

ARTICLE 1

JOSHUA 3:7–17, A SYNTHETIC EXPLORATION

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ABSTRACT

Joshua 3:7–17 can be constructed in a way that respects duly the intention of its authors and its position within the Hebrew Bible. The text can be divided into two sections which are investigated according to three conventions: the narrative’s space-time setting, the characterization of God, and the utilization of the ark of the covenant as a literary device. Throughout, special attention is paid to the connection articulated between Moses and Joshua, as well as the relationship between Israel and YHWH. The greater process of textual de- and re-construction yields understanding as to how those circumstances antecedent to Josh 3 catalyse the events of the passage, while furthermore clarifying the necessity of Josh 3 to those events post-Josh 3. The essay concludes that Josh 3 ultimately acts as a preparation point wherein Israel’s disposition in the wake of her wilderness-era is confronted and refined, that she might be theologically equipped for the events unfurled in the book’s latter chapters.

The Joshua narrative acts broadly as the bridge between the Torah and the Nevi’im—working to culminate the legal writings antecedent to the book and provide exposition to the following prophetic ones.¹ Its position in Bible lends it well to this task; be it witting or not, Josh’s method of textual unification works twofold—depicting the actualization of the Promised Land² while establishing the socio-political scene from which the DtrH stems. It is against the pseudo-success of Joshua’s campaigns that Judges is felt all the more bitterly and that the subsequent rise and fall of the monarchy is framed.

The book plays frequently with a pattern of call and response that is most apparent throughout its initial half.³ Within, the operation of Israel’s military apparatus is directed as per divine instruction delivered through Joshua.⁴ Beyond the first half of the book, this pattern takes

¹ Trent C. Butler, “The theology of Joshua,” *RevExp* 95, no. 2 (1998): 203, <https://doi.org/10.1177/003463739809500206>. I would clarify that it seems to me the true culmination of the Torah (if indeed we can apply the notion of a culmination) is found in the formation of the Sinaitic Covenant. In writing “culminate” here, I mean to state in a holistic sense that Joshua brings to a general fruition the land expectation born of the Abrahamic Covenant in a way that is perhaps deliberately absent from the Torah.

² Speaking directly to the Abrahamic Covenant in its 4 iterations: see Gen 15:19; cf. Gen 15:16, 17:8, 22:17; Josh 3:15, 17:8, 22:17.

³ See Josh chapters 1 (toward crossing and conquest: God commands, Joshua prepares), 5 (toward circumcision: God commands, Joshua executes), 6 (toward the battle of Jericho: God commands, Joshua executes), etc.

⁴ Ann Gillian Chu, “Announcing God’s presence through narration and dialogue: An exegesis of Joshua 3,”

on different from as the narrative moves from conquest to administration. The land's allotment (Josh 12–22), followed by Joshua's final address (Josh 23–24), recalls more directly the governing divine agenda.⁵ As Gordon Wenham observes, these two dynamics are a manifestation of the book's greater thematic skew—its contents speak continuously to the relationship the covenant has stipulated between YHWH and the Israelites.⁶ Framed by the book's opening and concluding chapters, this theme narrows to comment specifically on the necessity of Israel's obedience to the LORD, and the LORD's prevailing character in its absence. Where chapters 23 and 24 warn against transgression of the covenant, chapters 1 through 5 examine YHWH's redoubled dedication to the Israelites in the wake of their transgressions. It is the extent of this dedication and its stipulations that Joshua's author(s) seems so intent to explore.⁷ Especially pre-conquest (chapters 1–5), the relational current between Israel and her God falls under constant tension and assessment. This makes sense—Israel therein finds herself on the cusp of great change.

The apparent centrepiece of these opening chapters—Josh 3:1–17—grants a better understanding of this relational dynamic and its intended extrapolations. Within, three motifs demand specific attention: the setting, both chronological and geographical; the characterization of God in interaction with Joshua and then the Jordan; and the nature of the ark. Respectively, these elements clarify the situation's significance, speak to the author's understanding of the LORD's disposition, and explore how Israel is made to interact with this disposition. Toward an orderly deconstruction of the text, the passage will be divided into a call (vv. 7–13) and a response (vv. 14–17), hereon Section I and Section II. Within the two, each motif will be traced, analysed, and reconciled.

