

Ch. 6 – Joshua

Joshua and Rahab: "Holy War" – Violence, Prostitution, Land for All?

Modern study of Joshua has established a series of seven fundamental questions:

- Instead of a "Pentateuch" (the *five* books of Moses), should we speak rather of a "*Hexateuch*" of *six* books) where Joshua represents the *conclusion*, the "eschatological" horizon and the fulfillment of the promises of the Pentateuchal divine covenants (with the patriarchs and Moses)? At the end of the book Joshua says: "And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that *not one thing has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you....*" (23:14; see 21:45; see the works of Gerhard von Rad.).

- Or is it better to accept Martin Noth's conclusions and interpret Joshua as the *first* volume of four, in a *Deuteronomistic History* (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings)? This is the current conclusion of the great majority of those who place emphasis on *Deuteronomistic* theology, which reflects the perspective of → **Deuteronomy**, of *one* united people who worship only *one* God in *one* chosen place (the Temple in Jerusalem; → **Judges**). Obviously in one way Deuteronomy and Joshua constitute a type of bridge between the Pentateuch and **Deuteronomistic History** (see note below).

- In terms of *the possession of the Promised Land*, is it better to understand it as a rapid conquest under the military leadership of Joshua (Joshua 1–12; see William Albright, John Bright, G. Ernest Wright)? Or is it a question of a gradual, more peaceful, always incomplete penetration *from* the mountainous regions (Judges 1; Albrecht Alt; Martín Noth)? Or is it a gradual migration of indigenous Canaanites in relationship with immigrants from the tribes of Joseph, Benjamin and Judah, *towards* the mountainous regions? (Israel Finkelstein; William Dever). Is it a peasant revolution with the Israelite invasion serving as a catalytic agent (George Mendenhall; Norman Gottwald; Walter Brueggemann 2009)?

According to the book of Joshua, the Israelite invaders destroyed 16 Canaanite cities. But according to archaeology, only three (Bethel, Hazor y Lachish) show evidence of a possible Israelite destruction, and the destruction of Hazor occurred a century after that of Lachish. In the period of the supposed "conquest" of *Jericho* and *Ai* and of the treaty with *Gibeon* (1250-1200 B.C.), these sites had no inhabitants. The list of Levite cities in Joshua 21 includes places that did not exist prior to the eighth century B.C.

However, the population in the mountainous areas of Samaria and Judea grew rapidly:

| | |
|--|--------|
| Thirteenth century B.C. (prior to the Israelite presence) | 12,000 |
| Twelfth century B.C. (beginning of the Israelite presence) | 40,000 |
| Eleventh century B.C. (full Israelite presence) | 75,000 |

For many in the First World the reading of Joshua as a peasant revolution, with the Israelite infiltration serving as a catalytic agent, is too Marxist. However, Edesio Sanchez, a Latin American evangelical biblicist, supports the reading of Mendenhall, Gottwald and Bruggemann:

The 'conflict' between Israel and Canaan is not a confrontation of two ethnic groups, but that of some slaves liberated from Egypt together with a collection of those socially and economically marginalized against the landholders and powerful of the Canaanite city-states....[Sánchez continues, citing Walter Bruggemann:] The Canaanites constitute the 'urban elite' that controls the economy and enjoys a powerful political privilege to the detriment of the peasants who produce the food and who define themselves as 'Israelites'.¹

The textual and archeological arguments in favor of each of the four hypotheses that seek to explain the origin of Israel in Palestine are very technical, but we can conclude that the historic reality was more complex than any one of the hypotheses alone would suggest. However, even an initial study of Joshua makes clear that the Great Assembly and the renewal of the Israelite covenant at Shechem (24:1-28) occurs in a great Canaanite city never conquered in the previous accounts. Furthermore, in Hebrew the same verb (*yashab*) can indicate "inhabit" or "sit enthroned" and the translations commonly conceal the fact that the word "inhabitants" of the earth can refer solely to the oppressive "enthroned" ruling class.

- What is the *literary genre* of Joshua? Are we to understand it as a historical narrative reliable in every detail,² or rather does it form part of a great "myth of Israelite origins" which primarily reflects the perspective of the two editions of the Deuteronomistic History (seventh and sixth centuries B.C.) with its ferocious opposition to idolatry?³

- How should the modern reader evaluate the theology of the "Wars of Yahweh" (Joshua 1–12, wrongly described as "holy wars" in Christian tradition)? Does accepting the book as "canonical" and/or "divinely inspired" require that the recourse to armed force to resolve problems of injustice, oppression and violence today be considered appropriate?

- How should we interpret the "*theology of the land*" in Joshua 13–21? Does this imply a just distribution of land in an equalitarian sense (of a sufficient parcel of land for each clan and patriarchal household)? Is such a theology pertinent for Latin America today (agrarian reform)?⁴ However, how could the Joshua paradigm be managed efficiently in our modern *urban* societies with their high unemployment rates?

