

An Approach to Properly Understand the Book of Joshua

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The book of Joshua is the first book of the Former Prophets in the Hebrew Bible, and is also the first book of the so-called "Historical Books" in the Christian Old Testament. When describing Israel's entry into Canaan, the book presents scenes and themes difficult for modern readers to understand, let alone embrace, since they discern violence, genocide or ethnic cleansing in the name of "holy war," discrimination against indigenous people, and colonization in the book. So how to read the book properly, especially how to understand such controversial themes and the God behind, becomes a critical issue for any serious readers. This paper aims to tackle such a complicated issue by offering an approach that treats the book as an ancient text in the context of the ancient Near Eastern (ANE) literature, and focuses on its theological messages. Nevertheless, even though the book of Joshua may not be a historical book according to modern standard, it contains historical data that help understand the ancient history of Israel.

This paper argues that by reading the book of Joshua theologically in the context of an ANE conquest account, it holds solid ground to face historical, moral and theological challenges of modern readers by the support of ANE conquest narratives, the book's internal evidence

such as the doublets, and the external evidence (or lack of it) such as archaeological proof. Such an approach reveals that as a part of an etiological collection, Joshua presents clear theological messages that covenantal fidelity, rather than ethnicity, is the guarantee of the Israelites as God's chosen people in the promised land even though the historical and literary details such as the conquest itself are controversial among modern readers, and may not find strong support in archaeological evidence or ANE literature.

Such an argument is made and supported through three steps: starting with background issues such as authorship and textual criticism, archaeological materials, and ANE literature that lay the foundation for the critical interpretive issues; then the survey of genre, historicity, and composition that helps unlock relevant features of the book; eventually the discussion on several crucial and controversial theological themes such as covenantal fidelity,¹ land, God's people, and *herem*, or "holy war" that brings the discussion back to the core of the argument—reading the book theologically in the context of ANE literature. In the process, various perspectives are presented to demonstrate the diversity of scholarly views and the complication of the relevant issues, but the author's position is given at the end of each discussion to guide the direction of argument.

I. BACKGROUND ISSUES

The background issues of the book of Joshua include materials from three aspects: authorship and related textual criticism issues, various interpretive models of archaeological evidence, and ANE literature. They together provide the foundation for the discussion of

¹ Covenantal fidelity refers to the fidelity or faithfulness required for the parties to covenant obligations, yet in the case of Israel's covenantal relationship with God, it is often the case that while God demonstrated his fidelity towards Israel, Israel failed to show the same fidelity towards God and damaged his covenantal relationship with God, eventually leading to Jeremiah's prophecy that a new covenant would be established and written on the heart. For details, see the specific discussion in the "Covenantal Fidelity" section of the article.

the three critical-interpretive issues and the four biblical theological themes afterwards.

1. Authorship and Related Textual Criticism Issues

Under the leadership of Joshua, Israelites entered the land of Canaan (Josh. 1-12) through three phases in five years (Josh. 14:7, 10): (1) the conquest of the Central Hill Country including Jericho and Ai (Josh. 6-10); (2) a southern campaign that defeated Libnah, Eglon, Hebron, Debir and the Negev etc. (Josh. 10:29-43); and (3) a northern assault that defeated a coalition of local kings and destroyed Hazor (Josh. 11:1-15).²

This section covers the issues of authorship and textual criticism. Traditionally, authorship was ascribed to Joshua himself since Jewish Talmud normally names the biblical book for its hero or chief character.³ This ascription was rejected in the nineteenth century through literary criticism which suggested an anonymous author no earlier than the monarchic period since the book refers to Jerusalem in Joshua 15:63, and possibly as late as the post-exilic period due to the developed role of the priests and Levites described in the crossing of the Jordan River.⁴

Regarding textual criticism, the book has both the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT) and the Greek Septuagint text (LXX)⁵ and the former is about five percent longer than the latter.⁶ Trent Butler claims that "virtually every verse of Joshua shows textual distinctions" between the two versions since one contains elements not attested in the other and vice

² John Laughlin, *Archaeology and the Bible* (London, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 1999), 110.

³ Leonard Greenspoon, "The Book of Joshua—Part 1: Texts and Versions," *Currents in Biblical Research* 3, no. 2 (April 1, 2005): 232.

⁴ Thomas B. Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 6.

⁵ The earliest Greek translation dated back to about the 2nd century BCE but only preserved in manuscripts from the 4th century CE.

⁶ Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, 32.

versa; even the order of some verses are different.⁷ Codex Vaticanus is the best witness for the LXX of Joshua,⁸ but the differences from the MT cannot be explained by translation only and the Dead Sea Scrolls proved that.⁹ The fragment of 4QJosha represents a third version of Joshua — "an older and better one than the MT and LXX."¹⁰ All these seem to indicate that some ancient scribes regarded themselves as "creative interpreters" and even authors, and made drastic modifications in the text.¹¹ This brings questions not only on the possibility of recovering an autograph of Joshua but also on the historicity of the events in the book.

2. Archaeological Evidence and Various Interpretive Models

One of the key reasons that the historicity of Joshua's conquest accounts have been widely rejected by most archaeologists and historians of ancient Israel is the lack of archaeological evidence. Many cities allegedly destroyed by Joshua were either non-existent or not occupied in the Late Bronze Age such as Jericho, Ai, Gibeon, Arad, and Heshbon.¹² Over the past century, several models have been proposed regarding Joshua's conquest and settlement stories in the archaeological circle.

The unified conquest model was formulated by William Albright in the 1930s who took the Bible at face value and suggested the existence of widespread conquest under Joshua's leadership. He proposed a solution to the unoccupied Ai by stating that the battle was

⁷ Trent C. Butler, Nancy L. deClaisse-Walford, and Peter H. Davids, *Joshua 1-12*, vol. 7A, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins, 2014), 60-61.

⁸ Greenspoon, "The Book of Joshua—Part 1," 242.

⁹ Butler, deClaisse-Walford, and Davids, *Joshua 1-12*, 63.

¹⁰ Steven L. McKenzie, *Introduction to the Historical Books : Strategies for Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 47.

¹¹ Greenspoon, "The Book of Joshua—Part 1," 231.

