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# A Leader's Misleading and a Prostitute's Profession: A Re-examination of Joshua 2*

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## Abstract

The interpretive difficulties of Joshua 2 lead some scholars to conclude that ch. 2 is a textual interpolation. Additionally, close literary readings of Joshua 2 often fail to explore adequately how Joshua 2 fits within the larger narrative. Close attention to the poetics of Joshua 2 and its place in the structure of chs. 1–12 reveals three levels of theological critique within the text: Joshua 2 represents a false start in Joshua's overall successful career; it presents Rahab positively, since she seeks covenantal inclusion into Israel; and the primary focus is an extremely positive evaluation of God as a sovereign and gracious divine warrior. Thus, ch. 2 fits into the larger context in that it affirms God's commitments from ch. 1, which are the foundation for the conquest described in the subsequent narrative.

**Keywords:** Joshua 2; Joshua 1–12; poetics; literary analysis; Joshua; Rahab; Jericho; conquest; divine warfare; divine warrior; prostitute; spies

Joshua 2 poses several challenges in interpretation. For instance, it apparently gives a report of Israelites covenanting with a Canaanite and

citizen of a city under the ban, and a prostitute, no less. Yair Zakovitch comments on this scandal, as follows: 'Why should the "Book of Wars of the Lord"…begin precisely at the house of a harlot? Why does the Jericho prostitute get such a prominent place…on the very opening pages of the books of the Former Prophets?'[1] Furthermore, Joshua 2 might seem somewhat isolated from the surrounding narrative. Finally, Joshua 2 is rife with ironic reversals of power and initiative, which might initially obscure the narrator's evaluation. Here we might wonder, was Joshua faithful or faithless in sending spies? And if the latter, was it not for the greater good, since it resulted in the salvation of Rahab and her family?

The primary issue under investigation in this study is, overall: How are we to interpret Joshua 2? That is, what is the narrator's interest and theological evaluation in ch. 2, and how does ch. 2 fit into and add to the characterization of the larger narrative? Scholars are at odds about how to handle these issues, and how to interpret Joshua 2. The episode seems to function on at least two competing levels, one focused upon Joshua and the Israelite spies, the second upon Rahab. L. Daniel Hawk concludes that ch. 2 is negative,[2] while David Howard argues emphatically

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1. Yair Zakovitch, 'Humor and Theology or the Successful Failure of Israelite Intelligence: A Literary-Folkloric Approach to Joshua 2', in Susan Niditch (ed.), *Text and Tradition: The Hebrew Bible and Folklore* (Atlanta: Scholars Press 1990), pp. 75-98 (76).

2. L. Daniel Hawk, *Every Promise Fulfilled: Contesting Plots in Joshua* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), pp. 71-72. When writing this study, I initially examined the text, and only then reviewed secondary literature. Thus, many of my observations were anticipated by other scholars, particularly Zakovitch and Hawk. Zakovitch (in his essay 'Humor and Theology') sees ch. 2 as an amalgamation of several folkloric story-types. He contends that although elements were toned down by redactors 'to fit the conservative character of the Bible', these story-types portray Rahab and the spies as 'comic-book characters—a clever, calculating Canaanite harlot and two bungling spies' (p. 96). For him, this demonstrates that 'there is no wisdom and no heroism apart from God alone' (p. 96), so that ch. 2 establishes a wisdom background for the subsequent narrative. In Hawk's studies on ch. 2 (*Promise*, pp. 71-72, and 'Strange House-guests: Rahab, Lot, and the Dynamics of Deliverance', in Danna Nolan Fewell [ed.], *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* [Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992], pp. 89-97 [95-96], and his commentary, *Joshua* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000], pp. 35-51), his analysis is that ch. 2 is a somewhat one-dimensional criticism of the Israelites. For Hawk, Rahab is the unexpected protagonist (*Joshua*, p. 42), who is 'more worthy of salvation [than] Israelite spies whose Yahwistic memory is short' ('Houseguests', p. 96). Yet he interprets this positive depiction of Rahab as being for the sake of depicting Joshua's espionage mission as a military

against Hawk that ch. 2 is positive.[3] I contend that 'positive' and 'negative' appraisals adhere to a false dichotomy, and also miss the narrator's subtle cues that it is actually God who is the protagonist of ch. 2.

My thesis is that three layers of theological critique coexist within the text: Joshua 2 reflects negatively (though not condemningly) upon Joshua, and positively upon Rahab, but the primary focus of the text is an extremely positive evaluation of God. The narrator emphasizes that, even though God did not initiate the events of ch. 2, their outcome is the work of God's hand. To support this, I will first establish the text and offer a preliminary analysis of the characters. Next, I will provide a poetic analysis of the text. And finally, I will offer an overall evaluation of ch. 2.