SECTION I: JOSHUA 3:7–13

Concerning setting, it can be said that Section I's location proves particularly opaque compared to its counterpart's. Aside from the Jordan, v. 10's list of peoples appears the only geographically-pertinent element of the passage. As such, I would argue that vv. 7–13 lend themselves most intuitively to a chronological orientation. This is exemplified even in the

Resonance: A Theological Journal 4, no. 4 (2018): 62, [https://www.academia.edu/37891181/Announcing_Gods_Presence_Through_Narration_and_Dialogue_an_Exegesis_of_Joshua_3](https://www.academia.edu/37891181/Announcing_Gods_Presence_Through_Narration_and_Dialogue_an_Exegesis_of_Joshua_3;); Jonathan J. Routley, "The prophet Joshua? The neglected ministry of the prophet of the conquest," *JETS* 65, no. 1 (2022): 53, https://www.hdcnepal.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/The_Prophet_Joshua_The_Neglected_Ministr.pdf.

⁵ A non-exhaustive list of examples: 13:6, 15:13, 22:9, 23:3–5.

⁶ Gordon J. Wenham, "The deuteronomical theology of the book of Joshua," *JBL* 90, no. 2 (1971): 141, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3263755>.

⁷ Save for briefly, the matter of Joshua's authorship will not be discussed. Beyond this point, I have made the decision to refer to the authorial power behind Joshua as the book's "author," unless context demands otherwise. This is for the sake of consistency as well as personal preference.

section's exposition:

The LORD said to Joshua, “This day I will *begin* to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I *will be* with you as I *was* with Moses” (Josh 3:7 NRSV, emphasis added).

In delineating a connection between Joshua and Moses, the passage depicts Joshua beside his predecessor, across time. Even without this prompting, the parallels between the two are obvious—so obvious as to seem to invite continual, informative comparison across their subsequent narratives.⁸ This approach proves fruitful as the passage progresses; v. 7's direct connection between Moses and Joshua is repeated with subtle precision throughout the remainder of Section I.⁹ In their dialogue with God, martial-esque appointment over Israel, and respective crossings, the actions and figures of Moses and Joshua appear largely inter-referential.¹⁰ The demonstration of this connection calls to mind the progression of Israel's present journey, an objective duly supported by the verse's grammatical framework. Those words italicized above speak literally to the scene's chronological situation: Section I marks a mid-point on the timeline of Israel's liberation, flowing from Moses through Joshua. Indeed, Wenham states that, “It is clearly a fundamental concern of the editor to demonstrate that Joshua was the divinely appointed . . . successor to Moses.”¹¹

The reigning rationale in this appointment becomes evident upon further chronological orientation. In the articulation of the Moses-Joshua connection, a picture of the Josh 3 generation begins to emerge. Intertwined, I believe, is the question as to the narrative relevance of Joshua's exaltation. Considering its inclusion in the text, it appears necessary that Israel be made aware of God's continued relationship with her leader.¹² I would argue that this is due largely to three principal events: the crossing of the sea (Exod 14), the renewal of the covenant (Deut 29), and the failure to enter the Promised Land (Num 14). In examination of these passages, the image formed of Joshua's Israelites portrays a people removed from the profundity of the Exodus and left waiting on God post-Deut 29. As such, it's likely that the Josh 3 generation struggled with some combination of ignorance and doubt, ostensibly akin to Deuteronomy's “stubbornness.”¹³ This is entirely preceded—Moses ascribes as much to the

⁸ I.G. Matthews, “Expository studies in the Old Testament: IX. Joshua, the successor of Moses,” *The Biblical World* 30, no. 3 (1907): 215, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3140585>.

⁹ Chu, “Announcing God's presence,” 64.

¹⁰ Respectively as paired, Josh 3:7, Exod 33:1–3; Exod 17:8, Josh 3:9–10 (implied); Exod 14, Josh 3:7–17.

¹¹ Wenham, “The deuteronomical theology,” 145.

¹² Joshua himself is already aware of this connection (see Josh 1:5). The repetition of the connection in view of Israel implies a greater purpose in its public assertion.

¹³ Deut 10:16, cf. 29:19. It bears saying that this “stubbornness” is not necessarily a present state—discerning such a thing falls beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, the present state of the Israelites at minimum risks developing

pre-Joshua generation, attributing Israel's ignorance to divine intention.¹⁴ The effects of this state culminate in Num 14, the circumstance into which the Josh 3 generation has been born.