- When referring to the book of "Joshua" as a canonical text today, are we referring to the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT) or to the Greek version (the LXX), which is shorter and was the text accepted by the early churches? "The MT and Old Greek versions of the book of Joshua each represent later redactions or recensions of the earliest recoverable form of the book."⁵ The New Jerusalem Bible (text and notes) includes many important readings from the LXX that are ignored in other versions (NIV).

Note – Deuteronomistic History: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings. Traditionally the books of Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings were given the title of *Former Prophets*. However, beginning with the investigations of Martin Noth (1943) modern studies usually designate these writings as *Deuteronomistic History* (DH) because the interpretation they give to history is strongly influenced by the theology of *Deuteronomy* (HCSB, Joshua, Judges, Introductions; NJB, The Books of Joshua and Judges). Noth proposed an exilic date (587/86-538 BC) for the DH, which implies an "apologetic" purpose for the books: the destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile are explained as God's just judgment against God's people for their disobedience of the pact/alliance, especially for the sin of idolatry (Deut. 12:2-3; 2 Kings 17:10-12). More recently, however, it is more common to accept Frank Cross' hypothesis of a double writing of the books, with a first principal edition which had more of an "evangelistic" purpose under King Josiah (640-609 BC) and was directed toward Judah, seeking to persuade her to repent of her sins in order to not suffer the punishment that Samaria and the Northern Kingdom had suffered, being conquered by the Assyrians in 722/21.⁶

Both Martin Noth's original hypothesis and Frank Cross's later version conclude that for the DH, history itself has meaning: it does not consist of chaotic facts nor of events determined by the gods of the powerful empires of the period (Assyria, Babylonia), since Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the Lord of history and directs all that happens in accord with the promises and damnations of Yahweh's covenant (blessings for the obedient and punishment for the disobedient; see Deuteronomy 28). On recognizing that Joshua to Kings represents a history (DH), we can see that the book of → **Deuteronomy** serves as a bridge between the Pentateuch and the following DH. Furthermore, the book of → **Joshua** represents the fulfillment of the liberating project promised in the Pentateuch (see Gerhard von Rad's hypothesis that the Pentateuch and Joshua constitute a "Hexateuch" of six books), in addition to being the introduction to the DH. In the historiography of the Hebrew Bible, in addition to the Pentateuch/Hexateuch and the

DH, the third principal element is the history of → **1-2 Chronicles**, which (as Genesis in the Pentateuch) begins with Adam (1 Chr. 1:1) and continues until ca. 400 BC (including the books of → **Ezra** and → **Nehemiah**).

Outline – Joshua

I. Conquest of the Promised Land

1–12

- 1:1-18 Commission to Joshua
- 2:1-24 Rahab the prostitute collaborates with the two spies (Jericho; see Joshua 6)
- 3:1–4:24 Miraculous crossing of the Jordan River, arrival in Gilgal
- 5:1-12 Terror of the Canaanites; circumcision of the Hebrews; celebration of the Passover
- 5:13–6:27 Joshua's vision (5:13-15); *seizure of Jericho* (6:1-27; Rahab's house, 6:22-25)
- 7:1-26 Violation of the anathema (7:1-2), defeat at Ai (vv. 3-15), punishment of Achan and his household
- 8:1-29 *Conquest of Ai*
- 9:1-27 Treaty between Israel and the Gibeonites (deceit, vv. 1-18; statute, 19-27)
- 10:1-43 Conquest of the five kings (the south): "Sun, stand still at Gibeon" (10:12-13)
- 11:1-23 Conquest of the coalition of kings in the north (Hazor - N)
- 12:1-24 Summary: east of Jordan (vv. 1-6); west (31 kings, 7-24) (Bethel – N; Lachish – S)

II. Just Distribution of the Conquered Land (tribes, clans, *households*)

13–21

- 13:1-7 Unconquered land
- 8-33 Transjordanian tribes: Introduction (vv. 8-14)
 - Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh (15-33)
- 14:1-15 Introduction (vv. 1-5) and allotment to Caleb (6-15)
- 15:1-63 Tribe of Judah (1-12, 20/21-63) + Caleb occupies Hebron (13-20)
- 16:1-10 Tribe of Ephraim
- 17:1-18 Other half-tribe of Manasseh (1-13) + protest of Joseph's sons (14-18)
- 18:1–19:51 The other seven tribes: General description (18:1-10); conclusion (19:49-51)
 - Benjamin (18:11-28)
 - Simeon (19:1-9)
 - Zebulun (vv. 10-16)
 - Issachar (17-23)
 - Asher (24-31)
 - Naphtali (32-39)
 - Dan (40-48)
- 20:1–21:45 Privileged cities
 - Six cities of refuge (20:1-9)
 - Forty-eight Levitical cities (eighth century list?; 21:1-8)
 - Kohathite territory (21:9-26)
 - Gershonite territory (21:27-33)
 - Merarite territory (21:34-40)
 - Conclusion* of the distribution (21:41-45)

