sees that the “priority of God’s grace is as central to the OT as it is to the NT. ‘Legalism’ is a word which does not fit in any description of the faith and life of Israel.”

<sup>viii</sup> For a discussion of “identity” as an important theme in the Deuteronomistic History, including Joshua, see Martin Rose, “Idéologie deutéronomiste et théologie de l’ancien testament,” *Israël construit son histoire*, Le monde de la bible, 34, ed. Albert de Pury, Thomas Römer, et Jean-Daniel Macchi (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1996), 465-466. Rose includes land as an important element of identity.

<sup>ix</sup> Fritz, 17 notes: Israel und sein Land gehören unauflöslich zusammen, weil die Heilsgabe nicht veraußert oder aufgehoben werden kann, translated loosely: Israel and their land belong indissolubly together because the salvation gift cannot be sold to aliens nor invalidated. His emphasis on the importance of the land for Israel is certainly correct. He can say this gift cannot be lost only on the basis of source critical conclusions attributing chapter 23 and other notes about Israel’s loss of the land to later editorial hands.

<sup>x</sup> Miller and Tucker, 17, observe that “it may seem rather strange to make theological statements, that is statements about God and his nature and purpose, by recording and reading lists of cities and boundaries. . . . Tribal boundaries and administrative organizations doubtless served a real political and social need. But at the same time they are seen here as effecting what was considered a divinely ordered structure of life for Israel, established by God’s acts of salvation. Salvation here means not primarily some personal spiritual experience, but refers to historical, political, and even geographic realities. So the Lord not only gave Israel a land, but also organized the lives of the tribes in it.”

<sup>xi</sup> Note Woudstra’s warning (34) that “due care should be taken not to carry over the promise of the land into the modern era, as if somehow today the possession of the land is still part of what the people of the ancient covenant may claim. In the OT land possession and covenant blessing go hand in hand. But this possession of the land may be forfeited, as the author of Joshua indicates (23:16). Although the Latter Prophets contain many promises concerning a return to the land after the period of punishment, the NT, while holding out some promise of ultimate restoration to the people of the ancient covenant (Rom. 11:25-26), does not combine this promise with a repossession of the land of the fathers.”

<sup>xii</sup> Lori Rowlett, “Inclusion, Exclusion, and Marginality in the Book of Joshua,” JSOT 55 (1992), 14-23 reprinted in *The Historical Books, A Sheffield Reader*, edited by J. Cheryl Exum (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 63-71, writes: [p. 15 (63)] Times of turmoil tend to produce narratives of identity, requiring a set of axiomatic principles, usually unspoken, but inscribed in the text, which differentiate between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (the Other). The conquest narrative of Joshua is such a narrative of identity. . . . most of the episodes in Joshua are not simple battle stories. The focus throughout most of the book of Joshua is on the marginal cases, exploring the questions: who is included, who is excluded, what are the criteria for inclusion, and most importantly, why?”

<sup>xiii</sup> Fretheim, 54, sees Israel as escaped the merited judgment of God solely because of the unmerited mercy of God (see Deut. 10:10-11). Thus, a strong statement about the fulfillment of the promise would now serve to emphasize the extraordinary mercy which God has visited upon the people. The land is not only a gift, it is a merciful gift.

<sup>xiv</sup> As Fretheim, 54, says, "God *continues* to give the land to the people. It is never finally theirs to possess without the giver."

<sup>xv</sup> Fretheim, 54, explains: "the settling in the land can only be viewed as appropriation (or possession, 1:11; cf. Duet 1:8,39), not as achievement (cf. Josh 24:13; Deut 8:17-18; 6:10-11). The land is not only unmerited, it is not 'worked for.'"

<sup>xvi</sup> L. Daniel Hawk, *Every Promise Fulfilled*, Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 142, talks of the land as threatening Yahweh's desire: "The land threatens, both directly and indirectly, to draw Israel away from Yahweh. The direct threat issues from the gods of Canaan, who appear as rivals for Israel's allegiance. Indirectly, the abundance of the land tempts Israel to turn away. When its needs are satisfied by the land, Israel may no longer need or desire Yahweh, making other gods all the more tempting (Deut. 8:10-20). Israel's satisfaction may thus come at the expense of Yahweh."

<sup>xvii</sup> In this sense Joshua is the introduction of the themes running throughout Judges, Samuel, and Kings pointing to God's judgment and Israel's exile, a theme so strong Noth could categorize the Deuteronomistic History as a "doxology of judgment. See Rose, 467.