As per this position, it would follow that Israel's sight of the imperative Moses-Joshua connection would have been lost in the moment of Josh 3:7. This notion is all but proven in the direct imputation that the Israelites did not yet "know" of YHWH's continued work in Israel through Joshua.¹⁵ From a literary standpoint, it is the chronological articulation of the Moses-Joshua relation that situates the continuity of God's work in the textual foreground.¹⁶ In much the same way, it would appear as though the commencement of Joshua's exaltation (that is, those events both including and directly precluding the crossing of the Jordan) would have revealed the continuation of YHWH's activity to Israel (cf. Deut 29:6). Consequently, I would contend that the declaration of the Moses-Joshua connection would have functioned toward realigning Israel with her Sinaitic commitment, delivering her from any internal condition inhibiting her achievement of Deut 29's covenantal standard. In a sense, this process would engineer a reversal of Deut 29:4, engendering a sort of preventative "circumcision of the heart."¹⁷ This realignment is made imperative in consideration of the conditions across the Jordan; if the present train of thought is to be followed, the process of Joshua's exaltation would have served to equip Israel for her role post-Josh 3.¹⁸

This concept is developed further through the characterization of God, observed in his interaction with Joshua. The predominance of dialogue within the section again reinforces the continuity of the divine in Israel, displaying in turn the LORD's willingness to speak and his expectation of response. The extent of this expectation is clarified in Joshua's commission:

into something akin to "stubbornness" with all its requisite consequences. Taken in the context of the entirety of Deut 29, the designation of this parallel highlights the potential scope and severity of those repercussions that might stem from Israel's present disconnection with her theological obligations. It is in view of Deut 29 that the underlying *enjeux* of Josh 3 are revealed—Israel's success in the Promised Land hinges entirely upon her commitment to the agenda articulated in the Sinaitic Covenant.

¹⁴ Deut 29:2–4. This condition (be it intentional or otherwise) is displayed repeatedly throughout the wilderness narratives, most famously in that of the golden calf (Exod 32).

¹⁵ Josh 3:7.

¹⁶ Routley, "The prophet Joshua?" 58. Later on this thought continues: Josh 14–22 (Joshua's allotment of the land west of the Jordan) is preceded by a record of Moses' allotment of the land east of the Jordan (ch 13), delineating the same chronological continuity from another angle. Cf. Josh 22:9 in synthesis of call/response and Moses-Joshua.

¹⁷ As described in Deut 30:6. The role of the LORD in the circumcision of the heart within 30:6 places the state of being "circumcised of heart" against that of being divinely prevented from understanding the "signs and wonders" (Deut 29:3) of the wilderness as in Deut 29:4. As per this connection, I would argue the former might be taken as a true reversal of the latter even without outright statement.

¹⁸ Expounded upon in the concluding section of this essay.

You are the one who shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, “When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan” (Josh 3:8).

John Beck describes this command as “a logistical nightmare”—a statement supported by both Biblical narrative and historical record.¹⁹ In effect, Joshua is being asked to partake in an enormous act of trust: do not merely cross the Jordan, but “*stand still*” in its midst.²⁰ This notion is broadened in the connection of the section’s dialogical scheme with the call-and-response throughout the book. Ann Chu contends that the communication-oriented dynamic between the LORD and Israel (in whatever synecdochic form she might appear) ultimately asserts “the unswerving authority of a monotheistic God who manifests himself through language.”²¹ When layered, the combination of Beck and Chu’s perspectives underscores the greater thrust of v. 8. Upon no uncertain terms, the LORD has demanded Joshua perform a nigh-on-impossible task requiring complete reliance upon forces categorically beyond the notion of possibility. This is an inherently intimate, trust-demanding act.

Verse 9 includes the greater Israel in this process, depicting her (in a definitively non-synecdochic sense) as an active recipient of the LORD’s words in v. 10:

Joshua then said to the Israelites, “Draw near and hear the words of the LORD your God.” Joshua said, “*By this you [Israel] shall know that among you is the living God* who without fail will drive out from before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Gergashites, Amorites, and Jebusites” (Josh 3:9–10).

Portrayed clearly as the LORD’s and conveyed in direct attention of and noted proximity to the people of Israel, the words parallel (and thus ratify, to a certain extent) the intimacy manufactured in the LORD’s personal call to Joshua.²² In v. 10, YHWH’s presence is confirmed to be manifest in the logically absurd conquest to come; in the following declaration of his life and proximity to the Israelites, it is emphasized. Somewhat shortsightedly, J. Michael Thigpen argues that the phrase, “the living God,” explicitly contrasts YHWH with Baal on the basis that Josh 3 is a polemic against Baal’s supremacy.²³ Provided the weight of the chapter, such a stance feels too restrictive to be compelling. However, his observations as to the nuance of the phrase

¹⁹ John A. Beck, “Why do Joshua’s readers keep crossing the river? The narrative–geographical shaping of Joshua 3–4,” *JETS* 48, no. 4 (2005): 696, https://etsjets.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/files_JETS-PDFs_48_48-4_JETS_48-4_689-699.pdf; Carl von Clausewitz, *On war*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 532-33, as cited by Beck, “Joshua’s readers,” 697–98; 1 Chronicles 12:1–14: traversal of Jordan counted as military laud.

²⁰ From v. 8, italicized here for effect.

²¹ Chu, “Announcing God’s presence,” 62.