III. Joshua's Final Speeches and Death

22–24

- 22:1-34 First farewell: to the Transjordanian tribes (reproaches, accord)
- 23:1-16 Second farewell: to the other leaders ("all promises fulfilled")
- 24:1-28 The Great Assembly of Shechem: renewal of the covenant
- 24:29-33 Two funerals: Joshua and Eleazar; Joseph's bones

1. The Poor and Oppressed. It would be extremely erroneous to suppose that the absence of technical language in Joshua for the poor and the oppressed indicates a lack of concern for them. The entire book, with its stories of the defeat of the Canaanite kings (oppressors) and the distribution of their lands to the Israelites (slaves who escaped from oppression in Egypt), illustrates the historic divine project sung by Mary in the New Testament:

[God] has brought down the *powerful* from their thrones,
and lifted up the *lowly/poor*;
[God] has filled the *hungry* with good things,
and sent the *rich* away empty (→ Luke 1:52-53).

The abundant provision of land to a people without land is fundamental among the promises to the patriarchs, which the book, at the end, celebrates as having been fulfilled:

...and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that *not one thing has failed of all the good things that Yahweh your God promised concerning you* (Joshua 23:14; see 21:45).

All the lists of kings and conquered cities (Joshua 1–12) and all the details of territories assigned to the twelve tribes (Joshua 13–21) represent *territorial claims* made by *exiles* from the sixth century B.C., who hoped to return to their land and again inhabit their ancestral properties.⁷

However, we should not assume that Joshua is setting out a simplistic theology according to which all the Israelites were poor oppressed slaves (in the process of getting rich) and that all the Canaanites were rich oppressors in the process of becoming impoverished or being wiped out:

- Rahab is not a common street prostitute since she has her own house where she practices her profession. This house does not belong to her parents since they have to be brought to the house to escape destruction (2:18).⁸ According to → Hebrews 11:31, Rahab is an outstanding example of faith (one of two women named in the list; see Sarah, 11:11). But James insists that God chose the *poor* to be "rich in faith" (James 2:5) and names Rahab (with Abraham) as an example of an authentic faith that is manifested in praxis/works (2:25).

- The Gibeonites, through their shrewdness, avoid destruction, but the Israelites (oppressors?) obligate them to be slaves (*'ebed*, 9:23; Deut. 20:11), "woodcutters and water carriers" for the community (9:21), of the temple (v. 23), of the Israelite assembly and of the altar of Yahweh (v. 27). Notably, the Gibeonites were governed by elders, not by kings (9:11; cf. 10:2). The *covenant* between the Gibeonites and the Israelites (9:6-7, 11, 15-16), was sealed with a vow (9:15, 18-20). The fulfillment of this vow took precedence over the divine commandment of destruction (Deut. 20:10-18; see the oaths in Num. 30:2; Judges 11:36; 21:7). Since the covenants were always made with vows, it is difficult to understand how some can interpret marriage as a covenant; nowhere in the Bible are there indications of a vow in relation to marriages.

In interpreting Joshua another enormous error would be to assume that the book, which also lacks technical vocabulary for justice, shows no interest in that subject. Throughout, the book expounds on the three fundamental dimensions of Yahweh's justice, which is manifested in an historical design:

- liberating justice, Joshua 2–12 (the defeat of the oppressive kings);
- distributive justice, Joshua 13–21 (the land justly distributed to all in equal parts);
- justice as fidelity, Joshua 1 and 22–24 (faithful fulfillment of the law and of all the commitments of the covenant; also see the three references to faithfulness to a covenant (*chesed*) in the story of Rahab and the spies, 2:12, 14).

Just as the paradigm of the → **Exodus** is fundamental to the understanding of justice in the Bible, as a *liberating justice* for the oppressed (→ **Matthew**), so too is the just distribution of the land to the liberated slaves (landless), in Joshua 13–21, fundamental to understanding justice as equality (a *distributive justice*). In the Jubilee Year (→

Leviticus 25; Luke 4:18-19), the Law of Moses established a repetition every 50 years of the justice of the exodus (slaves liberated, debts cancelled, land returned to the original owner, land left fallow). If the distribution of the land in Joshua 13–21 had been unjust (consider El Salvador, where 14 families have traditionally possessed 90% of the land), the biblical basis for justice would have been destroyed. Because of the innumerable references to tribes, clans and patriarchal households, in addition to the geographic details, these chapters are infrequently read and are boring for many today. But such lack of interest on the part of the common reader should not suggest that these chapters lack importance.