¹² David A. Fiensy, "Digging Up the Bible: Examples of Using Archaeology to Interpret the Bible," in *Insights from Archaeology* (Minneapolis, MN : Fortress Press, 2017), 45.

fought at Bethel (which was destroyed during the 13th century BCE) but associated later with the ruin at Ai, which lay in Bethel's vicinity.¹³ This model later became questionable due to lack of Late-Bronze Age destructions of the towns mentioned in Joshua. For example, Jericho's walls were finally destroyed around 1550 BCE, and by the time of Joshua in the 13th century BCE, only an unwalled village stood there. Similarly, Gibeon was occupied in the Early- and Middle-Bronze Ages as well as the Iron Age, but not in the Late-Bronze Age when Joshua emerged.¹⁴

So K. Lawson Younger Jr. declares that "the only apparent consensus is that the Albrightean conquest model is invalidated."¹⁵ Moreover, Nelson Glueck explored the Transjordan region and found little evidence of settlement during the Middle- and Late-Bronze Ages, and concluded that the Transjordan Kingdoms such as Ammon, Moab, and Edom could not have been founded before the 13th century BCE. Thus the wandering Israelites could not have encountered these peoples as recorded in Deuteronomy and Joshua.¹⁶

An alternate "Peaceful Infiltration" model was originated by Albrecht Alt and strengthened by his student Martin Noth. They claimed that there had been neither large-scale exodus from Egypt nor conquest of Canaan but a series of peaceful tribal migrations entering Canaan which led to military conflicts later on.¹⁷ Noth considered the Ai story as an etiological explanation of the ruined Early-Bronze city (ca. 2200 BCE) since its name means "the ruin."¹⁸ These two models dominated the study on Joshua during the 20th century.

¹³ Richard S. Hess, Gerald A. Klingbeil, and Paul J. Ray Jr, eds., *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History* (University Park, PA : Penn State University Press, 2008), 83.

¹⁴ McKenzie, *Introduction to the Historical Books*, 50-51.

¹⁵ Hess, Klingbeil, and Ray Jr, eds., *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History*, 63.

¹⁶ Hess, Klingbeil, and Ray Jr, eds., *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History*, 83.

¹⁷ Hess, Klingbeil, and Ray Jr, eds., *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History*, 80.

¹⁸ Thomas W. Davis, *Shifting Sands: The Rise and Fall of Biblical Archaeology* (New York, NY : Oxford University Press, 2004), 118.

A third model called the "Sociological Model" or "Revolted Peasants" was proposed by George Mendenhall in 1962 (and was followed by Norman Gottwald) who rejected the other two models and proposed that Israelites were local indigenous people but withdrew to central hill country and won their freedom through a Marxist-type rebellion.¹⁹

None of these three traditional models seems to be able to adequately explain the complexities of the emergence of Israel since they all address the issue in isolation without integrating the "overall historical, demographic, economic and social developments" of the Late-Bronze Age to Early-Iron Age (13th to 11th centuries BCE).²⁰

A fourth model called "Invisible Israelites" was suggested by Israel Finkelstein who argued that Israelites and Canaanites shared the land until the economy collapsed following Egypt's withdrawal by the end of the Late-Bronze Age which led to Israel's peaceful emergence "from the shadow of the Canaanites."²¹ William Dever summarizes all the researches on Joshua and states that the external evidence does not support the biblical account of "a large-scale, concerted Israelite military invasion of Canaan, either that of Numbers east of the Jordan, or of Joshua west of the Jordan."²²

Overall, it is more likely that the origin of Israel was the result of multiple sources, some were local residents and some came from outside. If Israel came to Canaan with six hundred thousand men who could serve in the army according to Numbers 26:2 and 26:51,²³ it is unthinkable who could be stronger than such an overwhelming force

¹⁹ Hess, Klingbeil, and Ray Jr, eds., *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History*, 85.

²⁰ Nadav Naaman, *Canaan in the Second Millennium B.C.E.: Collected Essays* (Winona Lake, IN : Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 343.

²¹ Eric H. Cline, *Biblical Archaeology: A Very Short Introduction* (Cary, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 64.

²² Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, 14.

²³ The number of 600,000 is questionable given the ambiguity of the Hebrew word גָּלָל for "thousand."

given that the local residents were not only outnumbered but also mainly organized as city-states, lacking the centralized military power.

Nevertheless, there are several key archaeological discoveries that help identify Israel in the history. For example, Merneptah, Egyptian's third pharaoh of the 19th Dynasty who reigned from 1213 to 1203 BCE, recorded his military successes in Canaan in 1209 BCE on a stele now called the Merneptah stele or Israel stele since Israel was first mentioned in any known extra-biblical sources as a people group in Canaan.²⁴ So archaeological evidences support Israel's existence in the 13th century BCE rather than 15th BCE even though they do not rule out the possibility that Israel existed in the 15th century BCE but was only evidenced in the 13th century BCE.

In Joshua 8:30-35, the Israelites built an altar on Mount Ebal, the first structure after entering the land of Canaan, to fulfill the command in Deuteronomy 27:1-8, and the site was discovered by Israeli archaeologist Adam Zertal in 1980. It was dated to Iron I and excavated from 1982 to 1989. James Strange concludes that it is likely the altar of Joshua 8:31.²⁵ If Israel entered into Canaan in late-Bronze Age around 1260 BCE rather than 1440 BCE, then the altar dated to Iron I could have been built around 1200 BCE, which can be within Joshua's generation.

So the details of the book of Joshua are challenged by archaeological evidences. While literary genre to be discussed plays a role in explaining some discrepancies, the ANE materials in general further shed light on this matter.

3. Ancient Near Eastern Materials

For the book of Joshua, there are parallels from the ANE materials such as the Amarna Letters which were over 300 "diplomatic

²⁴ Richard S. Hess, *Joshua*, ed. Richard S. Hess, Block Daniel I., and Manor Dale W., *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2016), 39.

²⁵ Ralph K. Hawkins, *The Iron Age I Structure on Mt. Ebal: Excavation and Interpretation* (University Park, PA : Penn State University Press, 2012), 227.

correspondence between the kings of Canaanite city-states and their Pharaonic overlords, Amenhotep III and Akhenaten²⁶ in the Amarna period (14th century BCE) found in the royal residence in Amarna, Egypt,²⁷ documenting the unstable social and political conditions in Syria-Palestine.²⁸ Israel was not mentioned there, which could indicate that it did not exist by then.

Steven McKenzie identifies three basic genres in the book of Joshua: narrative, speech, and boundary lists,²⁹ and the tribal boundaries in Joshua 13-21 are very similar to the boundary descriptions in the treaty documents from Ugarit and from the Hittite capital in the Late-Bronze Age.³⁰ In a sense, God uses the boundary descriptions to define the fulfillment of his promise made to the Israelite ancestors.

