

JOSHUA

Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANE	ancient Near Eastern
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> , ed. Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983.
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
cf.	compare
CSB	Christian Standard Bible
CTJ	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
DCH	<i>The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> , ed. D. J. A. Clines. 8 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993–2011.
e.g.	for example
ESV	English Standard Version
ET	English translation
GKC	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> , ed. E. Kautzch, tr. A. E. Cowley
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
i.e.	that is
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBQ	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
JESOT	<i>Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
lit.	literally

LXX	Septuagint (Greek) text of the Old Testament
mss	manuscripts
MT	Masoretic (Hebrew) text of the Old Testament
NIDOTTE	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> , 5 vols., ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997).
NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
OG	Old Greek
OTE	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
ResQ	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
Syr	Syriac
Tg	Targum
TynBul	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
v(v).	verse(s)
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

INTRODUCTION

The book of Joshua stands at an important point of transition both in the life of Israel and within the canon that reflects on that life. Appreciation of this shared transition is crucial if we are to read this text and continue to hear it as Scripture today. These points of transition have also played an important role in how the book has been understood through the years, not only in recent critical interpretation but also in the history of Christian interpretation.

The transitional function of the book is flagged by its opening verses, declaring that Moses was dead and Joshua was therefore to lead Israel into the land God was giving them. Moses had been the pivotal human figure in the Pentateuch, the one who led Israel out from Egypt and through whom the great body of God's teaching at Sinai had been delivered. But Moses had died outside the land (Deut 34). Of the great promises to Abraham of blessing, a divine-human relationship, posterity, and land (which can be traced back to Gen 12:1-3), the promise of land remains unfulfilled by the end of Deuteronomy.¹ So do we read Joshua as the completion of the promises from the Pentateuch? If so, does it matter that we no longer have Moses as the key figure? Or do we read Joshua as initiating something new in Israel's life? If so, are we to read it primarily in terms of what follows?

The answers to these questions have largely shaped the interpretation of this book. Although there are no simple answers to the questions themselves, the view developed here is that Joshua is a bridge text. Janus-like,

¹ See David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978), 29; and T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Main Themes of the Pentateuch* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995), 33-47.

it looks back to the Pentateuch and the themes developed there while regarding itself as a discrete work, and it also anticipates Israel's life in the land, planting seeds for a larger story while still being complete in itself. Overemphasizing either of these perspectives leads to a distortion in how this text is read. If we primarily look at its role in bringing the Pentateuch's themes to completion, we underplay its preparation for what follows. Conversely, if we primarily look at how it prepares for events that follow, then we underplay its important links to what has gone before. We need instead to read Joshua as a distinctive work that relates both to what has gone before and what comes after, but without subsuming it into either.

I. Date, Authorship, and Purpose

Although Jewish tradition assigned authorship of the book to Joshua himself,² there is clear evidence within the book that, even though Joshua is reported as having either written certain documents (Josh 24:26) or at least initiated their writing (18:1–10), the book itself must have been completed at a later date. Most obviously, the book records Joshua's death and also comments on the period after it (24:29–31). This cannot have come from Joshua himself since it clearly looks back on his time.

Moreover, there are sixteen times when the phrase “until this day” occurs in the book. Apart from instances where it is spoken by someone within the narrative (e.g., Caleb in 14:11), all occurrences of this statement exceed the horizon of Joshua's own life.³ The actual date presupposed by these various statements is often quite vague, and for the most part is simply a time after Israel's entry into the land. However, the statement in 15:63 (= Judg 1:21) about the continued control of Jerusalem by the Jebusites ceased to be true following David's capture of the city (2 Sam 5:6–10).⁴ If all the “until this day” statements came from one hand (a point not universally agreed upon), then at least an early edition of the book needs to have been completed by then. How much earlier than the time of David this could have been is not clear, but it is important to note that

² See *Baba Bathra* 15a; this position is still favored by Adolph L. Harstad, *Joshua* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2004), 8–9.

³ See the table in Brian Neil Peterson, *The Authors of the Deuteronomistic History: Locating a Tradition in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 81–82.

⁴ The phrase occurs a further six times in Deuteronomy and thirty times in Judges–2 Kings.

written materials in the book reach back into the second millennium. If these materials came from diverse hands, then the most we could say is that the source material behind Joshua 15 is relatively early. However, the statement in 13:13 could also be read as describing conditions prior to David's ascension to the throne of Judah (cf. 1 Sam 27:8), and so would indicate that several of the "until this day" statements must be fairly early. Moreover, since Joshua 13 and 15 seem to reflect different source materials, then it seems most likely that the same editorial hand has brought these comments together. Moving on to Josh 16:10, the reference there about Gezer ceased to be true by the time of Solomon (1 Kgs 9:15–16), though of course this would also have been true in the time of David. We cannot say anything more specific about the other uses of this phrase in Joshua, but since those we can locate indicate an early date for at least key source materials on which the author has drawn, the probability must exist that the other occurrences of this statement are also quite early.⁵ If so, and recognizing that the "until this day" formula is scattered across the whole book and not just the sections associated with the land allocation that can be dated, then we have good reason to think that at least an early edition of the book existed by the time of David.

How much earlier than David this material existed is more difficult to determine, but there are clues that we should look to the early part of David's reign for the initial composition of the book. There are several features indicating the author was particularly familiar with the south of Israel but considerably less familiar with the north. The allotments for the tribes in the far north (Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, and Naphtali; 19:10–39) are all described quite vaguely, whereas those of Judah (15:1–63) and Benjamin (18:11–28) are outlined in great detail. The allotment for Dan (19:40–48) is also fairly vague, but this is because the book already knows of Dan's failure to take their allotment and that they had therefore moved to the far north. This movement must have been relatively early, yet still at some point after Samson (Judg 13–16) since his work as a judge is set in the area Dan was initially allotted. This information means we cannot place the book's composition too close to the entry into the land, especially since the statement in Josh 24:31 can also be taken as suggesting that the author knows about many of the events described in Judges.

⁵ Indeed, Peterson, *Authors*, 91–96, argues that all of these references make the most sense by the time of David.

This combination—of awareness of the geography of the south but not the north and the need to allow for at least a significant portion of the events described in Judges to have passed—would bring us to the early period of the monarchy as the most likely point for initial composition. Such a conclusion fits with what I have noted about the phrase “until this day,” while locating the author in either the central highlands or south of the country.⁶

Composition during the time of David may also be indicated by the interest the book shows in otherwise obscure locations that were important for his period in the wilderness (e.g., Hormah in Josh 15:29, cf. 1 Sam 30:30; Ziph in Josh 15:24, cf. 1 Sam 23:13). We might also note that the survival of the Archites (Josh 16:2), seemingly a Canaanite group, becomes important when Hushai the Archite emerges as an important figure in David’s court (2 Sam 15:32–37; 16:15–17:16). Finally, the covenant with the Gibeonites (Josh 9) provides the crucial background to events in 2 Sam 21:1–14. Although Gibeon’s importance emerges at other key points (e.g., Josh 10:1–5; 2 Sam 2:12–17; 1 Kgs 9:1–2), the covenant between Israel and Gibeon is of particular importance for David’s reign. It is possible to speculate more precisely than this,⁷ but the gains in doing so are slight and the evidence less secure. However, a reasonably secure conclusion is that at least an early edition of the book of Joshua came into being among those associated with David’s court. Therefore, it provides important background to David’s reign even as it also explores Israel’s origins in the land.

Although these clues point to David’s court as the most likely point of origin for the book, we should not assume that the book is simply an apology for David. It is clear from an overview of its contents that Joshua is concerned with much more than David’s court. However, consistent with its bridging function noted above, it aims to show how the themes left incomplete from the Pentateuch are brought to their conclusion while also anticipating events that would be important for the time of

⁶ H. J. Koorevaar, *De Opbouw van het Boek Jozua* (Heverlee: Centrum voor Bijbelse Vorming-Belgie, 1990), 255–61, argues that because the book displays no knowledge of the destruction of Shiloh, it cannot have been composed before this happened. Although the evidence considered here cannot conclusively rule this out, the extent of the interest in the David tradition suggests we need to date the book almost a century after this, especially as an argument from silence is always risky.

⁷ E.g., the reference to Geshur and Maacah in Josh 13:13 can be linked to 2 Sam 3:3 and 13:37–38.

David. Further, as Peterson has argued, the circles in David's court that brought this material together probably established a pattern for continued reflection on it, something that can explain both the interrelated nature of the whole of Joshua–Kings and also the distinctive nature of each book within that collection.⁸

The clues noted above show that the book prepares us for events from David's reign. These, along with the migration of the tribe of Dan to the far north, are key elements in which the book looks forward.

The book's role in bringing the story of the Pentateuch to a close is perhaps better known, but it is worth noting that the book's current shape emphasizes the fulfillment of the land promise as God, through Joshua, grants Israel the land. Hence, Joshua 1 deliberately reflects on the land promise in light of Moses' death in Deuteronomy 34 while also looking back to events in Numbers 21. This chapter also shows awareness of other passages in Deuteronomy, but the key point to note at this point is that it intentionally joins Joshua to the Pentateuch. Likewise, the recital of Israel's earlier history in Joshua 24 deliberately reaches back to the patriarchs (Gen 12–50) to stress God's faithfulness in fulfilling the land promise. The one key promise that remained unfulfilled in the Pentateuch has thus come to its fulfillment, and Israel as a whole could commit themselves to this faithful God as a result. The covenant ceremony in Josh 8:30–35 thus brings the promise of the Pentateuch to a satisfactory conclusion while also reminding later generations of the fact that they too need to make this same decision to serve Yahweh alone, a reminder that is of particular importance after the sobering events from the period of the judges. Joshua fulfills its key purposes precisely because it is a bridging text.

This high level of integration thus suggests that, even if we cannot specifically name the author or authors of the book, it is clear that the final text is not simply a collation of sources, but rather an intentionally structured and presented whole, and it needs to be read as such.

II. Joshua and the Canon

Joshua's function as a bridging text has also led to two key ways in which scholars have read it relative to the works around it, one way primarily

⁸ For a summary, see Peterson, *Authors*, 297–302.

looking back (as part of a Hexateuch) and the other primarily looking forward (as part of a Deuteronomistic History). Not surprisingly, there is value in both of these approaches, though neither fully addresses the function of the book. We need, however, to note each briefly before commenting on Joshua's connections to the wider canon in order to understand how it contributes to wider discussions in biblical theology.