<sup>xviii</sup> See D.J. McCarthy, "The Theology of Leadership in Joshua 1—9," *Biblica* 52 (1971), 175.

<sup>xix</sup> Miller and Tucker, 15, seek to explain the idyllic nature of the conquest period: "The era under Joshua's leadership is presented somewhat nostalgically as a time of faithfulness and obedience. This period could be interpreted so positively in part because God was directly at work performing an act of grace on behalf of his people, but also because Joshua—unlike most of the kings who were to follow—was the proper leader, the legitimate successor to Moses."

<sup>xx</sup> See the extended treatment of "The Person of Joshua" in Hess, 20-25.

<sup>xxi</sup> Fretheim, 58, observes that "a most significant role is given to the human leader of the people of God. For all practical purposes, Moses and his successor can be said to stand before the people in the place of God."

<sup>xxii</sup> Note that he receives the spirit of wisdom in Deut. 34:9.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Hess, 23, shows that "the intention of these events in Deuteronomy is to demonstrate that Joshua's leadership is based upon God's instructions, through Moses, to appoint him." Hess continues "for the Christian, this background exemplifies the preparation of a leader for Christian ministry. The leader is someone who, like Joshua, has already undertaken specific tasks successfully and who has demonstrated a loyalty to God's Word even when that means standing out from the crowd. Such a leader, who acts with independent judgment, can make mistakes. However it is important to learn from those mistakes. A leader like Joshua is someone recognized by the people of God and, most important of all, someone whom God clearly chooses."

<sup>xxiv</sup> Kissling in his literary approach, 70, determines that Joshua "*develops* into a fully reliable character who has a status that is independent of Moses, who is as successful as he can be at his central tasks, and who is a trustworthy servant of Yahweh."

<sup>xxv</sup> Butler, *Themes*, 24.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Butler, *Themes*, 25.

<sup>xxvii</sup> See the development of this theme in Deuteronomy by Hess, 22.

<sup>xxviii</sup> For Joshua's leadership as a central theme of the book, see George W. Coats, "The Book of Joshua: Heroic Saga or Conquest Theme," *JSOT* 38 (1987), 15-32, reprinted in *The Historical Books, A Sheffield Reader*, ed. J. Cheryl Exum (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 46-51.

<sup>xxix</sup> Coats, in *The Historical Books*, 59.

<sup>xxx</sup> For "law" as an important element of Israel's national identity, see Rose, 466.

<sup>xxxi</sup> For "religion" as an important element of Israel's national identity, see Rose, 466.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Boling and Wright, 27-37, describe the problem of the Divine Warrior in the entire biblical context extensively, since "throughout the confessional use of the conquest theme, as well as in the Book of Joshua itself, the central background model for conceiving the meaning of the tradition was the sovereign Lord acting in his role as Warrior against forces opposing his will and in behalf of his chosen agent, Israel." (27). They admit "war is a miserable business in a world of men who live in rebellion against the conditions of their creation. Yet God as Suzerain is not defeated. He uses people as they are, to further his own, often mysterious, ends. Hence by implication, we must say that God's use of Israel and her early institution of Holy War does not invest either war or Israel with sanctity or righteousness. On the contrary, both are evil; yet God used Israel as she was for his own

purposes. And among the results was the creation of the seedbed for Judaism, Jesus Christ, and the Christian movement.”