Although the commentaries concerning Joshua 13–21 commonly get lost in the identification of the people and places that are mentioned and in the related archeological dates, they also recognize that the distribution of the land was just: sufficient land for all, although not necessarily equal in a strict mathematical sense (Joshua 17:14-18; 19:9; → Num. 26:52-56; Achsah's requests, Jos. 15:13-19; → Judges 1:11-15; Zelophehad's daughters, 17:3-6; → Num. 27:1-11, sought to correct minor injustices). Richard Nelson points out that the distribution had to be just, or equal, with large portions for the large tribes and small portions for the small tribes. A committee representative of the seven tribes made the distribution by lots in the great "national lottery" in Shechem.⁹ Each clan had the responsibility of maintaining the just division of the land.¹⁰

Other indications of justice in Joshua (without the use of common technical vocabulary) include:

- The establishment of 48 Levitical cities for the *poor unemployed clergy* as a result of the centralization of worship in Jerusalem (→ Deuteronomy), after Josiah's reform (Joshua 21:1-45.¹¹ David Pleins cites the reference to the temple in Joshua 22:29 as another indication of the final priestly editing (post-exilic).¹²
- The establishment of the six *cities of refuge* (Josh. 20:1-9), which demonstrates how Deuteronomy (4:42; 19:4) and the Deuteronomistic History (Josh. 20:3) began to take into account the motives of actions in the process of judging them fairly.¹³

2. Women

Visible:

2.1 Rahab (Joshua 2 and 6:16-25). Not reduced to her profession as a prostitute, but identified primarily as a "woman" (2:1, 4; 6:22, 23); see **3. Sexual Minorities**, below. See Rahab's *mother* and father, *sisters/brothers* (2:13, 18; 6:17, 22-23; cf. the sons and *daughters* of Achan (without a wife), destroyed with the father (7:24).

2.2 Achsah, Othniel's wife, Josh. 15:13-19; → Judges 1:11-15.

2.3 Zelophehad's daughter, Josh. 17:3-6; → Numbers 27:1-11.

Invisible:

2.4 Israelite women in the assembly, 8:35.

2.5 Foreign women, 23:12-13, prohibited; → Judges.

2.6 Victims of corporal punishment and of the death penalty. See the sons and daughters of Achan, destroyed with their father (7:24-25; cf. → Ezekiel 18). Also the women and children of Jericho and Ai, victims of the war (6:21; 8:25).

2.7 Victims of the "Wars of Yahweh". Especially since Gerhard von Rad's study (1951),¹⁴ it has been common to speak of "holy war" in the Hebrew Bible, since the texts describe wars with religious language (Ex. 15:3) and war in Israel was a ritualistic act, a rite of the religious community. However, Gwilym Jones demonstrated that such a phrase does not occur in the texts, which rather refer to "Yahweh's wars", since the conduct of war is not holy and has no value in itself. At any rate, the laws of war in Deuteronomy 20:16-18

command the practice of *kerem*, the extermination of all the inhabitants (women, children and even animals) of the conquered Canaanite cities (Jos. 6:17-18, 21; 7:1-13, 15). The book of Joshua, in the texts that reflect the Deuteronomistic editing of the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., seeks to apply such laws literally. However, the stories of the Canaanite Rahab (Joshua 2 and 6:16-25) and of the Israelite Achan (Joshua 7) subvert the ideology of the war laws: they point out that a Canaanite woman *faithful* to Yahweh, along with her relatives, is blessed with long life, while an *unfaithful* and disobedient Israelite suffers the penalty of death, along with everyone in his household. The book of Joshua carefully presents Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute, and Achan, the covetous Israelite, in a dialectical connection that serves to subvert the ideology of war:¹⁵

| | |
|---|---|
| * Rahab , poor Canaanite, 2:1, 6 | ↔ Achan , prosperous Israelite (tribe of Judah), 7:17,24 |
| * hid the spies, 2:6 | ↔ took and hid the booty, 7:21-22 |
| * made a pact with Israel, 2:12 | ↔ broke the pact with Yahweh, 7:11 |
| * showed loyalty (<i>khesed</i>), 2:12,14 | ↔ betrayed Israel and Yahweh, 7:1, 25 |
| * caused victory against enemies | ↔ caused defeat in war, 7:10-12 |
| * saved her relatives from death, 6:25 | ↔ caused the death of everyone in his house, 7:25 |

This strong dialectical contrast between Rahab, the Canaanite who is faithful to Yahweh and Israel, and Achan, the unfaithful Israelite, demonstrates that the value and essential criterion of divine judgment is not blood or ancestry but authentic faith in Yahweh (See Appendix below). The result is a faithful practice of solidarity with the weak and oppressed; → Ezra 9:2; Matthew 8:11-12.

3. Sexual Minorities

3.1 Rahab the prostitute (*zona*) and the two spies (Joshua 2; 6:16-25). “From Israel’s perspective Madame Rahab is the epitome of the outsider. She is a woman, a prostitute, and a foreigner.”¹⁶

- According to → Matthew, Rahab was one of four women in the genealogy of Jesus (Mat. 1:5; also see Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba), two of them Gentiles and all representatives of sexual minorities (→ Mat. 1:5).¹⁷ According to Joshua, Rahab enjoyed a long life (Joshua 6:25, "ever since"). Matthew was not aware of the date of the Deuteronomistic editing of the book (sixth and seventh centuries B.C.), but he also attributes to Rahab a miraculous longevity, since he says she married Salmon, who lived two centuries later. She was the mother of Boaz, King David's great grandfather (tenth century).