A. JOSHUA AS THE CONCLUSION TO THE HEXATEUCH

Following the establishment of the Documentary Hypothesis as the dominant model for reading the Pentateuch in the late nineteenth century, one prevailing way of reading Joshua was to assume that the principal sources behind this model (JEDP) continued into Joshua. This is because it was thought unlikely that the main story line of the Pentateuch would end at the close of Deuteronomy, since by that point Israel had taken control of territory east of the Jordan, but not the land actually promised to its west.⁹ Given that chapters 13–21 refer primarily to events recounted in Numbers (almost all P on this analysis), then these chapters could also be assigned to P. Chapters 1–12 were usually assigned to JE (since disentangling these sources here was too difficult), but with such significant editing by D that the value of this source analysis was rendered doubtful. Chapter 22 was also usually assigned to P (though verses 1–8 are more probably D on this analysis), while chapter 23 was D. Chapter 24, which is difficult to align with any of these sources, might represent material from another source.

The seeming triumph of Martin Noth's proposal of a Deuteronomistic History (see section B below) was largely seen to have overturned this model for reading Joshua. Given that the majority of contemporary pentateuchal critics no longer work with this model (most European scholars now seem content to divide the Pentateuch into P and non-P),¹⁰ it might seem this approach is now passé. Moreover, the "Hexateuch" (i.e., Genesis–Joshua) has only ever been a scholarly construct, not something recognized in any system for organizing the canon of the Old Testament. There is, nevertheless, still good reason to note this approach even if

⁹ Adrian H. W. Curtis, *Joshua* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 15.

¹⁰ This is not the place for an overview of current approaches to the Pentateuch. For a helpful overview, see Gordon J. Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament Volume 1: The Pentateuch* (London: SPCK, 2003), 159–86.

only because it stressed the connections between Joshua and the rest of the Pentateuch.

Although he was broadly working with the source-critical model noted above, Gerhard von Rad took up the importance of reading Joshua in light of the Pentateuch with characteristic elegance.¹¹ A particularly noteworthy aspect of his study was that he gave attention to the final form of the Hexateuch, noting that the history recounted in this grand work was essentially a statement of Israel's faith, even if his larger concern was with how the Hexateuch developed. What particularly interested von Rad was the fact that the Hexateuch provided a "summary of the principal facts of God's redemptive activity."¹² What he appreciated, therefore, was the importance of seeing Joshua as the point where the promises of God to Abraham reached their conclusion.

Although seeing Joshua as part of a Hexateuch fell out of favor following the rise of Noth's theory of the Deuteronomistic History, it has been revived as a model for reading Joshua in recent years by Pekka Pitkänen.¹³ Pitkänen dates the material in Joshua quite early. His main concern has been with the composition of this material, for which he has developed a complex model, rather than developing its theological elements.¹⁴ Nevertheless, his approach demonstrates the continued importance of seeing Joshua in dialogue with the whole Pentateuch.

Reading Joshua in light of the Pentateuch is theologically helpful, but the category of a Hexateuch remains problematic in that it treats all six books as a single work. However, Joshua distinguishes itself from the Pentateuch even as it looks back to it. Joshua himself is told to meditate upon the Torah (1:8), accordingly regarding at least some pentateuchal material (in that the reference there might only be to Deuteronomy) as a separate and authoritative document. Likewise, when Joshua approaches the eastern tribes about crossing the Jordan to enable the western tribes to receive their allotment (1:13), or when Caleb approaches Joshua to

¹¹ Gerhard von Rad, "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch," in von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), 1–78; and "The Promised Land and Yahweh's Land in the Hexateuch" in *The Problem*, 79–93.

¹² Von Rad, "Form-Critical Problem," 2.

¹³ Pekka Pitkänen, "Reading Genesis-Joshua as a Unified Document from an Early Date: A Settler Colonial Perspective," *BTB* 45 (2015): 3–31; and Pitkänen, "Priestly Legal Tradition in Joshua and the Composition of the Pentateuch and Joshua," *OTE* 29 (2016): 318–35.

¹⁴ For a helpful summary diagram, see Pitkänen, "Priestly Legal Tradition," 329.

receive his (14:6–12), this is done on the basis of an existing set of traditions found in Numbers. And, of course, it is these earlier promises that Joshua can insist were fulfilled (21:43–45; 23:14), though it is also possible to use these promises for looking to what God will do if Israel is unfaithful. These examples indicate that Joshua completes promises made in the Pentateuch, but is nevertheless separate from it in that it depends on the pentateuchal material as an authoritative source rather than as a direct continuation of it.

B. JOSHUA AS PART OF THE DEUTERONOMISTIC HISTORY

A far more common approach to Joshua now is to see it as part of a Deuteronomistic History, an approach that can largely be traced back to the influential study of Martin Noth.¹⁵ Noth argued that Joshua–Kings, together with parts of Deuteronomy, comprised a single work of history that was completed in the exile, though drawing on older source materials, with the goal of explaining the Babylonian exile. Noth’s original theory has been taken up and developed in a range of ways, with debates over whether the history was a largely unified work or has gone through various redactions (including questions about when it was completed), and whether it offers a pessimistic or hopeful evaluation of Israel’s position in the exile.¹⁶ One problem that emerges from these alternatives is that remarkably diverse approaches to reading these texts are all grouped together under the one label, held together by the fact that they look at how Joshua prepares for much that follows.

This is not the place for evaluating this hypothesis as a whole. As with the Hexateuch model, it does have some important strengths. Most obviously, as noted above, there are points where material in Joshua prepares for events told in later books. Apart from the points previously noted, we might also observe the curse that Joshua pronounces on the one who rebuilds Jericho (Josh 6:26), which finds a specific fulfillment in 1 Kgs 16:34. These examples show that although Joshua is narrated by

¹⁵ Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001). The German original appeared in 1943. An unfortunate side effect of the prominence given to this theory is that his work on the Chronicler’s history, which was an integral part of his original work, was translated separately into English.

¹⁶ The various theories are helpfully summarized by Peterson, *Authors*, 7–60. See also Thomas Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2007) for a cautious evaluation of the theory.

looking back at the events of Israel's entry into the land, it also serves to look beyond that time and prepare for events later in Israel's story. Of course, this does not explain the literary relationship between these texts. If various elements in Joshua take us to the time of David, is the reference in Kings looking back to an existing text more or less the same as our Joshua, or is this evidence of continued writing in which material found in Joshua was composed to explain later events?¹⁷

Another strength of this model is that it looks to Deuteronomy as a key theological resource for Joshua—a key weakness in the Hexateuch model. That is, this model accepts the dependence of Joshua on existing pentateuchal materials, even if different approaches within this model sometimes treat the material in Deuteronomy as being composed for this history. It is, however, entirely possible to regard Deuteronomy as an existing body of material that Joshua references. This seems more consistent with how the book now functions, and there are certainly points where even its diction, and not only its theological themes, seem to emerge from Deuteronomy (e.g., Joshua 23). Deuteronomy is thus an undoubtedly important dialogue partner for Joshua, as are the remaining books in the Deuteronomistic History.

Nevertheless, there are significant weaknesses with this model that are particularly important for interpreting Joshua. Perhaps the most important (as already noted) is that the bulk of Joshua 13–21 has little if any interest in “Deuteronomistic” material, engaging instead with material from Numbers, while Joshua 24 (especially in the historical recital in vv. 1–12) draws on much of the Pentateuch, though without obvious reference to Deuteronomy. Joshua 22 does seem to draw on both, but in discrete sections, so that verses 1–8 draw on Deuteronomy but the rest of the chapter looks to Numbers. Such observations immediately cast doubt on the value of describing this material as “Deuteronomistic.” Indeed, as Pitkänen has argued, this mixture of Priestly and Deuteronomistic material is unique among these books.¹⁸ This raises the question of whether “Deuteronomistic” is a helpful label for describing Joshua, given that roughly half the book shows no particular interest in material that might reasonably be described by this label.

¹⁷ This does not have to bear on the question of history; the dating of source materials that might have been used is a separate issue from the literary relationship of the texts as we now have them.

¹⁸ Pitkänen, “Priestly Legal Tradition.”

Moreover, this model has tended to flatten the different books of the Former Prophets so that their distinctiveness is not always seen, though there are clear differences between Joshua and the rest of Judges–Kings. Joshua has no interest in the Spirit of God or of wisdom, even though both of these are important themes in Judges–Kings, and there are points where the narrative style of Joshua is clearly different too.¹⁹

Reading Joshua within a Deuteronomistic History is thus helpful as a means of seeing it as part of a larger story into which it has been integrated, but it does not fully recognize the distinctive features of the book and therefore risks flattening its content and themes into one particular frame of reference. By contrast, seeing it as a bridging work that has been taken up into a larger story enables the benefits of both the Hexateuch and Deuteronomistic History models to be seen without either coming to dominate interpretation.²⁰

C. JOSHUA AND THE WIDER CANON OF SCRIPTURE

Whereas discussions of the Hexateuch and Deuteronomistic History are largely concerned with understanding the initial setting of the book, reflection on Joshua in light of the wider canon (both OT and NT) is principally concerned with how material in Joshua is taken up in the rest of the Bible. This comes out of its bridging function while also noting that, in both the Hebrew canonical structure and the Greek one (which has shaped our English Bibles), Joshua is given prominence by being placed at the head of a larger story that knows of the significant material that precedes it. Whereas the Hebrew tradition reads Joshua as the first book of the Former Prophets, the Greek canon places it as the first volume in a series of historical books. Regardless of the canonical structure adopted, a key element is that Joshua immediately follows the events of the Pentateuch. Again, the bridging function is crucial.

Given the importance of the exodus in the theology of the Old Testament, it is not surprising that Joshua is a less prominent text for

¹⁹ On some elements of narrative distinctiveness, see David G. Firth, “Disorienting Readers in Joshua 1.1–5.12,” *JOT* 41 (2017): 413–30. See also “Joshua as Narrative” below.

²⁰ For a slightly fuller treatment of literary criticism and Joshua while recognizing its contested nature, see J. Gordon McConville, *Joshua: Crossing Divides* (London: T&T Clark, 2017), 18–27. A model for reading Joshua not dissimilar to that proposed here is H. J. Koorevaar, “The Book of Joshua and the Hypothesis of the Deuteronomistic History: Indications for an Open Serial Model,” in *The Book of Joshua*, ed. Ed Noort (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 219–32.

reflection both there and in the New Testament. But reference to it is made at key points, demonstrating continued reflection on it. The traditions in Joshua are taken up in two key directions within the balance of the Old Testament—either to demonstrate the faithfulness of God in fulfilling his promises or to highlight the sin of the generation that entered the land.