²² This can be seen in v. 9’s, “Draw near and hear . . .” Cf. footnote no. 17: Once again, an idea has been revealed first to Joshua and then broadcasted to Israel.

²³ J. Michael Thigpen, “LORD of all the earth: Yahweh and Baal in Joshua 3,” *TJ* 27, no. 2 (2006): 245–54, <https://research.ebsco.com/c/twg5t6/viewer/pdf/pbhw76c7nf?route=details>.

are interesting. He postulates that a correct translation emphasizes “the *living* God” rather than “*the* living God,” thus qualifying “living” as an inherency rather than a title, and magnifying God’s power by virtue of its immediacy and vigour.²⁴ This idea is sharpened by the remainder of v. 10 as well as v. 13’s supplementary honorific, “Lord of all the earth.”²⁵ This title not only invokes v. 10’s martial declaration but, in the same vein as Thigpen’s thought, elevates YHWH above the gods associated with v. 10’s peoples. Simultaneously, he is presented as closely in relationship with Israel and ultimately powerful over all circumstances.²⁶ Israel’s implied acceptance of this marks a departure from her wilderness ideology, yet again in preparation for the coming conquest.

It’s here that the ark of the covenant becomes relevant. Referenced three times in the present verses (vv. 8, 11, 13) and thrice more in those antecedent (vv. 2, 6), each time it is accompanied by a unique appellation of the structure, “the ark [of the covenant] [of the Lord] [of all the Earth]” (Josh 3:8, 11, 13). In the interest of transparency, I feel it necessary to remark upon Morris Jastrow’s interpretation of the lines at hand: Looking to obviate the variations in prose, he points to discrepancies between manuscripts, claiming that v. 11 was originally without the ark, reading, “... the Lord of all the earth is passing over ...”²⁷ That being said, the text still emphasizes the power of the LORD, whether through the ark or outright, irrespective of the validity of Jastrow’s conclusion(s).

Concerning the text’s present, ark-in translation, George Coats recognizes two main points of interest: “1) the ark is to be carried by the Levites; and 2) the ark leads the procession ...”²⁸ Point one is made relevant in symbol. In bearing the ark, the requisite faction of Israelite society (arguably another example of synecdoche) is made to support the covenantal embodiment upon their shoulders. In this, they simultaneously represent and fulfil the action they are carrying out, portraying an early but resonant and necessary adherence to the covenant. Coats’ second point is duly apt. Beyond Josh 3, the ark sits rarely at the forefront of Israel’s activities.²⁹ I. G. Matthews concludes that this stems from an inherent difference in circumstance between Josh 3 and those relevant passages which follow, contrasting crossing (miraculous) and

²⁴ Ibid., 246–47.

²⁵ The inclusion of “without fail” in conjunction with the list of peoples to-be-defeated asserts a complete and certain dominance.

²⁶ Interesting to explore, and perhaps related to this dichotomy, would be the commutability of the LORD’s voice through Joshua (or whoever the relevant mouthpiece might be) as an indication and/or direct manifestation of his presence.

²⁷ Morris Jastrow Jr., “Joshua 3:16,” *JBL* 36, no. 1 (1917): 55–57, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3259275>.

²⁸ George W. Coats, “The Ark of the Covenant in Joshua: A probe into the history of a tradition,” *HAR* 9, (1985): 138, <https://kb.osu.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/55ad3409-3e67-59c9-a524-b93840f1512b/content>.

²⁹ Cf. Josh 6:8, for example: the ark follows the foreguard around Jericho.

conquest (divinely-sanctioned but Israelite-enacted).³⁰ I would argue that the discrepancy in placement indicates a difference in purpose. Unlike Joshua's campaigns which are expressly rooted in the spiritual and ethnic sterilization of Canaan, the crossing of the Jordan acts in explicit advancement of Torah's pursuit of rest, facilitated by Sinai's covenant.³¹ Support for this can be found in vv. 8 and 13 as the words "still" and "rest," deployed in conjunction with the ark, juxtapose the Jordan's volatility and, more holistically, demonstrate a deliberate, quietly dominating opposition by way of the ark to that which was threateningly chaotic. This is in direct parallel to Num 10:

So they set out from the mount of the LORD three days' journey *with the ark of the covenant of the LORD going before them* three days' journey, *to seek out a resting place* for them, the cloud of the LORD being over them by day when they set out from the camp. Whenever the ark set out, Moses would say, "Arise, O LORD, let your enemies be scattered and your foes flee before you." *And whenever it came to rest, he would say, "Return, O LORD, to the ten thousand thousands of Israel"* (Num 10:33–36, emphasises added).

The ark's ceremonial position as required in Josh 3:11 recalls Israel's greater Abrahamic goal.