- James (2:25) places Rahab on an equal footing with Abraham as an example of faith expressed in works.
- The author of → Hebrews (11:30-31) also names Rahab as an example of faith, but, notably, Hebrews speaks of the miraculous fall of the walls of Jericho without mentioning Joshua:

By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace (Heb. 11:30-31).

Rather than name Joshua, Hebrews prefers to emphasize the people's faith (the implicit subject, 11:30-31). The "peace" that the two spies experienced, according to Hebrews, would include a certain sexual relief (*shalom*, "well-being in every way"; → Song of Songs 8:10; → 1 Cor. 7:15). Notably, then, Rahab appears in three key texts in the New Testament, but Joshua (the apparent hero of the book) only appears in one negative text (Heb. 4:8).

Traditionally of course the church assumed that the two spies received hospitality from the prostitute without taking advantage of her sexual services and that Rahab, upon her conversion, immediately abandoned her scandalous profession. Also, according to certain Jewish traditions (Josephus and Targums), Rahab was not a prostitute but only an innkeeper. Unfortunately for such purified versions, the Bible gives them no support. The

two spies entered the house of the prostitute and immediately "went to bed there" – without ascertaining anything relative to their mission (2:1). Furthermore, the visit to the prostitute was all that the spies did to obtain information. "Probably the narrator intends to titillate by reminding readers of an immemorial symbiosis between military service and bawdy house."¹⁸ The assuredness of the spies in entering Rahab's house is impressive: they know who she is, where she lives and what her profession is.¹⁹ Martin Woudstra (gay), president of the Evangelical Theological Society in 1979, cites the commentary by A. Gelin (1955) as the first affirmation of a sexual act between Rahab and the spies.²⁰ The original text contains six elements suggestive of sexual services which have been erased by tradition:²¹

- Joshua *secretly* [Hebrew, *kheresh*] sent... (omitted in the LXX);
- two *young* spies... [*neaniskoi*, LXX], 2:1a, 23; (also see the MT, Joshua 6:23);
- *they lay down there*²²[in the prostitute Rahab's house], 2:1b, *shakab*, see Gen. 19:33, 35; Phyllis Bird points out that the LXX tries to eliminate the sexual nuance of the Hebrew with the translation *kataluein* ("they lodged"),²³ a bias still reflected in many versions: "spent the night" (NRSV, JSB); "stayed" (NIV);
- *tonight* [2:3, LXX: placed in 2:2 in the TM "to minimize the sexual implications";²⁴
- *those who entered in you* [Siriach; that is, "in your house", Hebrew]; Phyllis Bird points out the repetition of the verb "enter", with its sexual nuance, 2:1, 3; see heading of Psalm 51, NRSV;
- the *crimson/scarlet cord* has sexual connotations, perhaps as a sign of a house of prostitution.²⁵ (See the lips of a woman, Song of Solomon 4:3; Tamar, prostituting herself, in Gen. 38:18, 25, 28; cf. the blood on the lintels in Exodus 12.)

Woudstra also recognizes the first five elements, but in titling the second chapter "Spies sent to Jericho" – without mentioning Rahab – he reflects a certain prejudice against her which the New Testament authors did not share.²⁶

Trent Butler, another evangelical commentator, titles the chapter "A Prostitute's Profession" and recognizes elements that suggest sexual activity.²⁷ Butler, then, interprets the text as irony: the house of Madam Rahab in Jericho enjoyed international fame and the two young spies hurried to go directly to her, without asking directions, obviously looking for sexual service from Rahab, in addition to information concerning the enemy. The priorities of the spies are evident, since before ascertaining anything they go to bed ("lay down" literally, 2:1). However, their fantasies are frustrated; immediately the king's messengers interrupt them – like gay bar owners today Madam Rahab was accustomed to being watched and invaded by the royal police. Like the midwives of Exodus 1, Rahab lies to the royal messengers and God blesses her lie. The spies go to bed two more times (2:4, 6). When Rahab approaches them, she preaches to them about her faith and proposes "other business" – concerning the survival of her relatives – instead of providing the expected sexual service. Rahab finally lets the two spies go, hanging by a rope from her window, sending them off totally disappointed. Butler recognizes that Rahab's confession of faith (Joshua 2:9-11) is an insertion by a Deuteronomistic editor, but in this case much of the irony that he perceives is owed to the later editor, while the original story appears to suggest sexual activity. Butler's interpretation may well reflect the intention of the Deuteronomistic editor, but the original story does not appear to be so pious. With her confession of faith, added in the first Deuteronomistic edition of the book, Rahab, the Canaanite, in effect evangelizes the two Israelite spies, and through them all of Israel, including King Josiah's generation (seventh century B.C.). With the final Deuteronomistic writing, after the destruction of Jerusalem (587/86 B.C.), Rahab's testimony becomes "apologetics" and explains the cause of the disaster (idolatry).