Emphases on the faithfulness of God can be seen in the Latter Prophets, Psalms, and Nehemiah. In Amos 2:9, God points out that he had destroyed the Amorite who had been before Israel. Although the sequence in Amos 2:9–11 is slightly odd (in that it seems to describe Israel's entry into the land before the exodus), this is probably because Amos wants to highlight God's faithfulness in the provision of the very land that Israel was now defiling.²¹ Likewise, reference to Gilgal in Amos 4:4 and 5:5 demonstrates awareness of the importance of that site as a sanctuary, something that presumes knowledge of the crossing of the Jordan and the establishment of the cairn there (Josh 3–4).²² Amos' point is that the northern kingdom had failed to live in light of the faithfulness of God in bringing Israel into the land and the mechanisms that God had provided for Israel to remember this. This is not an issue that was unique to the northern kingdom, because Mic 6:5 also remembers the crossing of the Jordan as evidence of God's faithfulness, something that Judah was ignoring.

The Psalms likewise remember themes from Joshua as evidence of God's faithfulness, though again the references are fairly brief. Although most are in the historical psalms, there is an important allusion in Ps 47:1–4. In these verses, the importance of Yahweh's reign over all the peoples is affirmed, with the gift of the land to Israel as particular evidence of his sovereignty. The claim of verse 8, that God reigns over the nations, is thus particularly rooted in the experience of Israel receiving the land. Similarly, Ps 114:3–6 reflects on the crossing of the Jordan as evidence that all the earth should tremble before the God of Jacob, who is Lord of all the earth. Pss 78:54–55; 105:44–45; and 135:11–12 all point to God's faithfulness in the provision of the land as a reason for Israel to continue in faithful obedience and praise. These references, along with Neh 9:24–25, all look to Joshua as a key point of reference that establishes

²¹ So David Allan Hubbard, *Joel and Amos: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 143.

²² Arguably, a similar reference underlies Hos 6:7, but as the exegesis of this verse is much disputed it is not included here.

God's faithfulness, and thus provide reasons why Israel should also have been faithful.

Although Joshua can be used to point to the faithfulness of God, reference to it can also be made to stress the failures of the generation that entered the land. The possibility of understanding Joshua as part of a history of failure is already hinted at in some of the texts noted above. Ps 78:56–58 includes a summary of a history of provoking God that is probably intended to be traced back to the first generation in the land. Reference to the sanctuary at Shiloh presumes knowledge of Josh 18:1, though it is more concerned with events in 1 Sam 4:1b–7:1. More particularly, Ps 106:34–39 looks back to the failure of the first generation in the land to destroy (שמד) the previous inhabitants, while noting that Israel was gradually ensnared by the idols of the peoples there. This passage clearly reflects on the comments scattered through Joshua about the continued existence of some Canaanite groups (Josh 15:63; 16:10; 17:12–13; 19:47), while also reflecting on the challenge posed by Joshua to all those gathered at Shechem to remove foreign gods and serve Yahweh alone (Josh 24:1–28). Such a compressed treatment does not leave room for the possibility that foreign peoples could indeed be integrated into Israel while stressing that the danger was always with the worship of other gods.

Although there are no indisputable citations of Joshua in the New Testament,²³ there are key points where themes from Joshua are taken up. The patterns in the Old Testament noted above continue into the New. Thus, reflection on God's faithfulness through Joshua can be seen in Stephen's speech to the council in Jerusalem. In Acts 7:45 he points to the fact that Israel had brought the tabernacle with them into the land because God had driven out the nations, presuming some knowledge of Josh 3:13–17 and 18:1, though the reference is really broad enough to encompass much of the book. Like several of the texts noted above, Stephen draws on this to point to failures within Israel, so he draws on Joshua from within this wider tradition. Stephen also makes a more specific allusion to Josh 24:32 earlier in his speech when he notes Joseph's burial (Acts 7:16), though this reference too builds to his larger accusation.²⁴

²³ Hebrews 13:5b could be a citation from Josh 1:5, but given that the text in Joshua is itself taken from Deut 31:6 the primary reference is probably to Deuteronomy (with, of course, echoes in Joshua).

²⁴ A more oblique reference to Josh 24:32 is found in John 4:5, but there it is presented as a simple statement of fact.

An intriguing allusion to Josh 7:19 occurs in John 9:24, where the Pharisees challenge the man born blind to “give glory to God.” Joshua uses the same phrase when challenging Achan to tell the truth about his sin, the implication being that the man has hidden sin that needs to be revealed. However, in a typical Johannine irony it is the Pharisees who have unrecognized sin, as the man challenges them to explain how Jesus could have healed him if he were the sort of sinner they believed. In this instance, the Pharisees demonstrate that they know the content of the Scriptures but misapply them.

Just as the Old Testament could point to failures in the generation that entered the land, so also Heb 4:8 looks back to the partial nature of Israel’s occupation of the land as a point where Israel did not fully achieve the rest God intended for them.

The most important development found in the New Testament’s appropriation of Joshua is focused on the character of Rahab. She occurs first in Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1:5) as one of a group of women (with Tamar, Ruth, and Bathsheba) who would appear to be inappropriate for the lineage of the Messiah and yet whose presence demonstrates the fact that God’s grace in Christ encompasses all people. Indeed, within Matthew there is a balance between the international nature of Jesus’ genealogy at the beginning of the Gospel and the commission to make disciples of the nations (Matt 28:16–20) at the end. Rahab is also an important example in Heb 11:30–31 on account of her faith that was expressed within the fall of Jericho. Here, the writer telescopes Joshua 2 and 6 by linking her faith in hiding the spies to her deliverance when the city walls collapsed. Intriguingly, the writer suggests that the others perished because of disobedience. This indicates a line of interpretation that understood destruction of the city to be the maximum possible punishment, but not a necessary one. This combination of Joshua 2 and 6 is also apparent in Jas 2:25, where James stresses the fact that Rahab’s faith was shown by her actions in receiving the spies and sending them off by a different route.

These three New Testament books are united in making explicit something that is otherwise only implicit in Joshua itself—that there was always the possibility of the Canaanite population being integrated into Israel on the basis of faith. The continued presence of non-Israelites in the land by the end of Joshua was both a threat and an opportunity, and the reception of Joshua in the rest of Scripture continues to recognize

that both of these possibilities continued to work themselves out in the life of Israel.²⁵

III. The Genre of Joshua

Central to the task of interpreting any text is determining its genre. The nature of genre is a complex issue because it relates to a series of decisions any author makes when composing a text as well as those decisions an audience is capable of making when seeking to interpret that text. Moreover, genre is always fluid to some extent because changes in culture and language mean that scope exists for existing genres to develop in new ways that might not have been available to an earlier generation, even while remaining true to the basics of that genre.²⁶ Nevertheless, for a text to communicate there is always some interplay between it and its readers as they assign some genre to it. Although this is often done intuitively, a more effective approach is for readers to seek consciously to determine a text's genre. In this model, we acknowledge that the text's author is not accessible to us to answer the question of genre, but we assume that the text itself will contain sufficient clues for us to answer this question.

We must keep in mind that naming a text's genre is not the same as understanding it, and that different labels could be used to describe the genre even while there is (broad) agreement as to what the genre is. Although labels assist us in discussing genre, we should be ultimately concerned with how a particular text seeks to communicate. If we do not understand this, we can easily misinterpret a text by applying inappropriate criteria to determine meaning. For example, were we to read the parable of the two sons and the gracious father (Luke 15:11–32) outside of its narrative context, we might conclude that Jesus was speaking about an actual son who had claimed and squandered his inheritance before his father's death (in contrast to his brother). In that case, we would read the parable as being historically referential. Yet although the parable is *lifelike*, nothing is at stake if we conclude that the genre of parable does not describe *actual* events. Interpreting it as a parable directs us to read it differently from Luke 15:1–2, which does claim to be

²⁵ See also §2 below.

²⁶ On the issue of genre more widely, see the helpful study by Jeannine K. Brown, "Genre Criticism and the Bible," in *Words and the Word: Explorations in Biblical Interpretation and Literary Theory*, ed. David G. Firth and Jamie A. Grant (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 111–50.

historically referential and so provides a historical context from which to read the parable (though we also recognize that Luke has provided a literary context with his Gospel). In any case, we can recognize that the parable represents an ancient genre, even if it is one that continues to find echoes today.

Likewise, a crucial starting point for reading Joshua is to understand it as an ancient text; therefore, its genre will conform to ancient patterns rather than contemporary ones.²⁷ I will comment on its genre here by identifying its key features.

A. JOSHUA AS NARRATIVE

An obvious starting point is to observe that Joshua is a narrative. Distinguishing between story and narrative is important, even if in popular usage these two terms are sometimes used interchangeably. Strictly speaking, the *story* is what happens, while the *narrative* is how that story is told. In terms of narratology, it does not matter whether the story is something that actually happened because those who narrate it have made choices about what to include and how to present it. I will therefore consider the issues of Joshua as a narrative without reference to the question of history, but then reflect on the issue of history as a separate indicator of genre.

The features of the narrative texts of the Old Testament have been the subject of fairly intense study since the 1970s. Even though much has changed since its publication, the pivotal work on this topic in English remains Robert Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.²⁸ Alter demonstrates that, although Old Testament narratives are structured around the same elements as contemporary narratives (having plot, dialogue, characterization, scene, and a narrator), this is because these elements are essential for the existence of a narrative. What matters more is how these elements are deployed within a particular culture and time. Hence, although Joshua is clearly a narrative, it works within the constraints of the narrative patterns available to the writers of the Old Testament and should not be read through modern narrative conventions. Nevertheless, the tools of

²⁷ See especially John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton, *The Lost World of the Israelite Conquest: Covenant Retribution and the Fate of the Canaanites* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 7–12.

²⁸ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

narrative criticism (and narratology more generally) are useful to the extent that they open up the narrative world of the text.

One problem with the success of Alter's work (and those that followed over the next decade) is that narrative critics have tended to treat all the books of the Old Testament in much the same way. Although this is appropriate at a general level since ancient audiences needed enough mutually intelligible information across these works to interpret them, the distinctive nature of the different narrative texts of the Old Testament has not always been recognized. Therefore, we need to understand the particular ways in which Joshua employs available narrative conventions.