Another key parallel is the ANE conquest account, such as the Egyptian conquest account, which is conceived as overcoming chaos and re-establishing proper order while foreigners were typically portrayed as inferior and even evil. This matches the narrative in Joshua, and demonstrates that Joshua could apply a common genre of conquest account in the ANE to depict Israel's history with typical figurative and hyperbolic literary features. Thomas Dozeman further notes that the form of the conquest reports appeared in Sumerian and Akkadian royal inscriptions in the third-millennium BCE, and Joshua 9-12 is based on the Assyrian royal conquest accounts, a form of ancient imperial propaganda, in literary structure and motifs to demonstrate the power and divine right to conquer other nations.³¹

²⁶ Hawkins, *The Iron Age I Structure on Mt. Ebal*, 216.

²⁷ Hess, *Joshua*, 39.

²⁸ Victor Harold Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels : Laws and Stories From the Ancient Near East*, vol. Fully revised and Expanded Fourth edition (New York: Paulist Press, 2016), 15.

²⁹ McKenzie, *Introduction to the Historical Books*, 55.

³⁰ Richard S. Hess, *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries vol. 6 (Downers Grove, IL : InterVarsity Press, 1996), 64.

³¹ Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, 67.

Richard Hess points out that the book of Joshua's most productive source for comparison is the genre of land grants which existed in Ugarit in Late-Bronze Age and Alalakh in the Middle-Bronze Age (Alalakh grant, or AT456, in the 18th century BCE).³² AT456 describes the gift from one king to another of a city together with its villages and lands, and offers "the closest overall structure to the book of Joshua."³³ Joshua resembles the royal grant of Alalakh in that the grant is conditional on continuing loyalty. According to Hess, the text of AT 456 has 76 lines and can be divided into five parts: (1) a town list that reviews previous exchanges of towns (lines 1-18); (2) a history of the beneficiary and how he assisted his suzerain in the past (lines 19-30); (3) suzerain's gift of Alalakh to the beneficiary and additional gift (lines 31-39a); (4) the oath that the suzerain swore to the beneficiary in making the gift (lines 39b-40); (5) conditions of disloyalty that would cause the beneficiary to forfeit this gift (lines 43-75 [lines 64-75 are broken with only a few words remaining]).³⁴ Thus AT456 provides a good structural comparison to the book of Joshua, and shows how the book of Joshua "functions as a West Semitic land grant from God to his people."³⁵ This echoes the nature of the book as theological rather than historical as modern readers tend to regard.

Overall, to claim that the book of Joshua presents historical events faces strong head winds. However, just as John Walton points out, "what really happened" was not that important in most ancient historiography, and "Israel's historical literature has features similar to chronographic texts and contains a few isolated examples that can be compared to royal inscriptions or historical literary texts. But the purpose of Israel's literature is theological."³⁶

³² Hess, *Joshua*, 43-44.

³³ Hess, *Joshua*, 44.

³⁴ Hess, *Joshua*, 45.

³⁵ Hess, *Joshua*, 49.

³⁶ John H. Walton et al., *The IVP Bible Background Commentary - Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL : InterVarsity Press, 2000), 209.

II. CRITICAL INTERPRETIVE ISSUES

Except the conquest model that is discussed in the archaeological section, three related key interpretive issues — genre, historicity, and composition — are covered in this section to better understand the book of Joshua.

1. Genre

The book of Joshua is part of the so-called "Historical Books" in the Christian Old Testament, so people tend to think that Joshua must be a historical book detailing historical events. However, after the publication of Thomas Thompson's monograph *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives* in 1974, two distinct camps emerged. Minimalists tend not to treat biblical records as historical unless proven so, while maximalists take the opposite position, treating biblical records as historical unless proven to be not so.³⁷

Since literary criticism, archaeological discoveries and ANE materials have made it clear that taking the biblical book at face value may not reflect what actually happened, genre has been identified as a key factor to explain such discrepancies. It must be noted that genre is not fixed but fluid, and one literary work such as Joshua can incorporate multiple genres since an author can mix genres.³⁸ The clues about genre usually appear with specific features in a text, often at either end or both ends of it, that signal to the reader as to what to expect and how to understand it.³⁹ So whether the book of Joshua is a historical book depends on what the main genres are and what is meant by "history."

On the one hand, some scholars such as David Firth stress the importance of distinguishing history from historiography. The former is an account of what happened in the past and the latter is a selective

³⁷ Gale A. Yee, Jr. Page Hugh R., and Matthew J. M. Coomber, *The Historical Writings: Fortress Commentary on the Bible* (Lanham, MD: 1517 Media, 2016), 51.

³⁸ McKenzie, *Introduction to the Historical Books*, 3.

³⁹ McKenzie, *Introduction to the Historical Books*, 4.

record about the past such as annals, king lists or battle accounts, and can be presented artistically.⁴⁰ McKenzie further points out that ancient history writing is not the result of a gradual accumulation of traditions as used to be assumed but a "deliberate product of a literate society" in which literary creativity plays a critical role in composition,⁴¹ and the primary purpose of such history writing is to "explain the present by rendering an account of the past."⁴² So the ancient author's primary concern was not "detailing exactly what happened in the past" but "how the causes of the past brought about the effects of the present," or simply "interpreting the meaning of the past for the present."⁴³ He regards the biblical historical books as etiological, stories that offer an explanation of current conditions based on past causes, and can be imaginative and allow "the incorporation of non-historical and even fictional narratives." So history writing is theology to Israelites for their understanding of the relationship with God.⁴⁴ It is worth noting that such an etiological explanation is often avoided by conservative scholars who stress on "the provisional nature of archaeological results" and affirm the basic historicity of the text.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, the doublets and internal contradictions within the book of Joshua indicates its historiographic character. For example, the record of no survivors being left in Hebron according to Joshua 10:36-37 goes against the record that the city stood to be conquered again in Joshua 14:13-14. Another example is that Joshua 11:23a states that "Joshua conquered the whole land, just as the Lord had promised Moses,"⁴⁶

⁴⁰ David G. Firth, *Including the Stranger: Foreigners in the Former Prophets* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 16.

⁴¹ McKenzie, *Introduction to the Historical Books*, 9.

⁴² McKenzie, *Introduction to the Historical Books*, 10.

⁴³ McKenzie, *Introduction to the Historical Books*, 11.

⁴⁴ McKenzie, *Introduction to the Historical Books*, 12.

⁴⁵ J. G. McConville, *Joshua*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig Bartholomew, and Daniel Treier, *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament: A Book-By-Book Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 70.