In sum, Section I appears to be an establishment of (1) the LORD's ongoing involvement with Israel, (2) the LORD's ultimate capability, and (3) the necessity of Israel's commitment to the LORD's commands.

SECTION II: JOSHUA 3:14–17

In contrast to its partner, Section II is movement-oriented. As the response to the former's call, it opens in the midst of action, immediately satisfying v. 11's instruction:

When the people set out from their tents to cross over the Jordan, the priests bearing the ark of the covenant were in front of the people (Josh 3:14, emphasis added).

This fulfilment continues throughout the section, which portrays a now-revitalized obedience to the LORD. This shift is present even in II's grammatical structure: the consistent participial conjugations impress a sense of continuous motion upon the reader, quickening the narrative's pace.³² Keeping with this affinity, the passage emphasizes the physical reality of the crossing, highlighting the tangible nature of the endeavour. Much of this emphasis is concentrated in vv. 15–16, wherein the setting appears to be of particular importance. Verse 15's parenthetical

³⁰ Matthews, "Expository studies" 219–221. That is, those passages where the ark is employed similarly.

³¹ Wenham, "The deuteronomic theology," 143. See Deut 12:29–31. As established outright in Josh 1:13. It is worth contextualizing, I feel, that while indeed the first step into Canaan and thus towards Canaan's cleansing (to be blunt and politically incorrect), the crossing acted as a sort of chapter title within Israel's book, beneath which conquest's sub-heading would appear to depict a necessary piece in the process of Israel's book-spanning journey toward restoration.

³² Chu, "Announcing God's presence, 65.

(italicized below) is the most obvious example of this. Understood as an “explanatory gloss” by Morris Jastrow, it heightens the situational tension by underscoring the severity of the Jordan’s condition:³³

Now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest. So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water ... (Josh 3:15, emphasis added).

Thigpen concludes duly that the interruption works to generate tension and furthermore drive home the absurdity of the miracle, during which time the Jordan near Jericho would have been “altogether impossible for the people of Israel [to cross] ...” This reading is supported even by the causal “so” in the latter sentence of v. 15, which is followed by the parting of the waters.³⁴ Read through from v. 14 through 16 while treating 15’s clause as the parenthetical it appears to be, the Jordan’s triviality, even despite its state, becomes abundantly apparent. When the parenthetical is omitted, the text reads something loosely akin to the straightforward, “The ark was in front, so the waters flew back.”

Furthermore, in its juxtaposition to the water’s parting, v. 15’s parenthetical aids v. 16’s description of the miracle’s magnitude:

... the waters flowing from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, were wholly cut off. Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho (Josh 3:16, emphases added).

The description provided is accentuated with a sudden increase in excessive, adjectival language (italicized), as well as with repeated reference to specific locations. This latter tactic appears an attempt to add some level of credibility or physical quantification to the scene. Though congruent with the nature of v. 16, this effect is largely lost on the contemporary reader: There has been significant debate concerning the locations of both Adam and Zarethan, with Jastrow going so far as to say that the inclusion of Adam at all was a textual corruption as per its omission in the Greek text.³⁵ He is an outlier; others place the city near the ford of Damieh, some twenty miles north of Jericho.³⁶ This would make sense—the topography of this location might have (and has) impeded the water’s flow.³⁷ That being said, where precisely this location

³³ Jastrow, “Joshua 3:16,” 54.

³⁴ Thigpen, “Lord of all,” 249–50; C. F. Keil, F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the old testament IV: Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (T&T Clark, 1875), 46. This interpretation holds when applied to the Hebrew text.

³⁵ Jastrow, “Joshua 3:16,” 53–62.

³⁶ Matthews, “Expository studies,” 218; Kiel, Delitzsch, *Biblical commentary*, 46.

³⁷ Lieut.-Colonel C. M. Watson, “The stoppage of the river Jordan in A.D. 1267,” *PEQ* 27, no. 3 (2013): 253–61, doi:10.1179/peq.1895.27.3.253; Matthews, “Expository studies,” 218.

falls is of little importance to the ultimate narrative. Of greater concern (and remarkably little scholarship) would be the question as to whether the pointed inclusion/translation of these locations holds relevant metaphorical implication. For the sake of conjecture, one might wonder whether the names might invoke the “completeness” of the miracle, depicting the waters breaking from Adam (the beginning) to the Dead Sea (the end). If such an assumption were to be made (and perhaps even if it is not), the latter sentence in v. 16 would evolve from another depiction of activity to a representation of Israel’s reactionary, summative movement in the wake of the LORD’s path-paving. Such would adhere to, again, the call-and-response so characteristic of the greater book.