To begin, we can regard Joshua as a narrative in that it recounts a story—the story of Israel's origins within the land promised by God. Moreover, we can trace this narrative across the book as a whole as the partial fulfillment of God's promise to Joshua in 1:3–5. This is a partial fulfillment because, although by the end of the book Israel is clearly in the land and the trustworthiness of God's promises is affirmed (Josh 21:43–45; 23:14–16), the book is also clear that much of the land remained to be taken (13:1–7; 23:1–16). A way toward resolution of this apparent paradox is provided by the covenant commitments made in 24:1–28. The process by which this is worked out constitutes the plot of the book as a whole, with the plot of the various narratives contributing to it. Scenically, we trace this across the central highlands, into the south, then the north, and back to the central highlands with a host of characters, though Joshua himself is the central human figure. Some form of dialogue features in all levels of narrative, and though it isn't nearly as prominent as in a book like Ruth, it is an important feature of Joshua.

Observing that Joshua is a narrative text is only a first step. The book works with the conventions of narrative in the Old Testament in some distinctive ways, and these deserve some consideration. This is important because, although there has been a proliferation of narrative studies of the Old Testament overall, Joshua has largely missed out on this.²⁹ As a result, diachronic explanations are often given for matters that can be resolved by closer attention to Joshua's narrative poetics.³⁰ A key goal of this commentary is to attend to Joshua's narrative features on the

²⁹ See Sarah Lebhar Hall, *Conquering Character: The Characterization of Joshua in Joshua 1–11* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 4–6. On narrative techniques more broadly, see André Wénin, “Josué 1–12 comme récit” in *The Book of Joshua* (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 109–38.

³⁰ Broadly, poetics are concerned with the study of how a particular genre works.

assumption that doing so will help readers understand it better; if it is better understood, then it can be better proclaimed. However, rather than provide a comprehensive introduction to Joshua's narrative poetics, I will comment on two key features that are of particular importance for it—focalization and anachrony.³¹

A key element to notice from the outset is Joshua's use of focalization. This is not something typically covered by books on the narratology of the Old Testament, and it is often confused with point of view. Developed initially by Gérard Genette, focalization is concerned with the extent to which a narrator provides readers with information needed to interpret the events recounted.³² Genette proposes a sliding scale with three key reference points. First, with zero focalization, the narrator is not only omniscient (as a narrative concept) but is able to provide guidance to readers so that our knowledge exceeds that of characters in the narrative. Second, with internal focalization, the narrative focuses on a particular character, and as readers we know only what that character knows. Finally, in an externally focalized narrative, readers know less than the characters. As readers, we can only interpret on the basis of what we observe occurring within the narrative and not on the basis of other information provided by the narrator.

The majority of Old Testament narratives are zero focalized—the narrator knows what is happening and provides readers with the information needed to interpret events. For example, in the narrative of David's adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah (2 Samuel 11), the narrator is present at a range of sites and knows more than the various characters, even if everything isn't disclosed in order for narrative tension to remain. Although a brilliant piece of narration, it follows the dominant pattern of zero focalization.

Internal focalization is less common, but still prevalent. For example, Nehemiah's response to news from Jerusalem (Neh 1:1–2:10) is presented

³¹ Through the commentary I have generally followed the narratological convention of referring to the "narrator" rather than the "author." For much of Joshua, these terms can largely be regarded as interchangeable. Nevertheless, following Wolf Schmid, *Narratology: An Introduction* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 65, there is still value in examining the narrator as one present within the text whereas the author stands outside of it. Attention to this also enables a closer focus on narrative studies.

³² Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 189.

from his own perspective, and thus internally focalized. We know only what he knows, and so have no information other than what is available to him. The narrator of the book may know more, but by restricting our focus to what Nehemiah sees, our field of view is smaller. In the Old Testament, such internal focalization is typically embedded within a larger narrative.

By far the rarest mode in the Old Testament is external focalization. This factor alone makes Joshua's use of it worth noting. A striking feature of the book of Joshua is that its first five chapters are almost entirely externally focalized.³³ For example, when we come to the story of Rahab in Joshua 2, the narrator provides us with no guidance about how to interpret these events, especially Rahab's comments. Is the agreement made with Rahab a sin, since Israel was meant to destroy the Canaanites, or is it a moment of insight about how the people of God are being formed? At the end of this chapter, which is also particularly notable for how it characterizes Rahab and the scouts through dialogue, we simply do not know. Likewise, in the story of the crossing of the Jordan in Joshua 3–4, the narrator does not provide guidance for interpreting what is happening. As a result, we do not know why Joshua gives the instructions he does. The effect is that as we reach Jericho in Joshua 6, we do not know if Israel is in a right relationship with God or not. External focalization is used to provide information to readers, but not enough for them to interpret these events with confidence. This additional information is then provided in the following chapters. Indeed, in 6:1–2; 7:1; and 9:1–4 the narrator adopts an explicitly zero focalized perspective, providing guidance that had been left out previously. Even so, it is not until 11:15 that readers can be certain of the appropriateness of Joshua's actions. This technique then forces us to reread what has been recounted with the information provided there. This pattern of external focalization is resumed in Joshua 22, meaning that by the end of that narrative the narrator has not disclosed the exact reasons for various elements within it, probably because to do so would distract from the key goal of raising the question of the identity of the people of God.

A second feature that is important for understanding Joshua's narrative poetics is anachrony, an element seldom treated in the principal works on Old Testament narrative. We can define an anachrony as any

³³ See Firth, "Disorienting Readers in Joshua 1:1–5:12."

point where the order in which events are recounted differs from the order in which the narrative indicates they happened.³⁴ Although many narratives in the Old Testament follow a structure in which the order of recounting is the same as the order of events, this is not always the case. Joshua is not as distinctive as Samuel in its use of anachrony. But it is still worth noting that, just as Joshua uses changes in focalization to leave readers looking for additional information, so also it deploys various anachronies to increase reader involvement with the text.

For example, although the narrator clearly knows that the men crossing the Jordan (Josh 3–4) are not circumcised, there is no mention of this until 5:4—and even then it is after God has directed Joshua to make flint knives to circumcise the Israelite males. All of this is important because Israel was about to celebrate Passover, an event for which the narrator has deployed subtle clues through the earlier narratives. Thus as readers we receive a shock when we discover that the nation is in no condition to celebrate Passover, let alone take over the land promised. Likewise, although Achan clearly took the banned goods from Jericho during the events recounted in Joshua 6, we do not learn of this until chapter 7. Once again, Joshua employs these techniques as a mechanism for engaging readers with the text, creating additional suspense that draws readers into the narrative world it has created. Although Joshua arguably lacks the narrative sophistication of a book like Samuel, it nevertheless has its own techniques that need to be recognized and that indicate a high degree of sophistication.

B. JOSHUA AS HISTORY

Just as consideration of Joshua as narrative must consider the ancient context, so too must consideration of the book as history. This is particularly important in that the conventions by which history is recounted vary across cultures and time. For example, no contemporary historians would invent speeches for characters as a means of presenting both what they believe happened and how it is to be interpreted, although Herodotus had no problem doing this. We do not, however, regard him as writing anything other than history because of this (and not just because we trace the word back to him), even if there are numerous points where we might not regard him as a reliable source. But we read him within

³⁴ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 35.

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL THEMES

Reflection on biblical theology can move in two basic directions—from the general to the particular or from the particular to the general. That is, we can look at themes that are significant across the canon and then look for their presence in a particular text (general to particular), or we can identify the leading themes in a particular text and then explore the ways in which they are developed more broadly across the canon (particular to general). Although there ought to be some degree of crossover between these approaches, since themes that occur more widely are likely to be present in a particular text, they each represent a different approach to the task of biblical theology.

The strength of the general-to-particular model is that it highlights the unity of the biblical witness, though at the risk of flattening the distinctiveness of the various texts.¹ Conversely, the particular-to-general model's strength is that it brings out what might be largely neglected themes in particular texts,² but may lose sight of the unity of the larger biblical witness. A dialogue between these approaches is certainly possible at the level of an overall biblical theology,³ but in a work such as this it seems better to focus on the second model in order to highlight Joshua's

¹ This model is exemplified, e.g., in Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2 vols (London: SCM Press, 1961, 1967), and his use of “covenant” as a structuring center.

² As exemplified in Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols. (London: SCM Press, 1962, 1965).

³ As exemplified by Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (London: SCM Press, 1992).

own themes, even though some of these will feature more broadly across the canon. Because these themes emerge from the exegesis of the book, the following sketches do not provide detailed support for the exegesis but assume readers will consult the relevant exegetical discussions in the commentary. Tracing these themes first from Joshua also means that each of them is to some extent related to the others, but there is value in considering them individually even if we must ultimately integrate them in both our reading of Joshua and of the wider canon.

§1 Faithfulness and Obedience

Readers of Joshua encounter the theme of faithfulness and obedience almost immediately. Having heard of Moses' death, we read God's words to Joshua requiring him to observe carefully all that had been passed on by Moses. Indeed, Joshua was to meditate on the book of God's instruction day and night in the knowledge that keeping these instructions faithfully provided assurance that he would succeed in claiming the land (1:6–9).

So important is the theme of obedience to God's word that it is given prominence at each major section of the book. As Joshua stood outside Jericho ready to launch Israel's first military campaign in the land, he received instructions from God explaining how to take the city: march around it for seven days with the priests blowing on ram's horns (6:1–5). In preparation for the land allocation, Joshua was told what to do (13:1–7): divide the land among the nine and a half tribes who would live west of the Jordan, even though much of that land remained to be taken. In the final section of the book, it is notable that Joshua's speech to the eastern tribes emphasized their faithful obedience while also stressing the need for their continued obedience (22:1–5). By this point, therefore, we have moved from Joshua's own obedience to that of the people as a whole.

This is because Joshua's obedience was representative of the greater demand that was placed on the people as a whole. This was already apparent when Joshua summoned the eastern tribes to fulfill their promise to assist their kin in taking the land west of the Jordan, with this summons leading to their own promise of obedience (1:10–18). This call to the nation continues in both of Joshua's great addresses (23:1–16; 24:1–28), demonstrating that continued obedience to God's word was to shape the people going forward.

In addition to statements stressing the importance of obedience to God's word at the head of each section, there are also important reflections on the nature of obedience in the summaries to each half of the book. In the summary of Israel's entry into the land, we are told that Joshua did everything that God had commanded through Moses (11:15). Indeed, so complete was his obedience that the narrator observes, "He left nothing undone of all that the LORD had commanded Moses." Similarly, in the summary after the covenant at Shechem, we are told that Israel had "served"⁴ God throughout the lives of Joshua and the elders who outlived him (24:31). Faithfulness and obedience thus provide bookends to Joshua as a whole (as well as dividing it into its principal sections), something that is marked by the move from Joshua's personal obedience to that of the people as a whole.