⁴⁶ The biblical verses of this paper are all from the "New English Translation" (NET).

while 13:1b states that "a great deal of land remains to be conquered." A third example is regarding which tribe Jerusalem was allotted to — Judah or Benjamin. Joshua 15:63 states, "The men of Judah were unable to conquer the Jebusites living in Jerusalem. The Jebusites live with the people of Judah in Jerusalem to this very day" while Joshua 18:28 states, "Zelah, Haeleph, the Jebusite city (that is, Jerusalem), Gibeah, and Kiriath—a total of fourteen cities and their towns. This was the land assigned to the tribe of Benjamin by its clans." Firth explains that it can either be short of integration of different traditions or using hyperbolic language in communication.⁴⁷

Other doublets that can be explained by lack of integration include two valedictory addresses (chs. 23; 24); two assemblies of all Israel called by Joshua (23:2; 24:1); double records of Joshua's order to choose twelve men (Josh. 3:12; 4:1-4); two references of Caleb receiving Kiriath-eba/Hebron (14:13-15 and 15:13) and then the city went to the Levites in Josh 21:10-12.⁴⁸ All these inconsistencies not only support that the book may not be as historical as traditional view thinks, but also support a complicated process of composition and redaction that will be discussed in the following section. Nevertheless, the doublets of Joshua's advanced age in 13:1 and 23:1 may not be redundant but intentional, serving as a literary wordplay⁴⁹ to bracket the account of the land division.⁵⁰

On the other hand, Younger proposes that it is necessary to put the book of Joshua in the context of ANE conquest narratives to understand it, which are conceived as overcoming chaos and re-establishing proper order.⁵¹ He further points out that it is wrong to distinguish between "history-writing" and "literary production" since

⁴⁷ Firth, *Including the Stranger*, 17.

⁴⁸ McKenzie, *Introduction to the Historical Books*, 43.

⁴⁹ Hess, *Joshua*, 47.

⁵⁰ McKenzie, *Introduction to the Historical Books*, 40.

⁵¹ James Gordon McConville, *Joshua: An Introduction and Study Guide: Crossing Divides*, Study Guide edition. (London: T and T Clark, 2017), 64.

the former always takes literary form and is an interpretive form on the past. The picture of a "total conquest" such as in Josh 11 should thus be understood as figurative and hyperbolic. He warns against dismissing the book of Joshua too quickly as history-writing. It is just not history-writing or straight re-telling of history according to our contemporary standard.⁵²

As an ancient book, Joshua of course cannot meet our contemporary definition of history-writing since it is a product of its own age, and contains theological messages mainly for its age. Moreover, while incongruities and contradictions in the book can hardly be explained away by genre alone, the fact that the Hebrew Bible had multiple editions simultaneously as attested by the Dead Sea Scrolls indicates that theological messages are way more important than texts themselves to the Israelites.

2. Historicity

A related topic to genre is historicity of Joshua's conquest account, which has been questioned by many scholars starting in the 19th century. Historicity is the correspondence between a written text and the actual events and entities of the past that the text refers to.⁵³ The rise of the historical critical method marks the shift from the biblical narratives as historical accounts of real events to the events behind the narratives.⁵⁴ For instance, Abraham Kuenen (1828-1891) stated that the conquest stories together with the exodus, the wilderness wanderings were "utterly unhistorical, and therefore cannot have been committed to writing until centuries after Moses and Joshua."⁵⁵ This conclusion was ahead of any significant supportive archaeological evidences by about a

⁵² McConville, *Joshua*, 66.

⁵³ Lawrence J. Mykytiuk, "Strengthening Biblical Historicity Vis-à-Vis Minimalism, 1992-2008 and Beyond, Part 2.1: The Literature of Perspective, Critique, and Methodology, First Half," *Journal of Religious & Theological Information* 11, no. 3-4 (July 1, 2012): 102.

⁵⁴ John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL : InterVarsity Press, 2009), 100.

⁵⁵ Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, 7.

century, and was much stronger than Eric Cline's recent claim that many events portrayed in Joshua lacks historical accuracy.⁵⁶

Scholars now generally regard the book as records of Israelites' entering into Canaan without "sweeping, instant conquest-with-conquests" even though there were several military campaigns.⁵⁷ Joshua's using spies is also regarded as a literary feature to show his fidelity to Mosaic precedent.⁵⁸ J. M. Miller goes even further by stating that the idea of Israel having twelve well-defined tribes before the monarchical period is probably artificial.⁵⁹

Although the book of Joshua is not a historical book according to modern standard, it still contains historical data that help understand the ancient history of Israel, including the date of critical events in the book and the date of the book's composition. The book itself does not offer explicit internal evidence for the dating of events, but there is consensus that Israelites were in the land of Canaan by the end of the thirteenth century BCE based on archaeological evidences. There are mainly two views on the date of conquest, which is related to that of exodus. One is called the early date view, dating the exodus to about 1446 BCE. Another is called the late date view, dating the exodus to about 1260 BCE.

Although the early date view is currently under reconsideration, evangelical scholars traditionally favour this view based on textual evidence.⁶⁰ For example, a literal interpretation of 1 Kings 6:1 leads to 1446 BCE as the year of exodus if Solomon became the king in 970 BCE and began building the temple in the 4th year (970 - 4 + 480 = 1446).

⁵⁶ Eric H. Cline, *Jerusalem Besieged: From Ancient Canaan to Modern Israel* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 19.

⁵⁷ Hawkins, *The Iron Age I Structure on Mt. Ebal*, 218.

⁵⁸ Bernard P. Robinson, "Rahab of Canaan—and Israel," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 23, no. 2 (December 9, 2009): 257.

⁵⁹ Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, 16.

⁶⁰ Helene Dallaire, *Joshua*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2012), 47.

So the entrance into Canaan was around 1406 BCE since the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years (Deut. 2:7; 8:2, 4; 29:5; Josh. 5:6; cf. Josh. 14:7, 10 and 14:10). Moreover, the anti-Canaanite polemic argues for an early date since the Canaanites disappeared after 1 Kings (9:16, 20-21) in the Former Prophets.⁶¹ The textual problem with 1446 BCE is that the chronological data in Judges and Samuel are not self-consistent, and when all the specific data are added together, they are over 480 years.