The arrangement with the spies that allows Rahab and her relatives to live obviously contradicts the rules of Yahweh's wars (Deuteronomy 20; cf. the punishment of Achan and his family for disobeying these rules, Joshua 7). This event is one of several signs that such laws represented an ideal for the succeeding generations and indicate Yahweh's firm opposition to idolatry (→ Ezra-Nehemiah), while the possession of the land in reality was a gradual process that followed other less rigorous and cruel rules of conduct.

3.2 Joshua, an unmarried "savior-liberator". The New Testament notably only mentions Joshua in a negative reference (Greek: *Iesous*, Heb. 4:8; in other texts the word is translated "Jesus", as in Matt. 1:21). No text

in the Bible indicates that he was married. Joshua's genealogy in → 1 Chronicles 7:25-27 indicates ten generations of ancestors, but it ends with Joshua, with no descendants.²⁸ To fill this disturbing void Jewish tradition says that Joshua married Rahab,²⁹ thus rescuing two reputations at one shot – and giving us another example of the way that the ideology of the majority (“family values”) imposes its propaganda and erases the evidence of the presence of sexual minorities (cf. → Matt. 1:5, which creates an impressive miracle by having Rahab married to Salmon, who lived two centuries later). The Jewish and Christian traditions recognize in Joshua “a military genius and a spiritual giant”,³⁰ but as a single man, not married to Rahab, we should understand his life as similar to that of shamans in other cultures: spiritual persons but almost always sexual minorities. Biblical traditions emphasize Joshua's military exploits (Ex. 17:9-13; Joshua 2–12) as well as his spirituality (Ex. 24:1; 33:11; Num. 11:26-29; cf. Joshua 5:15 with Ex. 3:5) and wisdom in administration (Joshua 1:6-9; 8:2; 13–21). They demonstrate how a shaman or male sexual minority does not have to be weak or effeminate.

Nonetheless, some modern versions suggest that Joshua was married and had children. Incidentally, the book's patriarchal-hierarchical character is evident in the eloquent exhortation at the end, where Joshua speaks for his whole "household":

"But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (24:15).

Certain modern versions substitute the original Hebrew word "household" (see "household" or "house" in the NRSV, NIV, KJV and others; → see Acts 16) for the modern concept of "family" (The Message, New Living Translation, Good News Translation, etc.). However, examples of houses of unmarried people abound in the Bible (Lydia, Mary and Martha, → Romans 16). Rahab as well, without being married, was responsible for relatives and perhaps children, all saved from destruction by the agreement she made with the spies.

In fact, in modern studies³¹ it is common to conclude that Joshua originally was only a military leader of the tribe of Ephraim (Joshua 10:10-14; see 19:49-50; 24:30), whose name was added in other accounts of the Pentateuch and of Joshua under the monarchy (the principal Deuteronomistic writing under Josiah, 640-609 B.C.) to strengthen national unity and a sense of common origins. Joshua is presented as a precursor to the ideal kings, especially Josiah, for his courage and obedience (Joshua 1:6-9); his integrity (1:7; 23:6); his support for celebrating the Passover correctly (5:10-12); and his commitment to the Law (8:30-35).³²

According to 5:1-9, Joshua circumcised all the men of the nation – some 600,000. (See Ex. 12:37, Num. 11:21; cf. Ex. 38:26, Num. 3:39; → Exodus.)³³ It was not without reason that the hill where Joshua worked was called the "Hill of the Foreskins". If Joshua worked 10 hours, that would be 60,000 men per hour or one thousand per minute. It is doubtful he could have performed such a delicate surgical procedure so quickly. But the task was so enormous that he had to have worn out several flint knives. The surgeon's preference for an instrument of the Stone Age instead of knives of iron suggests that his medical school did not figure among the best of the period, but every progressive religious leader also has her or his "conservative" side.

The story of Joshua's death in the Septuagint (LXX) states: "There [in Thamnasarach] they put with him into the tomb in which they buried him, the knives of stone with which he circumcised the children of Israel in Galgala, when he brought them out of Egypt, as the Lord appointed them; and there they are to this day."³⁴ Richard Nelson suggests that the Septuagint of 24:30 represents "just the sort of folkloristic, midrashic detail typical of textual expansions,"³⁵ but the Septuagint confirms that the first readers interpreted the account literally and as a personal achievement by Joshua. (For the same reason Nelson also rejects the Septuagint addition in 21:42.) So much zeal and enthusiasm for the rite of circumcision has no parallel in the Bible and in history; see Paul concerning Timothy's circumcision (→ Acts 16:1-3) and the zeal of Zipporah, but cf. Moses' indifference (→ Ex. 4:24-26).