But what does obedience look like in Joshua? We might be predisposed to think of obedience as precisely following a particular command. But this is merely a basic understanding of the concept, only directly relevant in Joshua to the making of flint knives and circumcising the Israelite men (5:2). We see a much broader understanding of obedience when Joshua is told to "meditate" on the Torah. Meditation involves more than simply memorizing Torah in order to carry out certain actions at definite points in time. Rather than a set of commandments designating specific actions, the Torah is better understood as a form of structured wisdom, something that gives shape to life and demonstrates the patterns of order God desires.⁵ It was entirely possible to transgress this pattern of order by acting contrary to it, as in the case of Achan (Josh 7), but this does not mean that it mandated only a specific set of actions. What is true of Torah can also be true of more specific directives.

This is illustrated at several points in Joshua. At Jericho, Joshua was given specific instructions about how the city was to be captured (6:2–5). In fact, though, beyond the general process, Joshua was left to determine the exact means of how to accomplish this. He was required to do certain things, but how he arranged the people to march around the city was left up to him. Obedience involved faithfulness to required specifics (e.g., priests blowing horns), but it also included working out other elements to best

⁴ CSB here has "worshiped," a not inappropriate sense of the verb עָבַד, but this rendering is probably too narrow at this point, and the broader sense of "served" is thus better.

⁵ See John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton, *The Lost World of the Israelite Conquest: Covenant Retribution and the Fate of the Canaanites* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 89–98.

deploy the people and ensure they were faithful to God's requirements. At other points, such as crossing the Jordan, this element of figuring out how to obey God's directives was developed without knowing the exact goal. For example, in 3:7–8, Joshua knew that God was to exalt him but understood only that he was to command the priests to stand in the river when Israel reached its edge. What was to happen at the crossing was revealed only later. Obedience could entail faithfulness either to specifics or to general guidance, in which much was left for Joshua to work out.

This becomes particularly important for understanding events in which Canaanites not only survive but also become part of Israel, most notably in the cases of Rahab (2:1–21; 6:17, 21–23, 25) and the Gibeonites (9:1–27). If Israel was to destroy all Canaanites in accordance with Deut 7:1–6, then was not their survival evidence of disobedience? If we treat obedience only as the exact carrying out of a specified action, then we could certainly read it this way. But if so, then we are left with an apparent contradiction in Josh 11:15, which explicitly commends Joshua's obedience. In the case of the Gibeonites, we are even told that God determined that they would not be destroyed (11:19–20), though only after their incorporation into Israel. If obedience meant destroying all the Canaanites, then how could Joshua have known there was an alternative plan for the Gibeonites?

Taking the comments in 11:15–23 seriously in light of all that has happened to this moment in the book requires us to consider a different approach.⁶ According to this passage, Joshua had fully obeyed, but he had not destroyed all the Canaanites. Indeed, 13:1–7 will make clear that many still survived. This suggests that obedience was a matter of faithfully reflecting on what God wanted to achieve through a directive and then working toward that goal. When we look at Deut 7:1–6, we see that the continued existence of the Canaanites could lead Israel away from faithfulness to God. But what if some Canaanites did not pose a threat? Indeed, what if they actually came to serve God or at least were not a stumbling block to those who did? Obedience in this case would require not destroying these people. Joshua's meditation on the Torah was meant to help him understand this and apply it. Obedience was thus faithfulness to what God was achieving through Israel in his mission. The

⁶ I assume the unity of the book's focus. For more details, see the comments on those verses.

commandments were to be understood as shaping the general pattern of Israel's actions rather than requiring a mechanical application of directives. This does not mean "anything goes"; Achan stands as clear evidence that disobedience (sin) is a tragic possibility.

The importance of this model of obedience can be traced through the canon. Joshua stands as the first book of the Former Prophets in the Hebrew Bible, while Psalms most commonly stands as the first book of the Writings. There is a close parallel between the command for Joshua to meditate on Torah in 1:6–9 and Psalm 1, which indicates that such meditation is the way to a flourishing life for any Israelite. This is a consistent pattern in the book: this model of meditative obedience starts with Joshua himself but is then picked up by the people as a whole. Appearing at the beginning of both the Prophets and the Writings, the theme of obedience to the Torah receives prominence. Moreover, it is reinforced by the presence of this same theme in Mal 4:4–6, so that the Prophets as a whole⁷ are bounded by the theme, which then continues in the Writings. Although the structure of the Old Testament canon in English (following the LXX and Vulgate) is different (and no one way of arranging the canon is definitive), the parallel between Joshua and Psalms is easily noticed. Obedience shaped by meditation is a vital component of the life of God's people.

The pattern can be traced further into the New Testament, with the obvious development that obedience is now shaped by a relationship to God in Christ. A particularly clear example of this can be seen in the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus made clear that he expected disciples not only to hear what he said but also to do it (Matt 7:21–23). Something of the shape of the obedient life is outlined in the antitheses where Jesus contrasted his teaching with earlier material (Matt 5:17–48)—some from the Old Testament and some consisting of rabbinic adaptations of the Old Testament. Notably, when he made a contrast with the Old Testament, Jesus' concern was to reflect on the heart of the commandment and to work out how that could be lived in a new context.

This is particularly evident in Jesus' antitheses about murder and adultery (Matt 5:21–30). In neither did he suggest that the new covenant abolishes the commandment. But he considered their intent and how they

⁷ In the Hebrew Bible, Joshua–Kings (less Ruth) and Isaiah–Malachi (less Lamentations and Daniel) make up the Prophets.

could be lived out rather than focusing on obedience simply as completion of a given action (or in these cases, *not* completing an action). Both of these commandments reflect a general concern in the Decalogue to create a community of trust. A redeemed community needs to be able to trust one another. But this cannot happen when our motivations are not considered. Clearly, someone could keep the prohibition against murder by refraining from illegal killing. Jesus, however, went to the heart of the commandment, pointing to a much stricter interpretation of it, one that considers our intentions, not just our actions.

Jesus' teaching comes from a profound reflection on the Torah. We (like Joshua) need to meditate on God's word and understand that obedience to it is essential. But, rather than simply conforming our behavior to specific acts, our obedience needs to be consistent with God's purposes and developed through faithfulness in new contexts. Obedience is faithfulness that draws Scripture and life into a fresh dialogue.

§2 Identity of the People of God

Throughout Joshua, it is clear that God was giving the land of Canaan to his people. But who were the people of God? Although at one level the answer is "Israel," a careful reading of the book indicates that the identity of the people is more complex than that. The people of God are more appropriately defined as those who join God in his purposes (though to a lesser degree those who do not oppose God's purposes may enjoy the blessings of being among his people). Indeed, one of the key tasks of Joshua is to challenge a facile idea of the identity of God's people.

The centrality of the issue is raised early in the book and is a pivotal element throughout. We see foreigners integrated into Israel, but we also see Israelites excluded.⁸ Joshua 1 establishes that Israel was to take the land, with the implication that the inhabitants were to be destroyed so that Israel could settle and not be led astray by false worship. Certainly Joshua 22–24 is concerned that Israel not be caught in this trap. Nevertheless, the Israel that emerges at the end of the book is not the same one that entered the land under Joshua. The people of God

⁸ The importance of this is explored in more detail in David G. Firth, "Models of Inclusion and Exclusion in Joshua," in *Interreligious Relations*, ed. Hallvard Hagelia and Markus Zehnder (London: T&T Clark, 2017), 71–88.

are not identified on the basis of ethnicity but rather on the basis of a relationship with God.

The variations to ethnic Israel are established as soon as we encounter Rahab in Joshua 2. A Canaanite prostitute, we might imagine her to be precisely the sort of person that Israel should destroy. But actually she demonstrated the sort of faith to which any Israelite might aspire, assisting the scouts and obtaining a promise that she and her family would not be destroyed. The promise was fulfilled when Jericho fell (6:17, 22–23), so that Rahab's family continued to live among Israel (6:25). The declaration that Joshua accomplished all that God commanded through Moses (11:15) makes clear that Israel's actions toward Rahab were no mistake. Indeed, it is notable that the book gives as much space to the death of Achan and his family (Josh 7) as it does to Rahab's inclusion. Achan was an Israelite, but he incurred God's wrath for his decision to take from the items dedicated to God at Jericho (7:1). By this point of the book, in addition to seeing the capture of two relatively insignificant cities (Jericho and Ai), we have seen Canaanites becoming Israelites and Israelites becoming Canaanites.

The situation becomes more complex with the Gibeonites in Joshua 9, yet it is important to note the prominent place given to foreigners in the covenant ceremony recounted before Israel encountered the Gibeonites (8:30–35). Curiously, apart from Rahab's family, no other foreigners have been mentioned in the book, but clearly at this point there were foreigners sojourning within Israel (8:33, 35) who had committed themselves through the blessings and curses. The presence of foreigners as a significant group thus prepares us for the encounter with the Gibeonites.

According to 11:19–20, the Gibeonites were apparently moved to act because God had not hardened their hearts so that they would resist Israel. But according to 9:24, their own perception was that they acted because of their fear of what God had commanded Moses. Yet these two explanations are not incompatible with one another because divine sovereignty and human responsibility can go together. The Gibeonites were then placed in the sanctuary to carry out menial tasks. By the end of the battle reports, we thus have evidence of the continued existence of Canaanite groups. Their existence is not regarded as problematic, however, since they were integrated in different ways into the people of God.

The importance of foreigners is also stressed in the land allocation chapters (Joshua 13–21). Although Caleb is already well known to readers

from the initial attempt to enter the land (Numbers 13–14), his Edomite heritage is stressed by noting that he is a Kenizzite (Josh 14:6). This man of foreign heritage demonstrated the sort of faith Israel was meant to display in claiming the land. Thus, Caleb becomes the paradigmatic figure for these chapters, just as Rahab had been in Joshua 1–12. Notable too is that Caleb is prominent at the start of this section, while foreigners more generally are noted when discussing the cities of refuge at its close (20:9). These foreigners were clearly intended to be people who understood the requirements of Torah, which is why they could claim refuge. They included various Canaanite groups mentioned as continuing to live among Israel (e.g., 15:62; 16:2, 10; 17:12–13).

Joshua 22–24 then becomes a reflection on the identity of the people of God in light of all that has gone before. Although Joshua 22 is at one level about Israel's internal identity, it makes clear that their identity was not defined by geography, since the eastern tribes lived outside the promised territory. In Joshua 23–24 Joshua spoke to the assembly. By this time, we know they are a mixed people, which is part of the reason Joshua had to exhort them to be faithful and obedient to Yahweh alone and not to the gods of their ancestors (24:22–24). This then becomes the definition of the people of God: a people committed to the service of Yahweh alone, with the possibility of all such people obeying God. Ethnic Israel was the vehicle by which this happened; non-Israelites were incorporated to varying degrees into Israel. But what defined the people of God was their commitment to him.