As to the date of composition, B. S. Childs notes that Joshua 15:63 and 16:10 indicate the writing should not be later than the tenth century BCE.⁶² These two verses show that the tribe of Judah lived with Jebusites in Jerusalem, and Ephraimites lived with Canaanites in Gezer, which should occur before David conquered Jerusalem at about 1003 BCE (2 Sam. 5:6-10) and an Egyptian pharaoh destroyed the Canaanites in Gezer and gave the city "as a wedding present to his daughter, who had married Solomon" (1 Kings 9:16).

The scholars advocating for a late date mainly base their argument on archaeological data and ANE data.⁶³ They regard 1 Kings 6:1 as symbolic, reflecting a complete number of twelve generations of forty years each,⁶⁴ but in reality each generation could have been fewer than forty years even though Genesis 15:13 and 15:16 could indicate 100 years for a generation.⁶⁵ Both the lack of Israelite record in the Amarna Letters, and the Israelite record in the victory stele of Pharaoh Merneptah seem to support the late date view. Moreover, a significant decline in Canaanite city-culture occurred in the thirteenth century BCE, corresponding to the rise of Israel in the region.

⁶¹ Hess, *Joshua*, 37.

⁶² David M. Howard, *Joshua: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1998), 32.

⁶³ Dallaire, *Joshua*, 48.

⁶⁴ Hess, *Joshua*, 38.

⁶⁵ Douglas S. Earl, *The Joshua Delusion: Rethinking Genocide in the Bible* (Havertown, UK: James Clarke Company, Limited, 2011), 152-53.

3. Composition

Due to the book's central position in the Hebrew Bible, rather than treating it as an independent book, its relationship to the Pentateuch and to the Former Prophets draws scholars's attention and various hypotheses are proposed such as Hexateuch, Tetratuech, Deuteronomistic History (DtrH), and Enneateuch.⁶⁶

Since Joshua 24:26 states that "Joshua wrote these words in the Law Scroll of God," and since God's promise to Abraham and his descendants regarding "the land flowing with milk and honey" did not realize in Pentateuch but until Joshua, the Hexateuch (Genesis–Joshua) theory was proposed in the nineteenth century.⁶⁷ It is true that Joshua at a narrative level is the direct continuation of Deuteronomy.⁶⁸

Refuting the theory of source criticism that identifies the J and E sources in Joshua as proof of the Hexateuch,⁶⁹ Noth proposed in 1943 the theory of the Deuteronomistic History (DtrH), which claims that unlike the Tetratuech (Genesis–Numbers) that were composed during the monarchic period, the biblical books from Deuteronomy to Kings were composed as a unified history during the Babylonian exile by a Deuteronomistic historian (after 562 BCE when Jehoiachin was released as recorded in 2 Kings 25:27-30). Thus Joshua was composed more than half a millennium later than the events of conquest and settlement even if the sources behind them were earlier.⁷⁰ The book's lack of reference to Egypt's presence also implies its late composition since the author was "unaware of the historical situation of the period."⁷¹

⁶⁶ Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, 38.

⁶⁷ Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 31.

⁶⁸ Karin Finsterbusch, "Deuteronomy and Joshua: Torah in the Book of Joshua in Light of Deuteronomy," *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 3, no. 2 (2012): 166.

⁶⁹ Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, 18.

⁷⁰ Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton, *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts* (Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Academic, 2018), 202.

⁷¹ Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, 16.

The DtrH hypothesis received wide acceptance without much challenge except many modifications until John Van Seters in 1972 proposed that the Tetrateuch was composed later than Deuteronomy based on analysis of their terminology and literary techniques.⁷² That argument was not widely accepted except by a few scholars such as Pekka Pitkanen,⁷³ but the disagreement about the specifics of the DtrH further developed till the consensus on the hypothesis dissipated in the 1990s.⁷⁴ For example, the repetition of the record of Joshua's death in Joshua 24:29-32 and in Judges 2:7-9 is a problem for the DtrH hypothesis.⁷⁵

Entering into the 21st century, some old hypotheses receive a second life. Dozeman argues that Joshua was initially composed as an independent book.⁷⁶ Pitkanen argues for a revival of Hexateuch that Julius Wellhausen favoured, and he calls it Pentateuch–Joshua due to significant connections of literary features such as splitting the sea in Exodus 14-15 and splitting the Jordan River in Joshua 3-4.⁷⁷ He proposes that two authors worked on the six-volume collection. One on Genesis–Numbers and the other on Deuteronomy–Joshua given the significant differences between the two units such as no priestly material in Deuteronomy.⁷⁸ Some scholars even propose an Enneateuch hypothesis of Genesis–Kings. Nevertheless, no new hypothesis after DtrH has captured widespread scholarly acceptance.⁷⁹

⁷² Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, 19.

⁷³ Pekka Pitkänen, "Reading Genesis–Joshua as a Unified Document from an Early Date: A Settler Colonial Perspective," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 45, no. 1 (February 1, 2015): 5.

⁷⁴ McKenzie, *Introduction to the Historical Books*, 17-18.

⁷⁵ Thomas B. Dozeman, "The Book of Joshua in Recent Research," *Currents in Biblical Research* 15, no. 3 (June 1, 2017): 272-73.

⁷⁶ Dozeman, "The Book of Joshua in Recent Research," 2012.

⁷⁷ Pekka Pitkänen, "Pentateuch–Joshua: A Settler-Colonial Document of a Supplanting Society," *Settler Colonial Studies* 4, no. 3 (July 3, 2014): 247.

⁷⁸ Pitkänen, "Reading Genesis–Joshua as a Unified Document from an Early Date," 4.

⁷⁹ Pitkänen, "Reading Genesis–Joshua as a Unified Document from an Early Date," 3.

Recent research has moved on from source criticism and composition hypothesis to view the composition as "a process of supplementation or redaction," and the date of composition has moved into the post-exilic period.⁸⁰ For example, some scholars suggest that Joshua-Kings went through two editions, the first during King Josiah's reign (640–609 BCE) to celebrate the religious reform, and a later edition to explain why the kingdom of Judah was still destroyed despite the reform.⁸¹ Carolyn Sharp even suggests that multi-vocality is a common phenomenon for the Hebrew Bible—"Scripture's own dialogical engagements, within complex compositions such as Genesis and Isaiah and Jeremiah and also between biblical books, invite us to honour multi-vocality."⁸² So it is unlikely a consensus of composition after Noth's DtrH hypothesis will emerge any time soon.

III. BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL THEMES

The book of Joshua contains several theological themes that are critical to understand the book. Among those themes, four are closely related: *herem* or the so-called "holy war," land, covenantal fidelity, and God's people—insiders versus outsiders. Since God's covenantal promise was about descendants and land (Gen. 12:7), the three themes of covenant, land, and people are all related. Given that "at that time the Canaanites were in the land" (Gen. 12:6b), *herem* reflects the covenantal fidelity and fulfillment, and is thus closely related to the other three themes. It is worth noting that this paper does not organize these four themes around the core of covenantal fidelity, but according to controversial level — from the highly disparate views among biblical scholars and theologians on *herem* to almost consensus on God's people.

⁸⁰ Dozeman, "The Book of Joshua in Recent Research," 272.

⁸¹ Yee, Page, and Coomber, *The Historical Writings*, 279.

⁸² Carolyn J. Sharp, "'Be Strong and Resolute!': Reading Joshua in the Contemporary Church," *Anglican Theological Review* 97, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 31.

1. **הָרֵם "herem," or "holy war"**

The book of Joshua describes Israelites's entering into Canaan, their promised land, under the leadership of Joshua. It presents scenes that are difficult for modern readers to understand, such as violence and genocide, especially the discrimination against indigenous people, and the colonization of an inhabited land.⁸³ Although incidents of *herem*, or "holy war" are rare in the Hebrew Bible, this book records such commands and stories, such as Jericho (6:17, 21), Ai (7:24-25; 8:2, 22, 24-26), and other cities and territories (10:28-40; 11:8, 11-14, 20-21).

Herem, or **הָרֵם** in Hebrew, is understood differently among scholars, and is reflected in the following discussions. The traditional view is that it is a divine decree of total destruction such as in Joshua 6:17-19, which was first given to Joshua in the book of Deuteronomy (7:1-5; 20:16-18) to apply to the peoples of the land that God gave to Israel in Cisjordan. It was already applied under Moses's leadership to the peoples in Transjordan (Deut. 2:34; 3:3-6), and continued in Samuel's era (1 Sam. 15:3). The war against Canaanites are often understood as a "holy war," which fits the religious view of war in the ANE, but appears to be divinely-sponsored ethnic cleansing for modern readers. For example, Rahab's words, "the Lord is handing this land over to you" in Joshua 2:9 are a holy war formula,⁸⁴ and the remainder of Joshua 2:9-11 clearly echoes the Song of Moses in Exodus 15:14-15, a typical trace of literary creativity.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, the treatments of Rahab and the Gibeonites were exceptions to the request and practice of total annihilation.

Some people take the description of *herem* at face value and make their arguments accordingly. Marcion and some Gnostics in the second century CE held the view that the cruel God of the Old Testament was different from the loving God of the New Testament. Some modern

⁸³ Dallaire, *Joshua*, 40.

⁸⁴ Robinson, "Rahab of Canaan—and Israel," 260.

⁸⁵ Robinson, "Rahab of Canaan—and Israel," 263.

scholars point out that the battles against Jericho and Ai are not to conquer but to clean up the promised land.⁸⁶ For example, Helene Dallaire regards the intent of this religious act as destroying the evil to manifest God's holiness among his people through required ritual purity.⁸⁷ She further argues that although the command from a loving and gracious God to exterminate the inhabitants seems harsh, the land is cleansed to establish a holy people to glorify God's name.⁸⁸ Similarly, Andrew King claims that *herem* is a holy war that requires consecration and ritual purity of all participants with covenantal requirements such as circumcision and sacrifice.⁸⁹ Peter Craigie further offers two reasons for the annihilation of Canaanites: First, Israel in this case was God's hand to execute God's judgment against the Canaanites; Second, the coexistence of Canaanites with Israel would lead to syncretism, an evil forbidden by God.⁹⁰ Overall, such arguments reflects the traditional view and is supported by biblical texts such as Genesis 15:16; Leviticus 20:23; Deuteronomy 9:4-5; 12:29-32.⁹¹

Some scholars view *herem* differently. For instance, Hess suggests that the warfare in Joshua did not originate in a theology of "holy war" in the Old Testament theology, but in a political ideology that Israel shared with its neighbouring nations.⁹² Firth further points out that what more important is not the theme of war but the identity of Israel as a people going forward.⁹³ These scholars either see a higher purpose of *herem* than genocide or ethnic cleansing, or see it as a literary product of common cultures in the ANE. Some even compare and contrast

⁸⁶ Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, 44.

⁸⁷ Dallaire, *Joshua*, 61.

⁸⁸ Dallaire, *Joshua*, 61.

⁸⁹ Andrew M. King, Joshua M. Philpot, and William R. Osborne, *The Law, the Prophets, and the Writings: Studies in Evangelical Old Testament Hermeneutics in Honor of Duane A. Garrett* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2021), 122.

⁹⁰ Dallaire, *Joshua*, 63.

⁹¹ McConvile, *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament*, 73.

⁹² Hess, *Joshua*, 47.

⁹³ Firth, *Including the Stranger*, 51.

herem with the "holy war" in Islam, and find differences in purpose, nature, and rule. For example, Sherene Khouri concludes that the nature of the Hebrew wars was judicial, but the nature of the Islamic wars was vengeful.⁹⁴

Other scholars do not take Joshua's description at face value and offer their own explanation. Many argue that the book echoes the war rhetoric of the book of Deuteronomy, but does not reflect a historical reality. Some contend that the *herem* stories were not factual accounts of annihilation of cities or groups, but parables to address the principle of strict obedience to God.⁹⁵ For example, J. G. McConville notices that modern commentaries commonly explain the command of *herem* from God as "a metaphor for rigorous adherence" to God, which is supported by the historical assessment that Israel never did to Canaan what the book depicts.⁹⁶ Similarly, Douglas Earl argues that since Israel did not occupy the areas mentioned in chapter 13, the text's claim that the whole land was taken is traditionally understood by commentators as stressing the difference between God's faithfulness and the people's lack of faithfulness.⁹⁷ The "peasant revolt" model of the Conquest also provides an alternate explanation since it proposes that no narrated genocide had actually been performed.⁹⁸

Walter Brueggemann agrees that the book of Joshua is not about genocide,⁹⁹ and further suggests that "covenantal obedience has the nerve to instruct God about a more excellent way. Clearly, the God of the Book of Joshua awaits such instruction."¹⁰⁰ That is, Joshua

⁹⁴ Sherene Nicholas Khouri, "Holy Wars: A Historical and Theological Comparison Between Joshua's Conquests Vs. Mohammad's First Three Incursions," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 20, no. 60 (Winter 2021): 89.

⁹⁵ Greer, Hilber, and Walton, *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament*, 513.