3.3 Science: astronomy, sex and gender – paradigmatic changes. The book of Joshua narrates three of the most memorable miracles of the Bible:

- The Jordan River dried up and allowed Joshua and the Israelite people to cross the river on dry land to enter the Promised Land (Joshua 3–4 // Moses crosses the Red Sea / Sea of Reeds; → Exodus 14-15);
- The walls of Jericho fell, and the Israelites won the decisive battle in the conquest of the land (Joshua 6);
- Without doubt, the greatest is the story of divine help in the battle against the five kings of the south (Joshua 10:12-14):

12 ...Joshua spoke to the Lord...in the sight of Israel,

"Sun, stand still at Gibeon,
and Moon, in the valley of Aijalon."

13 And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped,

until the nation took vengeance (*naqam*) on their enemies (*'oyeb*)....

The sun stopped in midheaven, and did not hurry to set for about a whole day. 14 There has been no day like it before or since, when the Lord heeded a human voice; for the Lord fought for Israel (Joshua 10:12b-14).

Modern commentators have offered four interpretations of this text:

- A "natural" phenomenon occurred (a solar eclipse; a meteor shower), incorrectly interpreted later as a miracle;³⁶
- An astrological oracle was incorrectly interpreted;
- A mythical affirmation was literally interpreted incorrectly;
- The mythical-poetic concept that the sun and the moon were frozen in space turned into the orthodox affirmation that Yahweh heard Joshua's human voice and stopped the sun in its zenith.

According to Richard Nelson, the fourth interpretation is preferable to postulating such an incorrect interpretation of the text; better to see it as an act of "demythologizing" a problematic poetic text. The act of invoking the sun and the moon was an idolatrous act, according to Deuteronomistic theology (Josh. 23:7, 16; Deut. 17:3; 2 Kings 23:5).³⁷

This is an important text to refute fundamentalism, since after Galileo's struggle with the theologians (who interpreted the text very well), not even the most fundamentalist institutions have wanted to use the Bible as a text to teach astronomy. This fundamental paradigmatic change in biblical interpretation is being repeated today in the spheres of sex and gender. As in pre-Copernican astronomy, the Bible describes the world as it is seen by the naked eye, without the assistance of scientific instruments (telescopes, microscopes). But with microscopes and other scientific instruments we can perceive that there are more than two sexes and also a great diversity of "natural" behaviors.

3.4 Prostitution in the Hebrew Bible. Jewish and Christian traditions have manifested a strong feeling of shame in reference to the presentation of Rahab (Josh. 2:1-24; 6:16-25) as the key heroine in the possession of the Promised Land and for the description of the two spies as being in the search of Rahab's sexual service as well as information. In the Hebrew Bible no text prohibited Israelite men from having relations with prostitutes and no text prohibited a woman from deciding to work as a prostitute (the prohibition is directed toward the fathers). The texts indicate no negative judgment against Tamar, Rahab or Samson, but several texts reflect the contempt that prostitutes suffered.

- Gen. 34:1-31, Dinah's rape and the commentary of her brothers.
- Gen. 38:1-30, Tamar, Judah's daughter-in-law, pretends to be a prostitute, later is vindicated.
- Lev. 19:29, prohibits parents from selling their daughter as a prostitute.
- Lev. 21:7, 14, priests are prohibited from marrying a prostitute (although laymen did).
- Lev. 21:9, death penalty (by burning) for prostitutes who are daughters of priests.
- Judg. 11:1, the tyrant Jephthah, son of Gilead and of a prostitute (anonymous).
- Judg. 16:1-3, Samson visits a prostitute, escapes, carrying the city gate with him.

- 1 Kings 3:16, legal battle between two prostitutes concerning a baby, resolved by Solomon. They had access to the king, without discrimination, to achieve a just decision.
- Jer. 3:3, metaphor for unfaithfulness to the pact with Yahweh.
- Ezeq. 16, Jerusalem and Samaria are pictured as whores, unfaithful to Yahweh.
- Deut. 23:17-18; Gen. 38:21-22; Hos. 4:14; *qadesh* (temple prostitute); cf. *qadesh* (male temple prostitute), 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 2 Kings 23:7; Job 36:14.

Appendix. Wars of Yahweh (four views)

Peace: → Micah 4:1-4; Isaiah 11:1-9; Matthew 5 and Luke 6

A. Traditional defense: a just war, a necessary evil in order to avoid a worse evil³⁸ (→ Deuteronomy 20; Numbers 31).

- Yahweh commanded: "But as for the towns of these peoples that Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance, you must not let anything that breathes remain alive. You shall annihilate them...just as Yahweh your God has commanded, so that they may not teach you to do all the abhorrent things that they do for their gods, and you thus sin against Yahweh your God" (Deut. 20:16-18).
- In the book of Joshua, then, at the end of each battle won, Joshua only obeys what Yahweh has commanded: 6:21; 8:24-25; 10:10,28,30,35,37,39-40; 11:11,14,21; also see 9:18; 13:6-7; 14:12; 17:18.
- The total destruction of each living being (*kerem*), commanded by Yahweh, is the just divine punishment for the iniquity of the pagan peoples of the land – wickedness pointed out in the Bible and confirmed by archeology (Gen. 15:16).