To interpolate thus would be to implicate external intention in even the geography of the miracle. I would argue that this is an entirely logical step.³⁸ This stance is supported perhaps most when it comes to Section II’s development of YHWH. Even though he is referenced only once within vv. 14–17 (in v. 17), his presence is encountered continuously via the actualization of Section I’s plan. In a sense, the author has depicted a photo negative wherein God’s presence is defined by the result of his actions—this is his fingerprint, so to speak. Syntactically, this is represented in chiasm,³⁹ where the climatic phrase (v. 16) is flanked by the initiation and then completion of the crossing (chiastic climax italicized below). These supports accentuate v. 16 itself, wherein the aforementioned participle use, in conjunction with choice diction (“far off,” “wholly cut off”), stresses YHWH’s undisputed dominance over the Jordan:

Now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest. So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, *the waters flowing from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, were wholly cut off. Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho.* While all Israel were crossing over on dry ground, the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firmly on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan (Josh 3:15–17, emphases added).

In defeat of v. 15’s conditions “as soon as” (v. 15) the ark enters the river, divine precedence is truly realized. Jastrow colours this idea with local intertextuality, surmising that v. 13 is fulfilled in v. 16.⁴⁰ Paul Saydon holds to a slightly different approach, writing instead that it is v. 14 that leads to v. 16a.⁴¹ Regardless, God’s presence is made clear in the Jordan’s stopping, despite his literary absence. C. F. Kiel and F. Delitzsch summarize the situation in writing that this chiastic

³⁸ So would: Thomas B. Dozeman, “The book of Joshua in recent research,” *CurrBR* 15, no. 3 (2017): 270–88, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476993X16661918>.

³⁹ Chu, “Announcing God’s presence,” 65–66.

⁴⁰ Jastrow, “Joshua 3:16,” 54–55.

⁴¹ Paul P. Saydon, “The crossing of the Jordan: Josue 3; 4,” *CBQ* 12, no. 2 (1950): 200, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43720202>.

moment “brings out in all its fullness the miracle ... by the omnipotence of God,” thus eliminating any doubt as to the true nature of the river’s stopping.⁴² It is in consideration of the Jordan’s Hebrew translation (“descending”) that this thought is made complete; there can be no denial of divine intervention when the Jordan is transformed instantaneously from raging downward force to upright wall.⁴³

This moment is magnified again by the ark. Within Section II, focus falls specifically to what the device accomplishes, rather than what it represents. Coats speaks again to this, reaffirming the assertion that vv. 14–17 function as the ritual fulfilment of vv. 7–13, suggesting that the ark acts as the nucleus from whence the fulfilling conditions to the miracle are met.⁴⁴ While the ark’s first mention is ancillary, reaffirming its place “before the people” (Josh 3:14), its second two references in v. 15 bear more weight, depicting its entrance into the Jordan. Interestingly, the ark itself does not touch the water to begin the miracle. Instead, it is at the moment when the *priests* meet the river that the waters are flung back:

So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were *dipped in the edge of the water*, the waters flowing from above stood still ... (Josh 3:15b–16a, emphasis added).

The author goes to lengths to show that the priests’ interaction with the Jordan is minimal; it is only the most logically immediate part of their body that enters the barest bit of the river before the miracle is enacted. Undoubtedly, this emphasizes the sheer authority of Israel’s God, acting immediately and successfully even in indirect contact with the victim of his power. This would be a satisfactory conclusion if it had not, by now, been underscored sevenfold.

Rather, in view of Section I’s encouraging attitude toward any Moses-Joshua comparison,⁴⁵ I am convinced that a portion of the fullness of Section II is revealed only when held against Moses’ own Section II-esque event—the crossing of the Red Sea. The following parallel between the two episodes are evident:

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left (Exod 14:21–22).

⁴² C. F. Kiel and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical commentary*, 46.

⁴³ Chu, “Announcing God’s presence,” 66.

⁴⁴ Coats, “The ark,” 138–41.

⁴⁵ (And operating upon the undoubtedly reasonable assumption that the writer(s) of our text did not truncate the employment of their various devices in accordance with the Section I, Section II demarcation I’ve made.)

While all Israel were crossing over on dry ground, the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firmly on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan (Josh 3:17).

In Josh 3:17's depiction of the Jordan's crossing, there is no "strong east wind"—or any such force at all—to drive back the Jordan.⁴⁶ It is in the absence of this force that the significance of the ark is revealed. Paired, the unit comprised of the ark and priests functionally replicates the work of Exodus' wind, clearing a way that Israel might pass "on dry ground," just as they did across the sea. This is monumental. Suddenly, what God has been proven to be able to do alone is made to be accomplished through the union of man and divine, manifested in the ark. This idea appears so integral to the narrative that an opportunity to reiterate the profundity of YHWH's power in direct recollection of the Red Sea has been deliberately sacrificed upon the altar of its inclusion.