⁹⁶ McConville, *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament*, 74.

⁹⁷ Earl, *The Joshua Delusion*, 313.

⁹⁸ Sharp, "Be Strong and Resolute!," 29.

⁹⁹ Walter Brueggemann, "The God of Joshua... Give or Take the Land," *Interpretation* 66, no. 2 (April 1, 2012): 170.

¹⁰⁰ Brueggemann, "The God of Joshua... Give or Take the Land," 172.

or someone from the leadership of Israel should stand up to argue against *herem*, just as Abraham did in Genesis 18:16-33, or Moses did in Exodus 32:7-14, and Numbers 14:11-35. Instead, Joshua was canonized as the only person to call God into war (Josh. 10:14).¹⁰¹ Of course, this is only Brueggemann's reading of the passage, and Walton reminds the modern readers that "we must read the Bible as an ancient text, not as a modern one."¹⁰² In this sense, the ANE background materials, especially the genre of conquest account, plays a role to help understand what the text actually conveys.

Overall, *herem* described in Joshua brings forward the problem of violence and genocide in the name of God in the Hebrew Bible. Reading it as an ancient conquest account helps properly interpret the so-called religiously inspired violence, and tackle the moral and theological difficulties as well as the historicity of such accounts. Earl correctly points out that the book of Joshua has seldom been used to justify violence in the name of God, such as justifying or preaching the Crusades.¹⁰³ Karl Barth's comment on the historicity of the events and faithful reading of the Scripture is revealing given that genre often plays a critical role in understanding such kind of descriptions that are unfamiliar to modern readers:¹⁰⁴

the idea that the Bible declares the Word of God only when it speaks historically is one which must be abandoned, especially in the Christian Church.... it led to a rigid affirmation that in the Bible, as the Word of God, we have only "historical" accounts and no saga at all – an affirmation which can be sustained only [if] we either close our eyes or violently reinterpret what we see....We have to realize that ... the

¹⁰¹ Rachel Havrelock, "The Joshua Generation: Conquest and the Promised Land," *Critical Research on Religion* 1, no. 3 (December 1, 2013): 317.

¹⁰² John H. Walton, "Joshua 10:12-15 and Mesopotamian Celestial Omen Texts," in *Faith, Tradition, and History, Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context* (Winona Lake, IN : Eisenbrauns, 1994), 183.

¹⁰³ Earl, *The Joshua Delusion*, 7.

¹⁰⁴ Earl cites it from "K. Barth, Church Dogmatics (London: T&T Clark (15 vols), ET. 2004): III/I, 82", a source that I have no access.

presumed equation of the Word of God with a "historical" record is an inadmissible postulate which does not itself originate in the Bible at all but in the unfortunate habit of Western thought which assumes that the reality of a history stands or falls by whether it is "history."¹⁰⁵

2. Land

This is a related issue to *herem* since the purpose of *herem* was to clean up and re-occupy the land. The allocation of land in Transjordan to Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh are described in Numbers 32:39-42; Deuteronomy 3:12-17 and Joshua 13:8-32; 17:1. Once the Israelites crossed the Jordan River and entered into Canaan, the land was taken over by force and further allocated among the nine-and-a-half tribes in Cisjordan. How to understand the conquest and allocation of the land is another key theme in better understanding the book.

Some scholars such as McKenzie regard the land in Canaan as ultimately belonging to God, rather than the local residents at the time, so there is no problem for God to lead the process of conquest and allocation.¹⁰⁶ Joshua 10 shows that "God fights for Israel and gives them the Promised Land.... Without God they cannot succeed."¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, the land is a gift to families rather than to individuals and this is clearly reflected in the land allocated to one of Manasseh's descendent Zelophehad who had no sons but daughters (Josh. 17:36). Horst Seebass also notices the parallels between Numbers and Joshua regarding land allotment among the Israelite tribes.¹⁰⁸

Other scholars see the conquest and allocation of the land can only be understood in a context of land right hierarchy in the ANE.

¹⁰⁵ Earl, *The Joshua Delusion*, 2, citing Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics* (London: T&T Clark [15 vols], ET. 2004): III/I, 82.

¹⁰⁶ McKenzie, *Introduction to the Historical Books*, 54.

¹⁰⁷ Hess, *Joshua*, 58.

¹⁰⁸ Horst Seebass, "'Holy' Land in the Old Testament: Numbers and Joshua," *Vetus Testamentum* 56, no. 1 (2006): 104.

For example, M. Gluckman notes that several groups or individuals can hold a hierarchy of rights in the same land, and once the rights are established, the rights of those higher in the hierarchy cannot trump the rights of those lower. It provides a framework for understanding the relationships between royal, tribal, and household agrarian practices and ideologies discernible in the book of Joshua since ANE kings and temples could not legally confiscate domestic lands from households without just cause.¹⁰⁹

In a word, the land allocation needs to be viewed not only theologically since it is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and the Israelite patriarchs, but also according to the legal perspective in the ANE, which helps understand why there are overlaps in land allocation.

3. Covenantal Fidelity

After conquering Jericho and Ai, Joshua built an altar on Mount Ebal for God (Josh. 8:30-35) according to Moses's command (Deut. 27:5-6), and renewed the covenant. Joshua assembled Israel's leaders at Shechem and drew up an agreement for the people (Josh. 24:1, 25). Joshua's emphasis on covenantal fidelity indicates that it is the key to understanding the book of Joshua, including other key theological themes such as *herem*.

Traditionally, scholars emphasize the obedience of the Israelites to God's commandments. For example, both the books of Deuteronomy (6:13-15; 7:4; 8:19-20; 10:12-13; 28:13-14, 20, 63; 29:24-28) and Joshua (23:8-16; 24:14-15, 19-20) indicate that the Israelites do not have an absolute right of inheritance to the land, which actually depends on their allegiance to God and his covenant. The covenantal relationship between Israelites and God is the key—even though Israelites cannot keep the covenant, God does not forget his commitment to Israelites.

¹⁰⁹ Stephen C. Russell, "The Legal Background of the Theme of Land in the Book of Joshua," *Hebrew Studies* 59 (2018): 115-16.

Some scholars suggest that covenantal fidelity means more than just obedience on the party of Israel, but taking the liberty and obligation with faith and determination to challenge God in certain occasions. For example, Brueggemann points out that Moses had the courage to urge and instruct God on how to act in covenantal fidelity and away from destructiveness.¹¹⁰ Brueggemann further proposes that the book of Joshua requests insistence before God like that of Abraham: "Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen. 18:25)¹¹¹ As mentioned before, this is a minority view.