This theme appears through the rest of the Bible. Notably, Israel's first judge (Othniel in Judg 3:7–11) was a member of Caleb's family and, therefore, not ethnically Israelite. Yet he becomes the paradigm figure through which we read the rest of the stories of the judges. Conversely, in the dreadful events of Judges 19–21, we see an Israel that had lost sight of what it meant to be faithful. As a result, they devoted to destruction some of their own people to resolve a problem of their own making (Judg 21:11). An Israel that did not live in obedience to God became indistinguishable from the Canaanites and had no claim to being God's people.

In both Samuel and Kings, continued prominence is given to foreigners who were integrated into God's people. Although David is often portrayed as an ideal Israelite, it is notable that in 2 Samuel 11 Uriah the Hittite is more righteous because he lived for God. Israel was to be a people open to all who gave themselves to the service of God; this truth is particularly

prominent in Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple in which he anticipated the foreigner coming to the sanctuary because of the need of all peoples to know God (1 Kgs 8:41–43). There is also an important shift in language compared to what we see in Joshua. In Joshua, the foreigner (Heb גֵר) refers either to someone who had chosen to live within Israel or to a displaced Israelite. But in Kings, the foreigner (Heb נִכְרִי) refers to someone in his own land who yet would become part of the people of God. Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1–19) exemplifies this kind of foreigner within Kings. Perhaps surprisingly, this type of integration may even be alluded to in Esth 8:17, where many ethnic groups “professed themselves to be Jews” following Mordecai's elevation.

Other parts of the Old Testament also anticipate the point when God's people will be more clearly drawn from all peoples. In Isa 19:16–25, we see the hope that even Egypt and Assyria, the archetypal oppressors of Israel, would one day become part of God's people. This hope finds further expression in Isa 56:1–8 in its declaration that all who commit themselves to God's covenant will have a home in the sanctuary. Such a home does not mean a second-class status but rather being an integral part of God's people. Just as Joshua himself stressed in Joshua 24, the people of God are those who are committed to him.

It is no surprise to find this understanding of the people of God in Jesus' ministry. In all three Synoptic accounts of the cleansing of the temple (Matt 21:12–13; Mark 11:1–11; Luke 19:45–46), Jesus cited Isa 56:7, emphasizing that the temple was meant to be a place for all to worship. His anger was directed against those who exploited such people for their own benefit and who, therefore, did not obey God.

This concern for the inclusion of foreigners is also evident through Matthew's Gospel. Although Jesus at one point only sends his disciples to the “lost sheep of Israel” (Matt 10:6; cf. Matt 15:24), at key moments he recognizes foreigners who become part of the people of God and who demonstrate greater faith than ethnic Israelites (Matt 8:5–13; 15:21–28). The parable of the wedding banquet (Matt 22:1–14) fits this pattern, and those who celebrate the banquet have responded to God's call in obedience. All of this prepares for the well-known commission of Matt 28:16–20, with its directive to disciple the nations by baptizing and teaching them to obey all that Jesus commanded. Thus, the identity of God's people has clear continuity with what we have seen in Joshua. Our response to Jesus determines whether we are part of God's people.

The concern that the people of God should encompass all nations is expressed throughout the New Testament. Paul's language of "the obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5; 16:26) catches this well, identifying a characteristic to be found among all the nations. This is why the gospel is for all who believe (Rom 1:16–17). It involves not only belief but obedience, reflecting the pattern already seen in Joshua even as Paul's understanding of the righteousness of God is expressed through faith in Christ, which can be described as obedience. That God's people are made up of all those bought by Jesus is also reflected in the song of the elders (Rev 5:9–10), in which they affirm that Jesus' death was for "every tribe and language and people and nation." This possibility has its roots in Joshua and can be traced through the rest of the Bible. The people of God are those who live in faithful obedience to God—a faithful obedience that now finds its focus in Jesus.

§3 Joshua and Jesus

Even though there are relatively few direct links between Joshua and Jesus, there are still parallels between them and points where the presentation of Joshua feeds into the larger presentation of Jesus in the New Testament.⁹ It is worth understanding these connections in order to appreciate the wide background of Old Testament sources that the New Testament writers draw on in presenting Jesus. A helpful entry point into this topic is to consider some christological titles and then reflect on ways in which Joshua relates to them. From that, we can consider the more specific connections drawn between Joshua and Jesus in the epistle to the Hebrews.

Although there are many important christological titles, two important ones relative to Joshua are "servant of the Lord" and "prophet." We cannot unpack every relevant New Testament passage on these titles, but we will explore how these titles are developed in Joshua and then

⁹ Zev Farber, *Images of Joshua in the Bible and their Reception* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 284–85, claims there is no Joshua–Jesus typology in the New Testament. However, although it is subtle and not a significant feature, the evidence suggests that when later Christian writers developed this theme more explicitly they were not creating something absent in the New Testament. Farber (pp. 286–309) helpfully traces it through the Epistle of Barnabas, the dialogues of Justin Martyr, and Tertullian).

EXPOSITION

I. Entering the Land (1:1–5:12)

A. Preparations for Entering the Land (1:1–18)

¹ After the death of Moses the LORD's servant, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses's assistant: ² "Moses my servant is dead. Now you and all the people prepare to cross over the Jordan to the land I am giving the Israelites. ³ I have given you every place where the sole of your foot treads, just as I promised Moses. ⁴ Your territory will be from the wilderness and Lebanon to the great river, the Euphrates River—all the land of the Hittites—and west to the Mediterranean Sea. ⁵ No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. I will be with you, just as I was with Moses. I will not leave you or abandon you.

⁶ "Be strong and courageous, for you will distribute the land I swore to their ancestors to give them as an inheritance. ⁷ Above all, be strong and very courageous to observe carefully the whole instruction my servant Moses commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right or the left, so that you will have success wherever you go. ⁸ This book of instruction must not depart from your mouth; you are to meditate on it day and night so that you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do. ⁹ Haven't I commanded you: be strong and courageous? Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

¹⁰ Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, ¹¹ "Go through the camp and tell the people, 'Get provisions ready for yourselves, for within three days you will be crossing the Jordan to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you to inherit.'"

¹² Joshua said to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh, ¹³ "Remember what Moses the LORD's servant commanded you when he said, 'The LORD your God will give you rest, and he will give you this land.' ¹⁴ Your wives, dependents, and livestock may remain in

the land Moses gave you on this side of the Jordan. But your best soldiers must cross over in battle formation ahead of your brothers and help them ¹⁵ until the LORD gives your brothers rest, as he has given you, and they too possess the land the LORD your God is giving them. You may then return to the land of your inheritance and take possession of what Moses the LORD's servant gave you on the east side of the Jordan."

¹⁶ They answered Joshua, "Everything you have commanded us we will do, and everywhere you send us we will go. ¹⁷ We will obey you, just as we obeyed Moses in everything. Certainly the LORD your God will be with you, as he was with Moses. ¹⁸ Anyone who rebels against your order and does not obey your words in all that you command him, will be put to death. Above all, be strong and courageous!"

Context

Readers commencing Joshua should realize from the outset that, although there are good reasons for seeing it as a distinct book,¹ it is also part of a continuing narrative. That narrative begins with the creation account in Genesis and, in various ways, continues through to the end of 2 Kings. Most importantly, Joshua follows immediately from the end of Deuteronomy. Indeed, the opening, "After" (1:1), represents a consecutive verb (וַיְהִי), which usually requires it to be read in terms of what precedes. Although this verb can introduce a book without making a direct connection with what has gone before (e.g., Esth 1:1), the fact that it is here associated with Moses' death makes clear that we are to read this chapter in light of the closing chapter of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy will thus provide a key point of reference for reading Joshua and especially this chapter. In fact, large parts of God's speech to Joshua verge on being a compilation of references to Deuteronomy:

1. The statement of Moses' death (v. 2) recapitulates Deuteronomy 34.
2. Reference to every place "where the sole of your foot treads" (v. 3) is taken from Deut 11:24.
3. The promise that "no one will be able to stand against you" (v. 5) is taken from Deut 7:24 and 11:25, while the promise never to leave or forsake Joshua is taken from Deut 31:8 (having been first spoken to the nation in 31:6).
4. The command to "be strong and courageous" (vv. 6, 9, 18) is taken from Deut 31:7, 23.

¹ On the distinctiveness of 1:1–9 as an introduction to a new book, see H. J. Koorevaar, *De Opbouw van het Boek Jozua* (Heverlee: Centrum voor Bijbelse Vorming-Belgie, 1990), 163–64.

A clear effect of this is that when we read of the “book of instruction” (תּוֹרָה) on which Joshua is to meditate in verse 8, we naturally think of Deuteronomy as the most obvious reference. Admittedly, the direct citations are taken from a small cluster of chapters in Deuteronomy (7, 11, 31, and 34), but the level of reference to Deuteronomy in a relatively short speech makes clear that it is a pivotal text for understanding this chapter.² But it would be wrong to focus only on Deuteronomy, because when we turn to both the directives to the leaders (vv. 10–11) and the subsequent discussions with the eastern tribes (vv. 12–18) the primary reference is to the book of Numbers, although we return to Deuteronomy in verses 16–18.³ This follows the pattern of the book as a whole: chapters 1–12 refer primarily to Deuteronomy, chapters 13–21 use Numbers as their main point of reference, and chapters 22–24 again use Deuteronomy. Thus, it becomes clear that Joshua 1 is an intentional introduction to the book.

As we read this chapter, therefore, we are reminded that this is a story to be situated within a larger story—one where the past is crucial for its interpretation. But we are also offered a vision of what it means for Israel to progress and enter the land that God had promised, which takes us back to Genesis 15. The vision for going forward is rooted in the past, in texts that are themselves the basis for further reflection. At the same time, they are presented as a mechanism by which Israel can begin to see God’s promises fulfilled. As we progress through the rest of the book, we will see that the processes by which Israel is to make sense of her past as a guide for her future are quite complex. This is so in part because Joshua will describe scenarios that are not expressly anticipated in the Pentateuch, yet it always remains the case that understanding the past is vital for Israel to understand her vocation and thus how she is to go forward.

² Joshua 1:1–9 is often treated as a literary bridge between Deuteronomy and Joshua. The processes by which this occurs are complex, as is evident in T. B. Dozeman, “Joshua 1,1–9: The Beginning of a Book or a Literary Bridge?” in *The Book of Joshua*, ed. E. Noort (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 159–82. But focus on these verses in isolation means we miss the ways in which this chapter as a whole creates bridges in multiple directions. See further Terence E. Fretheim, *Deuteronomistic History* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983), 49–53.