In sum, Section II appears to be the affirmation of (1) the LORD's ongoing involvement with Israel, (2) the LORD's ultimate capability, and (3) the fruits of Israel's cooperation in what the LORD demands of her.

SYNTHESIS

In conversation with its surrounding texts, Josh 3:7–17 speaks profoundly to what it means to be in correct relationship with God as an Israelite. Its position in scripture situates the text at what is the debut of a new era for the Hebrews. No longer do they find themselves under Egypt or wandering in the unknown—Josh 3 effectively marks the first offensive step toward covenant actualization. This thought is apparent in the ways the author of the text has seamlessly integrated past themes with new precedents, crafting a narrative that places the victories to come in terms of those that have passed.

In textual terms, the passage marks the evolution from the passive Exod 14:4, "The LORD will fight for you, and ... you have only to be silent," to the active Josh 1:7, "Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you." As Israel's position relative to her larger purpose changes, so do her instructions as to what it looks like to keep on in faith. In this post-wilderness chapter of the Hebrew biography, Josh 3 portrays a God that invites his people to take up arms with him in the covenant, depicting a new standard of obedience requisite to success.⁴⁷ This attitude can be traced to Deut 29 where emphasis is placed strongly on the necessity of obedience and exclusive

⁴⁶ Matthews, "Expository studies," 218. It is worth noting that in the entirety of Section II there is no such mentioned force.

⁴⁷ Cf. Josh 7:10–12, 15. Again, this "new standard" is a development of an "old" standard (continuity as seen in Deut 29) that has been in some senses modified for new times to produce new, relevant results in faith.

adherence to YHWH, at threat of abandonment.

This makes complete sense in view of the environment waiting on the other side of the Jordan. No longer will Israel enjoy the “safety” of the wilderness’ ideological vacuum within which they might contend with their doubt. Rather, they will have to both metaphorically and literally take up arms against those faiths differing from their own, that they might resist the biblically reviled concept of syncretization. Extra-biblically, this tracks with the black-and-white nature of the passage. Obviously, the “liturgical conquests” of Joshua do not constitute “history” as we take the word today.⁴⁸ Instead, the passage most likely represents what was a gradual diffusion of the Hebrew people into Canaan over time, magnified to portray YHWH’s dominance and demonstrate an archetypal cooperation between Israel and her God.⁴⁹ That is not to say that the entirety of the account has been falsified.⁵⁰ However, over time, the story would most likely have been ornamented and moulded into the “religious interpretation” of Josh 3 which stands today.⁵¹ In a modern sense, this is a textual fault. From it, no proper conclusion as to the historical reality of the situation can be derived. I would argue, however, that the profundity of Josh 3:7–17 is derived precisely from this same drama that sacrifices objective truth. As far as the goal of the text goes, it is not designed to recount history, per se, but instead to record the symbolic process by which this history was accomplished.⁵²

To those exilic and diasporic readers encountering the text, the narrative painted by 3:7–17 would have been far more impactful than a historical iteration of the occupation of Canaan. Dispossessed and wrestling continuously with glaringly existential questions of faith, an account of this nature would have sown hope from several angles as to the eventual restoration of “order” throughout Israel. Foundationally, it depicts a revival of God’s presence within his people after a period outside of his graces, speaking directly into the diasporic question as to his abandonment. Beyond that, it displays what it looks like to obey God without a centralized place to worship, commenting symbolically on the weight placed upon guarding oneself against foreign faiths. On a more personal level, the text also speaks to God’s invitation for man to work with him in pursuit of deliverance, whatever that may look like. Throughout the passage, God’s own power is thoroughly underscored and then juxtaposed in the face of his evident desire for man to be a co-enactor (in a sense) in his divine plan. This not only provides reassurance as to

⁴⁸ Coats, “The ark,” 138.

⁴⁹ Coats, “The ark,” 138; Marvin A. Sweeney, “The book of Joshua,” In *TANAK: A Theological and Critical Introduction to the Jewish Bible*, (Augsburg Fortress, 2012), 189, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt22nm69v.12>.

⁵⁰ Indeed, Kaufmann raises the point that the boundaries of the land as depicted in Joshua may have kept with those historically accurate: Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The biblical account of the conquest of Palestine*, (Magnes Press, 1953), 47.

⁵¹ Matthews, “Expository studies,” 214; Jastrow, “Joshua 3:16,” 61. Be it in an early oral tradition or the later written one.

⁵² Matthews, “Expository studies,” 219–21.

the LORD's desire for a reciprocal relationship with Israel, but furthermore reframes what it might look like for Israel to strive to maintain faith and hope in a time of upheaval.