<sup>xxxiii</sup> For a list of attempts to escape or avoid the problems of holy war texts and reasons why they are inadequate, see Fretheim, 69-71. His own approach (71-74) emphasizes that God has chosen to be dependent upon humans to carry out his purposes in the world, that God works with people and situations in the form they are available with all their sinfulness and unfaithfulness, that God’s work in the world has a contextual character that conditions God’s work, that human beings will never have perfect perception as to how they are to serve as God’s instruments, that war was a necessity for the nation Israel to survive, that God’s involvement in war shows hope in that God is not willing to give the world up to its own violence since “for God to work toward redemptive goals inevitably involves conflict and violence; the forces of evil will not surrender voluntarily”; and that finally God’s involvement in war means God himself takes the road of suffering and death. Compare Leslie Hoppe, *Joshua, Judges* Old Testament Message 5 (Wilmington, Del: Michael Glazier, Inc., 16-18, who concludes: “the ideology of Holy War is not any more difficult to explain than the necessity of Jesus’ death. Both are attempts to describe the mysterious ways by which God uses human folly and sin as a means of salvation. . . . That wars that took place during the settlement period were evil—there is no denying that. . . . What the Bible does affirm is that God’s purpose was served even by this evil.” Such a conclusion ignores, however, that God foresaw that such wars would occur and directed the method by which such wars would take place just as God planned and let be carried out the crucifixion.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Gordon Mitchell, *Together in the Land*, JSOTS 134 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), studies the theme of foreigners in the land of promise in Joshua in a new literary approach. He finds “ambiguity” in the theme (189-190), concluding: “The narrative is an attempt to reconcile the challenge of living together with others in the promised land and the hope of their effective removal. The opinion of the implied author in Joshua is that it would be best if there were no foreigners. However, there is a grudging acceptance of a certain class of foreigner which is represented by exception outsiders like Rahab and the Gibeonites. It is the powerful kings with whom it is impossible to live. . . . A powerless people is able to find consolation.” But the theme is more than a literary one. It is a theological tenet based on historical experience with God. It serves not only a dreamlike vision of the future. It describes decisions Israel faced with God. No all-conclusive answer was given. God allowed exceptions such as Rahab and the Gibeonites for different reasons, but the final theology was that God allowed faithful aliens among his people and that Israel in not following the ban with all the peoples had failed to reach God’s goal for them and had to live with the tempting consequences.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Boling and Wright, 36-37, conclude: The use of the Divine Warrior theme is unwelcome to our ears. Yet, consequent to the basic language of the Bible, ‘the fighter for justice’ is a human way of stating the Suzerain’s concern for universal order and his active role in the world in its support. God the Redeemer and God the Warrior are not contradictory terms., for the love of God is always two-edged. Power actively at work in the world for redemption is something we all have experienced in both its positive and negative aspects.”

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Woudstra, 33-34 notes that the “author is concerned to end on an optimistic note. Israel . . . was doing the seemingly impossible. It served the very God of whom Joshua had said in absolute terms that this could not be done.”

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Fretheim, 82, seeks to revise the translation of 24:19 to “You cannot serve the Lord as you see to do at present, I. e., if you continue to mix the worship of him with other gods,” seeing the point as being “not that the worship of a holy and jealous God is impossible, but that it is a very serious matter, need special attentiveness.” Such a weakening of the text misses the very strength of the point the text makes.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Fretheim, 78, concludes: “Joshua 24, with its fifteen (!) instances of the word ‘serve, worship,’ makes one clear point: the future of the community in the land is finally determined by whether it worships Yahweh alone, or turns to the worship of other gods (too).

<sup>xxxix</sup> Hawk, 144, asks the significant question: “Will Israel find a relationship with Yahweh ultimately desirable?”

<sup>xl</sup> Nelson, 15, says, “the book of Joshua is a literary production designed to create and support the identity of the people it calls ‘all Israel.’ They are the people of Yahweh the Divine Warrior. They are the rightful masters of the land of Canaan. They are a people formed by the demands of the law given through Moses. The book seeks to give its readers the courage to meet whatever current challenges are brought on by their identity as Yahweh’s people. It also seeks to communicate hope for a future fulfillment of Yahweh’s promises. . . . The Book of Joshua is a witness to the power of a shared story to generate, define, and defend a community.

<sup>xli</sup> As Rowlett, 65, observes, “the distinction between Israel and the Others based primarily on ethnic, cultural and religious difference begins to break down almost immediately.”

<sup>xlii</sup> For a discussion of “national unity” as an important identifying element in the Deuteronomistic History, including Joshua, see Martin Rose, 465.

<sup>xliii</sup> Woudstra, 33, speaks of the “open-endedness” of the book that “reaches toward the future and suggests to the readers the feeling that their task is not yet done.”

<sup>xliv</sup> In many senses covenant loyalty is the basic identifying mark of people of Yahweh. Thus Rahab recites Israel’s confession and lives among them, whereas Achan can confess only his breaking of covenant and must die even though he is an insider by other identifying marks. Rowlett, 71, summarizes this in sociological terms of authority patterns: “The primary ideological purpose of the conquest narrative is to send a message to internal rivals, potential Achans, that they can make themselves into outsiders very easily. The text is more concerned with demonstrating to the internal populace the extent of the governing authorities’ strength than with sending to external groups (real ethnic ‘others’) a statement about their military capabilities.”

<sup>xlv</sup> Hawk, 141 notices that “from Israel’s perspective obedience to the commandments is important not only to ensure Yahweh’s aid but also to avoid his wrath.”