B. Liberationist defense: war as a judgment against wealthy oppressors, not against the people. The conflict between Israel and Canaan was not a confrontation of two ethnic groups, but that of slaves liberated from Egypt who allied themselves with certain socially and economically marginalized groups against the powerful landholders of the Canaanite city-states. The Canaanites constituted the 'urban elite' who controlled the economy and enjoyed political privilege to the detriment of the peasants who produce the food and who defined themselves as 'Israelites.' Those who defend this "liberationist" interpretation point out that the Hebrew word *yashab*, commonly translated "inhabitants," literally means "seated" and can refer to the "enthroned" ones, that is, to the oppressive Canaanite kings. Moreover, the book of Joshua ends with a story about the renovation of the covenant at Shechem (Joshua 24), which should have included the native peasants making alliance with the Israelites. The book of Joshua does not include any story about the conquest and destruction of Shechem.

C. Literary defense: The perspective is that of the deuteronomistic history, sixth century B.C., which condemns idolatry and mixed marriages. As Walter Bruegemann points out, "the community waiting at the brink of the land of promise in Joshua 1...is not an ancient community of Moses [preparing for wars of conquest in the thirteenth century B.C.]; it is sixth-century Israel, waiting in anticipation for an entry (reentry) into a land from which they had been displaced by the geopolitics of a Babylonian world."³⁹ The stories of cruel wars and the practice of *kerem* in Joshua 1–12 do not represent any reality or possibility for the exiles ruled by the Persian empire (see Cyrus' decree, 539 B.C.; → Second Isaiah) – they are "edifying" stories that seek to encourage the weak post-exilic Jewish communities in their struggle against idolatry and mixed marriages (→ Ezra, Nehemiah).

D. Denunciation and rejection: *Wirkungsgeschichte* (historical impact of the text) – provokes holocausts. Although scholars have developed impressive defenses of the Joshua text, many insist that we have to judge the literature not only according to the *intentions* of the author, but also considering the *effects* of the text in human history (German: *Wirkungsgeschichte*). A mother who, with the best of intentions, thinks she is giving her daughter medicine when in reality she is administering a deadly poison cannot absolve herself of all responsibility for the resulting death. Thus, for many, it is all right to build theological defenses for the mandates in Joshua to

kill all breathing things (women, children, animals). But if one effect of the book has been to justify endless violence and wars, the book and its author or authors deserve a strong denunciation and rejection.

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End Notes

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- ¹ Edesio Sanchez 1999:487.
² Richard Hess 1996.
³ See David Pleins 2001:147, 100-102.
⁴ Ray May 1997.
⁵ Richard Nelson 283.
⁶ Frank Cross 1973; Steven McKenzie 1992: 161-168; 2007:106-108.
⁷ David Pleins 2001:100; Richard Nelson 1997:15-18.
⁸ Phyllis Bird 1997:211
⁹ Richard Nelson, 1997:206-208.
¹⁰ Ibid., 172-73.
¹¹ Richard Nelson 1997:231-243.
¹² David Pleins 2001:102.
¹³ Richard Nelson 1997:227.
¹⁴ Gerhard von Rad, 1951.
¹⁵ Hamlin 1983:19-20.
¹⁶ Danna Nolan Fewell 1998:72.
¹⁷ See → Matthew: W. E. Davies and Dale Allison 1998:172-173; Robert Gundry 1994:14; Craig Keener 1999:79; Amy Jill Levine 2000:141-142; *pace* Bruce Waltke ISBE.
¹⁸ Boling and Wright 1982:145; see 141.
¹⁹ Alberto Soggin 1972:39.
²⁰ Martín Woudstra 1981:70, nota 8.
²¹ Richard Nelson 1997:36-44.
²² Young's Literal Translation.
²³ Phyllis Bird 1997:210, note 31.
²⁴ Richard Nelson 1997:38, note d.
²⁵ Phyllis Bird 1997:213.
²⁶ Woudstra, p. 70.
²⁷ Trent Butler, 1983:24.
²⁸ Sarah Japhet 1993:183-184
²⁹ Talmud b. Mejilla 14b-15a
³⁰ Waltke 1982:1134
³¹ Albrecht Alt; Martín Noth
³² Richard Nelson 1997:21-22
³³ William Propp 1999:414
³⁴ Joshua 21:42 in the Septuagint version also refers to these flint knives, obviously a matter of special interest in that tradition.
³⁵ Richard Nelson 1997:282
³⁶ John Sawyer 1972
³⁷ Richard Nelson 1997:142-145
³⁸ Bruce Waltke 1982:1134-1139 (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, II, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans).
³⁹ Walter Bruegemann 1997:210.