Overall, fidelity of Israelites to God is critical to the covenantal relationship, but God is faithful to his covenant even when Israelites are faithless. This traditional view still holds in principle. As to Brueggemann's viewpoint, it is new but the book of Joshua does not even hint any such request as needed.

4. God's People—Insiders and Outsiders

Who are God's people? Does God differentiate between who are insiders and who are outsiders? Can they interchange? If so, based on what criteria can they interchange? How does the book of Joshua illustrate this theological theme? These are the questions this section aims to address. Due to the scenes of *herem*, the book of Joshua seems to take a problematic attitude towards foreigners. That is, God in the Hebrew Bible seems to be cruel by taking a preferential attitude towards Israel.

However, some scholars think the book actually opens a door for foreigners, including Canaanites, to join Israel given that covenantal relationship was not limited to Israelites but opened to people who showed their willingness to join such a relationship and obey God's commandments. God's people include Gentiles who turn their hearts to God and exclude Israelites who turn their hearts away from God. For

¹¹⁰ Brueggemann, "The God of Joshua... Give or Take the Land," 172.

¹¹¹ Brueggemann, "The God of Joshua... Give or Take the Land," 175.

example, Rahab was a Canaanite whose heart longed for God (Josh. 2:11-13) and was accepted by the Israelites (Josh. 6:22-25), and even became an ancestor of King David (Matt. 1:5). In contrast, Achan was an Israelite whose heart turned to riches (Josh. 7:1) causing military failure of the Israelites at Ai, and was stoned to death (Josh. 7:25). So he in effect became a Canaanite doomed to be destroyed, the exact opposite to Rahab.¹¹² Some scholars even argue that Gibeonites acted in a similar way to Rahab in terms of submission to Israel's God. For example, Christopher Magezi argues that just like Rahab, the Gibeonites believed that God had given the land of Canaan to the Israelites, so they gave up the option to wage wars against the Israelites.¹¹³

The idea that the people of God are not defined by ethnicity but by faith is further emphasized by the New Testament. Firth remarks that God's saving work is for all the peoples irrespective of ethnicity since God is not a petty racist.¹¹⁴ Hess illustrates how God's mercy reaches non-Israelites such as Rahab (Josh. 6:17-25) and the Gibeonites (Josh. 9) who became associated with God's people.¹¹⁵ Christopher Wright hits the nail on the head — "Outsiders are brought in and insiders are expelled. What counts ... is not which nation has God on its side, but what people are choosing to align themselves with the purpose of God."¹¹⁶

Nevertheless, some scholars think that God shows favouritism in the book. For example, Brueggemann argues that the God revealed in the book of Joshua is "tribally committed and monarchically disposed" and "will continue the course of self-justifying violence."¹¹⁷

¹¹² Firth, *Including the Stranger*, 25.

¹¹³ Christopher Magezi, "Migration, Instrumental to Accomplishing God's Redemptive Purpose to Humankind: Perspectives from Ruth and Joshua," *In die Skriffig* 53, no. 1 (2019): 7.

¹¹⁴ Firth, *Including the Stranger*, 184.

¹¹⁵ Hess, *Joshua*, 57.

¹¹⁶ Earl, *The Joshua Delusion*, 140.

¹¹⁷ Brueggemann, "The God of Joshua... Give or Take the Land," 174.

Overall, Israel may be defined ethnically, but can also be understood as a faith community. Achan lost his status due to his lack of faith in God and Rahab became a member of Israel because of her commitment to God. Just as Firth suggests that Israel's relationship to foreigners is determined by faith in God rather than by ethnicity, and the book's focus is on Israel's existence as a pointer to all the peoples that God is mighty and that all should fear him.¹¹⁸ If we read the whole Bible rather than just the book of Joshua, Brueggemann's view cannot stand. Even if we only read Joshua, the examples of Rahab, Gibeonites as well as the origin of Caleb as foreigners, all indicate that God is more than just God of Israel.

IV. CONCLUSION

This paper demonstrates that the book has a loud and clear theological message: allegiance to God leads to all the blessings from him: being his people, in his land and fight for his purpose. Even though there are controversies in understanding the book such as genre, historicity, and composition, Sharp properly reminds all modern readers, especially Christians, that "we are walking the road to Emmaus every day, and in our wrestling with Scripture in community, we may glimpse none other than the risen Christ."¹¹⁹ (Luke 24:13)

Moreover, regardless of all the archaeological discoveries, ANE parallel analysis, and biblical historical criticism, Evangelicals need to recover the meaning of what the biblical texts intend to tell about the events they recount.¹²⁰ John O'Keefe and Robert Reno rightly comment that for church fathers, the Bible was not "a perfect historical record," but "the orienting, luminous centre of a highly varied and complex reality, shaped by divine providence," and the truth rested in

¹¹⁸ Firth, *Including the Stranger*, 175.

¹¹⁹ Sharp, "Be Strong and Resolute!," 32.

¹²⁰ Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 104.

the scripture's power to "illuminate and disclose the order and pattern of all things."¹²¹ Modern Evangelicals need to carry on the torch to be faithful to God and his word while engage contemporary scholarly findings and explanations to come up with a solid and holistic view of the Hebrew Bible.

ABSTRACT

Starting with biblical-canonical, archaeological, and ancient Near Eastern (ANE) background materials of the book of Joshua, this paper discusses three interpretive issues first and then four biblical theological themes as they are often related and even intertwined to demonstrate and argue that the book of Joshua should be read theologically in the context of ANE literature. The book presents clear theological messages that covenantal fidelity, rather than ethnicity, is the guarantee of the Israelites as God's chosen people in the promised land even though the historical and literary details such as the conquest itself are controversial among modern readers, and may not find strong support in archaeological evidence or the ANE literature.

撮 要

本文從約書亞記的聖經正典、考古和古代近東（ANE）背景材料入手，首先討論了三個詮釋方面的問題（體裁、歷史性和構成），然後討論了四個相關且常常交織在一起的聖經神學主題（聖戰、土地、盟約忠誠、上帝的子民），以證明應在古代近東文學的背景下從神學角度閱讀約書亞記。這本書傳達了明確的神學信息，即對盟約的忠誠，而不是種族，是以色列人作為神在應許之地的選民的保證——儘管征服本身等的歷史和文學細節在現代讀者中存有爭議，並且可能無法在考古證據或古代近東文獻中找到強有力的支持。

¹²¹ John J. O'Keefe and Russell R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 11.