³ The ways in which Joshua engages with pentateuchal texts varies. But following J. J. Krause, *Exodus und Eisodus: Komposition und Theologie von Josua 1–5* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 56–58, we can note three basic categories: Joshua can *appeal* to an earlier text, *allude* to it, or *explain* it. These categories are not mutually distinct from one another but are a useful set of reference points. Although vv. 12–15 do show close affiliation to Deut 3:18–20, they are also sufficiently different that the additional information provided by Numbers 32 is pivotal.

Exegesis

1:1. The opening of Joshua immediately situates the events of this chapter in the context of Deuteronomy 34 and its description of Moses' death. We are not told how long after Moses' death this is, but since Deut 31:14–23 made clear that Moses knew he was about to die and that Joshua had been commissioned as his replacement, we are probably to assume that these events are very close in time to the events of Deuteronomy 34. In any case, although Joshua had known that Moses was going to his death, he would not yet have known that he had died, so God's speech will make this clear to him.

The descriptions of both Moses and Joshua in this verse are important for the narrative as a whole. Moses is called God's "servant," a title that is otherwise associated with David and the enigmatic servant in the book of Isaiah. Deut 34:10–12 is clear that no one else exercised a ministry with the significance of Moses. Nevertheless, since Joshua is also called God's "servant" at the end of his life (24:29), we are assured that in at least some respects he continued the pattern Moses had laid down. But as we commence the book, Joshua is still known as Moses' attendant, the one who had served Moses, continuing a title used of him earlier (Exod 24:13; 33:11; Num 11:28). It is an important role, and in Num 11:28 it is particularly associated with the presence of God's Spirit. Indeed, the presence of the Spirit is expressly said to be a key reason for his designation as Moses' successor (Num 27:18). The evidence of this wisdom, combined with Moses' laying hands on him, was a key reason why Israel obeyed Joshua (Deut 34:9). Unlike the other books of the Former Prophets, the book of Joshua never mentions the Spirit, but the background to this chapter assumes that the presence of the Spirit is a key element in Joshua's role. This is therefore foundational background information against which we are to trace his transition from Moses' attendant to the Lord's servant.

As is more common in the Old Testament, he is here called Joshua, though his name was originally "Hoshea" (Num 13:16). Both forms of the name are variants of the concept of "salvation," except that "Hoshea" expresses this generically, whereas "Joshua" makes an explicit link with Yahweh. We do not know anything about his father Nun beyond his mention in the genealogy in 1 Chr 7:27.

1:2–5. God's speech to Joshua can be divided into two parts. In the first of these (vv. 2–5) God reminded Joshua of his promises and of their

continued validity in spite of Moses' death, before exploring how Joshua and Israel can progress in verses 6–9. The speech thus sets the pattern to be followed by the chapter as a whole. Although as readers we are told of Moses' death in verse 1, it is only as God spoke that Joshua discovered this fact and his work as Moses' designated successor began.⁴

Rather than mourn Moses, Joshua and the people were to arise and prepare to cross the Jordan to the land that God was giving to the Israelites (drawing on phrasing that appears twenty-one times in Deuteronomy; reference to God giving the land occurs in each stage of this chapter). Lying behind this is the belief that all land ultimately belongs to God; therefore, he can give it as he wills. These two imperative verbs show that the focus is on the future. But Joshua needed a context for understanding that future, so the balance of the speech's first half recounts some of the key promises that God had made to Israel.

Although God is speaking to Joshua, the promises were directed both to Joshua and to Israel as a whole. Hence “your territory” is plural, since the boundaries described for the land belong to the nation, and this is consistent with the use of the plural through verses 3–4. On the other hand, the promises in verse 5 are in the singular, directed to Joshua in particular, even if Israel could take comfort from them.

Verses 3–4 thus describe the boundaries of the land that God had promised to Israel—broadly those described to Abram in Gen 15:18–21.⁵ Here, though, “the wilderness” stands for the area around the “brook of Egypt” in Gen 15:18, and “the Hittites” stand for all the peoples of the land listed in Gen 15:19–20, meaning that the reference is to a Canaanite group rather than the better-known Hittites whose empire was based in Anatolia.⁶ The “wilderness” represents the region of the Negev to the south, while Lebanon is the northern boundary, though this is also traced eastward to the Euphrates. The Mediterranean is a natural boundary to the west. As Hubbard has pointed out, these boundaries are more than

⁴ As Sarah Lebharr Hall, *Conquering Character: The Characterization of Joshua in Joshua 1–11* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 13, argues, the characterization of Joshua only makes sense in light of this function.

⁵ G. Matties, *Joshua* (Harrisonburg, PA: Herald Press, 2012), 47, notes that the boundaries used here represent typical Egyptian descriptions of Canaan in the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries BC.

⁶ See R. S. Hess, *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 70–71.

Joshua was ever realistically going to walk,⁷ and it would not be until the time of David that Israel's boundaries would closely approximate these (2 Samuel 8). But the idea of walking them seems to relate to the idea that when land was exchanged the one acquiring it would walk the boundaries, something that might lie in the background of the removal of the sandal of the kinsman unwilling to act as levirate (Deut 25:9–10).⁸

Although the promise in verse 5 would have resonance for the rest of Israel, it is particular to Joshua. As the one called to lead Israel, he needed to know that no enemy would be able to resist him for the whole of his life, language that refers specifically to military opposition in Deut 7:24 and 11:25.⁹ This promise has a clear time limit—one reason why we need to understand Israel's taking of the land as a one-off event in God's purposes. No one could later make this claim, which significantly undermines Nelson's assertion that Joshua here functions as a type for Josiah.¹⁰ Although some broad parallels between them exist (as we would expect for significant leaders), this verse makes clear that no successor could automatically claim God's presence. God would not forsake Joshua because there was a specific task that he had ahead of him, something made clear by the fact that this promise follows on from the two imperatives that occur immediately after the news of Moses' death. Obedience to those commands is already the basis for fulfillment of the promises, both to Joshua and to Israel.

1:6–9. The second half of God's speech also begins with two imperatives ("Be strong and courageous"), though these two are effectively synonyms.¹¹ These imperatives follow logically from the promise of verse 5—if no one could resist Joshua, then there was no basis for fear. Instead, as leader he was to distribute the land that God had sworn to give to their ancestors (adapting phrasing found five times in Deuteronomy). The land is thus simultaneously God's gift and something to be claimed

⁷ R. L. Hubbard Jr., *Joshua*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 78.

⁸ This practice is expressly carried out for the allocation of land to nine tribes in Josh 18:8–10.

⁹ This makes the claim of Earl, *Reading Joshua as Christian Scripture*, 122, that Joshua was not really interested in conquest sit oddly with the text's own posture.

¹⁰ R. D. Nelson, "Josiah in the Book of Joshua," *JBL* 100.4 (1981), 531–40. For more wide-ranging criticisms of this thesis, see Butler, *Joshua 1–12*, WBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 202–4.

¹¹ For the military background of this phrase, see Rowlett, *Joshua and the Rhetoric of Violence*, especially 156–80.

and allotted. Verse 7 provides a more specific focus for Joshua: He was to be strong and very courageous in carefully observing all the instruction (תּוֹרָה) that God had given through Moses. This was not simply a set of facts to be known but rather a life that was to be lived—and living this life would take effort. Drawing on the common metaphor of life as a journey, the idea is that Joshua should stay on the path that this instruction provides rather than take alternative routes, for this is the means by which he would succeed. This success is related to the task that God had given Joshua, so walking faithfully in the Mosaic instruction was the means by which Joshua could lead the people into the land that God had promised.

Joshua was to meditate (הִגֵּד) on this instruction. The verb, with a similar promise of success, also occurs in Ps 1:2 and means something like “growl” or “mutter.” This verbal element is more apparent in Ps 2:1, where it is translated “plot.” It is difficult to match this word to a single English verb since “meditate” is often thought of as a silent activity. That the instruction was to be in Joshua’s “mouth” is an idiom that goes naturally with the verb. Thus, he would continue reflecting on its meaning, with such reflection being verbal. This relates to the fact that reading in the ancient world meant reading aloud. In the same way, reflection on it was verbal. But what matters in particular is that Joshua’s life was to be shaped by faithfulness to God’s instruction. At this stage in the book we might think of this as unproblematic, but as the ensuing chapters unfold it becomes clear that Joshua would need to wrestle with the intent of the instruction in order to determine how it was to be applied in a range of circumstances.¹² This would require seeing the instruction as guidance for situations that would be faced rather than as a comprehensive set of rules that could simply be applied. Joshua would need a deep knowledge of God’s instruction, which meant both knowing its content and reflecting on how it could be applied. Therefore, it could not depart from his mouth, because only by continued recitation/meditation could he both know it and understand how to apply it. Psalm 1 then broadens out this possibility for all believers.

God’s speech then concludes with a reminder of the command to be strong and courageous so that Joshua would understand there is no place for fear because Yahweh would go with him. Joshua could succeed and lead his people to success when he understood that his role as a leader

¹² See §1 (“Faithfulness and Obedience”).

was to journey with God, know God's instruction, and shape his life by it. Success here does not mean something financial but to receive the things that God is giving. We might perhaps think of "success" as flourishing in the life God has prepared—which is the way it is developed in Psalm 1. Here, that flourishing would be military, as Israel received the land God gave.

1:10–11. God's command in verse 2 had been for Joshua to prepare the people to cross the Jordan. Joshua could not do this on his own, so the first stage involved him commanding the officers to go through the camp and tell the people to ready their provisions to cross the Jordan in three days to possess the land God was giving them. A key verb here is עָבַר, which is translated "go through," whereas when speaking of the Jordan it is translated "crossing." Use of this verb echoes God's command in verse 2 and also prepares for chapters 3–4, where it will function as a key word in the narrative (occurring twenty-two times). In this way, the narrative makes clear that Joshua was indeed obeying God.