In terms of the actual intent of Joshua's author(s), there are multiple stances. Considering its narrative similarity to Deuteronomy, some have argued that the book was at one point appended to its predecessors. This would render the Pentateuch the "Hexateuch."⁵³ While there is debate as to whether this thought is legitimate, the overlaps particularly within Josh 3/4 flirt with the conclusion that Joshua's formation is owed to multiple authors working with several sources in several revisionary stages.⁵⁴ There have been attempts to categorize each "section" of passage according to these sources in light of their alleged ideological undercurrents—they prove inconsistent. Saydon contends that the repetitions should be wholly written off, raising that the primary intention of any redactor must have been the preservation of the call-and-response motif, and thus the prioritization of the theme of obedience.⁵⁵ This is in line with the nature of the text; within, there exists an undeniable fascination with what exactly it looks like to cooperate with the covenant. In fact, the text is so taken with this notion that I would go so far as to state that the crux of 3:7–17 lies in its redefinition of the Israel-God relationship on these grounds.

CONCLUSION

Divided across the two sections of Josh 3, the development of the narrative's setting, the characterization of God, and the usage of the ark point to the evolution of Israel's relationship with YHWH as she enters a new phase in her history. Shifting in setting from a description of the timeframe of the crossing to a description of the event itself, the passage illustrates the unfailing potency of YHWH's presence, simultaneously upon Israel's leaders and wielded in her interest. His characterization progresses similarly, depicting first a communicative God and then a guiding God, who attends closely to his people on both internal and external fronts. Finally, the deployment of the ark embodies what it looks like for Israel to work rightly with her LORD. In both its preparation and its action, the device intertwines YHWH's people with YHWH's power in an awesome feat of victory on the road to restoration. On the whole, the passage beautifully constructs the notion that Israel is invited to partake with obedience in the plans of the LORD, given an active role in her future even as it's YHWH who holds the final say.

⁵³ W. H. Bennett, "The book of Joshua and the Pentateuch," *JQR* 10, no. 4 (1898): 649–53, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1450390>; Wenham, "The Deuteronomical Theology," 148.

⁵⁴ Matthews, "Expository studies," 216–19; Saydon, "The crossing," 197–201.

⁵⁵ Saydon, "The crossing," 195–96.

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AUTHOR'S BIO

Elise Falcon is a first-year undergraduate at the University of St Andrews studying Mathematics and Biblical Studies. She loves all things nature, art and music, and has a not-so-secret affinity for peanut butter. As far as studies go, she is particularly interested in investigating the creation accounts throughout the Hebrew Bible, as well as the Gospel of John's prologue. She harbours quiet hope that they will one day, somehow, render her maths degree relevant.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Originally written for an Old Testament module, this essay was inspired by a lovely sermon that I'd heard a few years ago on the significance of Joshua 3. Unsurprisingly, the sermon framed the passage that it might echo the story of Christ and God's actions therein. I wanted to know what the chapter had to say for itself. In writing about it, it became clear quite quickly that the workings of the passage were both more intricate and more interesting than I would have ever assumed. Over the next months I found myself adding to the paper—deadline long passed. Eventually, it found its way here. I do hope that you've enjoyed reading it as much as I have writing it.

EDITORS' NOTE

This article is an excellent in-depth analysis of Joshua 3:7-17, which investigates God's relationship with Israel in the new post-wilderness period. Elise Falcon attends to syntactical subtleties and the narrative structure of the text, situating Joshua beside the preceding Moses, and the subsequent fate of Israel through the *Nevi'im*. Specifically, she argues that three motifs exist in the passage: "the setting, both chronological and geographical; the characterization of God in dialogue with Joshua and the Jordan; and the nature of the ark." Falcon effectively synthesizes these themes—commenting on their profundity toward Israel's faith in between displacement and longed-for settlement.

Falcon presents stimulating, inspired arguments, supported by a marked understanding of the biblical text. Her readiness to dive deep into the passage begets a wealth of compelling ideas regarding Israel on the cusp of the Promised Land. Cleverly, the article arranges itself as a sort of call and response: the call of God to act (discussed primarily in Section I) and Israel's response (covered in Section II). The article's structure pleasingly parallels the narrative progression of Josh 3:7-17—making for an engaging and comprehensible read. This is a highly commendable piece of biblical scholarship, and we greatly enjoyed preparing this piece for publication. The article indeed contributes to scholarship on Joshua, and the consequence of Israel's entrance into and inhabitation of the Promised Land. We are extremely pleased to see *Joshua 3:7-17, A Synthetic Exploration* published above.

EDITORS: Rachel Cornille and Luke Robinson