The identity of the officers (שוֹטְרֵי) Joshua commanded is unclear, but it is possible they were military officers with some form of adjunct judicial role.¹³ In any case, it shows a continuation of the pattern established in Exodus 18 and Num 11:16–30 of sharing leadership functions, even when there was a central leader. Joshua may have been the main leader, but he was not a solo figure. At this stage he seems to have anticipated a fairly rapid departure, though in fact there was nothing in God's speech that required it to be as soon as three days' time. Another period of three days is mentioned in Josh 3:2, and somehow we have to account for the time when the spies were in Jericho, not least because Rahab told them to hide for three days before returning to the camp (2:16). We can find ways to make these time periods match up,¹⁴ but it is probably better to think of "three days" as an idiom not dissimilar in meaning to the English "a few days," permitting openness rather than providing chronological

¹³ See P. S. Johnston, "Civil Leadership in Deuteronomy," in *Interpreting Deuteronomy: Issues and Approaches*, ed. D. G. Firth and P. S. Johnston (Nottingham: Apollos, 2012), 147.

¹⁴ The best attempt at this is D. M. Howard Jr., "Three Days' in Joshua 1–3: Resolving a Chronological Conundrum," *JETS* 41.4 (1998): 539–50. Howard proposes a seven-day structure that allows the various periods to overlap with one another. His system does work, but it is difficult (albeit not impossible) to make the consecutive verb with which chapter 2 commences concurrent with events in this chapter.

exactitude. The point is that the nation needed to be ready to move when summoned by God to do so.

1:12–15. Although the land promised by God was west of the Jordan, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh had received their allocation of land in Gilead east of the Jordan in Numbers 32 (though the other half of Manasseh would settle west of the Jordan). This happened with the understanding that they would join the remaining tribes and not return to their territory until the land west of the Jordan was taken for their kinsfolk. These tribes needed to be reminded of that commitment because, although there would be divisions among them (as seen in chapter 22), the taking of the land was the task of all Israel. Unity was essential. Thus, Joshua summoned them to remember the command that God had given through Moses.

The words attributed to Moses in verse 13 are summaries of what he said in Num 32:20–22 and again in Deut 3:18–20. Joshua’s quote is not exact but provides the essence of the earlier discussion. The quote itself is not the commandment, since it does not direct the eastern tribes to do anything but rather assures them that God had allotted the land east of the Jordan. Strictly, their territory was to the north of where Israel then was, but “this land” (v. 13) is more generally understood as the territory east of the Jordan. Rather, the command is the conclusion Joshua drew from the larger conversation between Moses and the eastern tribes in Num 32:16–27 in which they had accepted Moses’ proposal—that their wives, children, and livestock remain in the east while they cross over and fight—as a command from him since they had promised to do so. The fighting men of the eastern tribes were to go over ahead of their kinsfolk, prepared for battle (see Josh 4:12).

Although it is not mentioned, the assumption is that the other men (those too old, too young, or who for some other reason could not fight) would have stayed with the women, children, and livestock. For the eastern tribes, this was a risky process since, militarily at least, all they had would be left vulnerable while they assisted their kinsfolk. But just as they had received rest in the land now allotted to them, so also their kinsfolk needed to receive rest in the land that God had promised. Only when that had happened could these tribes return to their territory (recounted in chapter 22).

1:16–18. The response of the eastern tribes was positive, accepting that Joshua’s directive to remember Moses’ words should be understood

as a command. Thus, they would leave their families and livestock east of the Jordan and go where Joshua directed. Indeed, they equated their earlier commitment to Moses with their present commitment to Joshua. Given the various ways in which the Israelites had failed to obey Moses during the period in the wilderness, this might not sound like the most wholehearted of commitments. But if we understand this in terms of the commitments made in Numbers 32, then it can be understood more positively, which is probably what is intended by the eastern tribes. However, for the narrator there may well be a note of irony in this claim, especially as there will be points in the book where such wholehearted obedience seems to be lacking. That the eastern tribes intended it positively seems borne out by their wish that God be with Joshua as he had been with Moses and that therefore all should obey Joshua.

This obedience is forcefully expressed, referring to Joshua's "order" (פֶּה), "words" (דְּבָרִים), and all that he might "command" (צוה). To some extent, these three should be seen as synonymous, though the last represents a more formal directive than the other two. The repetition of the concept is what matters most. Thus, regardless of how Joshua might express a directive, it was to be obeyed, and failure to do so would constitute rebellion meriting the death penalty. Aaron had been put to death for rebellion against God (Num 20:24), background that suggests the eastern tribes understood failing to obey Joshua in the upcoming campaign as disobeying God. Since the verb for "rebel" here is not particularly common, a reference to Aaron is probably intended, meaning that the chapter begins and ends with reference to the deaths of the nation's two most prominent leaders. We are probably to interpret this understanding of rebellion as part of the background to the conflict between east and west in chapter 22 when the western tribes were prepared to attack the eastern because of a perceived failure to obey. Although that chapter will demonstrate that obedience is more complex than is sometimes imagined, what matters here is the intent.

The eastern tribes also expressed the wish that God would be with Joshua as he had been with Moses (v. 17), the very thing that God promised Joshua in verse 9. Furthermore, they charged Joshua to be strong and courageous (v. 18), echoing God's words in verse 9. Thus, they expressed the mutual commitment that existed between them and Joshua, and the echoes of God's words bring the chapter to a neat close, balancing their words with his.

Bridge

As the introduction to the whole book, this chapter establishes a number of key themes that will be developed as it progresses.¹⁵ First, we should note the ways in which it links the past, present, and future. Here, the text is anchored in Israel's past through the many references to Numbers and Deuteronomy. If Israel was to understand its position, then it had to be rooted in the past, in those points where the promises of God were made and expounded, where their own experience had shown the reality of those promises. Here, they are not explicitly referenced, but the constant engagement with passages from earlier parts of the Pentateuch shows that Israel needed this background. There were obvious reasons for this in their context. They needed to know that the land they were about to enter was the one God had promised. But they also needed to be reminded that this past was not all glorious success. Mention of Moses' death, and allusion to Aaron's in verse 18, means the chapter as a whole is bookended by references to points where even the great leaders of the past had failed. The past thus provided Israel with hope for going forward while at the same time showing that they could not simply assume God would go with them.

The past also shaped Israel's present. In Joshua's case this meant not only that he could be assured of God's presence, but also that his own life was to be shaped by continual reflection on God's instruction. This would provide him with the resources to know what a life of obedience to God—which included being strong and courageous—would look like. For the eastern tribes, this meant obeying Joshua as the one whom God had called. This reflection on past and present also provided an understanding of the future in which Israel could advance with confidence into the land that God was giving, living a life that was shaped by obedience.

This integration of past, present, and future is something that occurs at many places in the Bible—indeed, we return to it in Joshua's final addresses in chapters 23 and 24. But it is perhaps seen most clearly in the celebration of the Lord's Supper as the point when we remember Jesus' death, understand what it is to be part of his community as the church, and look to the future as we “proclaim the Lord's death until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26). The book of Joshua suggests that reflection on the past to

¹⁵ See especially §1 (“Faithfulness and Obedience”), §4 (“Land as God's Gift”), and §5 (“Leadership”).

understand the present and so illumine the future was fundamental to Israel's communal life, and the same continues to be true for the church.

A second key theme focuses on the nature of leadership. The reference to Moses and allusion to Aaron stress the point that all human leaders, no matter how great, will at times fail. Indeed, although Moses had accused the people of being rebels at Meribah (Num 20:10), the reality is that he and Aaron had rebelled against God there. Neither, therefore, had entered the land. But God's speech to Joshua makes clear that what mattered most was continuing the work God had set before his people. Of first importance was not the leader but rather the task to which God had called the leader. Joshua's status at this point is clearly less than that of Moses, but he will eventually obtain the title "servant of the Lord" because of his faithfulness to the work. Leadership is thus not about accumulating authority but about faithfully doing what God calls one to do. As with Moses, Joshua shared the work with others because leadership is not about aggregating tasks to oneself so that people are dependent on a particular leader but rather recognizing the proper giftedness of each person so that they all contribute to the work God has set out.

Leadership is an important theme in the book.¹⁶ Though Joshua would not always be a successful leader, the heart of his leadership is found in his continued reflection on God's instruction. Psalm 1 makes it clear that this is not restricted to leaders, since all believers can profitably do so, but it is particularly important that leaders are shaped by such reflection. By the time of the New Testament, we may note the extent to which Paul's ministry was shaped by his continual reflection on the Scriptures. Although there is no doubt that Paul's gifts and experience of the Spirit played their part in this (and as I have noted, Joshua's own experience of God's Spirit is in the background here too), his grounding in the Scriptures and continued reflection on them is a clear contributor to his ministry's effectiveness. This may also be one reason why he was keen that leaders not be new converts (1 Tim 3:6), since those without a grounding in the Scriptures were more likely to be "puffed up with conceit."

Finally, we can note the theme of the presence of God. God assured Joshua of his presence with him (vv. 5, 9), while the eastern tribes

¹⁶ See especially D.J. McCarthy, "The Theology of Leadership in Joshua 1–9," *Biblica* 52.2 (1971): 165–75.

expressed this as a wish for Joshua (v. 18). God’s presence throughout the chapter is linked to obedience, perhaps because obedience is the means by which God’s people truly discover what the reality of his presence is like. This theme is picked up by the writer to the Hebrews (in 13:5, a text that is similar to Deut 31:6 and Josh 1:5 without quite being a quote from either¹⁷) and applied to the church in general, but it is most fully understood through Jesus’ promise at the end of Matthew’s Gospel (Matt 28:16–20). A church that joins in God’s mission is a church that most fully experiences God’s presence.

B. Rahab and the Spies in Jericho (2:1–24)

¹ Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two men as spies from the Acacia Grove, saying, “Go and scout the land, especially Jericho.” So they left, and they came to the house of a prostitute named Rahab, and stayed there.

² The king of Jericho was told, “Look, some of the Israelite men have come here tonight to investigate the land.” ³ Then the king of Jericho sent word to Rahab and said, “Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, for they came to investigate the entire land.”

⁴ But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. So she said, “Yes, the men did come to me, but I didn’t know where they were from.” ⁵ At nightfall, when the city gate was about to close, the men went out, and I don’t know where they were going. Chase after them quickly, and you can catch up with them!” ⁶ But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them among the stalks of flax that she had arranged on the roof. ⁷ The men pursued them along the road to the fords of the Jordan, and as soon as they left to pursue them, the city gate was shut.

⁸ Before the men fell asleep, she went up on the roof ⁹ and said to them, “I know that the LORD has given you this land and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and everyone who lives in the land is panicking because of you. ¹⁰ For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings you completely destroyed across the Jordan. ¹¹ When we heard this, we lost heart, and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on earth below. ¹² Now please swear to me by the LORD that you will also show kindness to my father’s family, because I showed kindness to you. Give me a sure sign ¹³ that you will spare the lives of my father, mother, brothers, sisters, and all who belong to them, and save us from death.”

¹⁷ See T. R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews* (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 413–14.