## 1. Context of Joshua 2: Limits and Structure

As the book of Joshua opens, Joshua and the new generation[4] of Israelites are re-poised to take the Promised Land. In the introductory ch. 1, the narrator is ambivalent regarding both Joshua and Israel. The narrator emphatically identifies successful obedience as the goal, but leaves open that failure is a genuine possibility.[5] As of yet, any evaluation of Joshua

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failure (the spies' escape is the most successful thing about the mission, though 'there is a danger in the land…which the spies do not articulate'; *Joshua*, p. 50) and the Israelites as failing theologically, since Israelite spies are '[h]idden, ensnared, and outsmarted' (*Joshua*, p. 51) and "seduced" by a Canaanite prostitute and commit a serious violation of Yahweh's commandments [the ban]' ('Houseguests', p. 96). In what follows, I cite these and other scholars where they observed phenomena I had overlooked. However, though we have observed many similar phenomena in the text, my evaluation of ch. 2 departs sufficiently from those of Zakovitch and Hawk to be treated separately. I indicate below where my analysis differs from these scholars' analyses.

   3. David M. Howard, Jr, *Joshua* (NAC; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), pp. 97-98; Mark Jonathan Harvey Klassen, likewise concludes (*A Reading of the Rahab Narrative [Joshua 2.1-24] Based on a Text-Linguistic and Narrative Analysis* [Vancouver, BC: Regent College, 1998], p. 100) in his reading that ch. 2 is 'overtly positive'.

   4. Cf. Exod. 14.2-23; Deut. 1.35.

   5. In ch. 1, God must three times exhort Joshua to be bold (1.6-9). The narrator seems to ask whether this mere minister to Moses (יהושע בן־נון משרת משה, v. 1; cf. Exod. 24.13), who was the servant of YHWH and prophet *par excellence*, will live up to the Moses' legacy, when even Moses did not quite live up to his own legacy (cf. Num. 20.12; 27.14). Similarly, the people declare, 'Just as we obeyed Moses, so will we obey you' (v. 17), which might be quite ominous considering just how their parents obeyed Moses (e.g. Num. 14.1-10)! If they follow the pattern of their parent's generation, then by, 'Any one who rebels against your commands and does not obey your words…shall be put to

is premature, and ch. 2—the story of Rahab and the spies—is Joshua's first opportunity to prove himself.

Several features identify ch. 2 as an independent episode of scenic narration. It opens and closes with descriptive narration, covering much narrative time with comparatively little discourse.[6] These sections are marked out by the heavy use of *wayyiqtol* forms in 2.2-4 and 2.21-24. In v. 1, the narrator sets the scene for the episode, and vv. 21b-24 function as a coda.[7] In these verses, Joshua is formally reintroduced from ch. 1 as *ben* Nun (2.1; cf. Josh. 1.1), and namings of him form an *inclusio* that brackets ch. 2 (cf. v. 23, again the full *ben* Nun). Much of the remaining discourse in vv. 9-20 is dialogue, and here narrative time slows down dramatically; the narrator even avoids using *wayyiqtol* forms to de-emphasize the little action of vv. 7-8. Chapter 2 also shifts characters and location from the surrounding material, and its plot is relatively self-contained.

Moreover, it might seem that ch. 2 interrupts the flow of the narrative, whereas Josh. would more readily be a typical conquest narrative if ch. 1 were followed directly by the material in ch. 3. Because ch. 2 seems so self-contained, some scholars think that represents secondary insertion into Josh.[8] Also, theological incongruities may initially seem to be present, such as the matter of the spies covenanting with Rahab (see below). Choosing to see ch. 2 as a secondary addition and excise it (along with 6.7, 22-23, 25) is indeed one interpretive possibility. However, while acknowledging interest in the diachronic history of the text, in the present study I shall attempt to demonstrate coherence in the larger narrative *vis-à-vis* its final form, which includes ch. 2. With this in mind, an attentive literary reading will enable us to navigate some of the more challenging features of the text.

death', in Josh. 1.18, the people might be flippantly and unwittingly placing themselves under a curse.

6.    See Jean-Louis Ska, *'Our Fathers Have Told Us': Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives* (Subsidia Biblica, 13; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico 1990), pp. 7-8. Ska distinguishes between 'narration time' and 'discourse'. The former is 'duration of the actions and events in the "story"' (p. 7), that is, the internal chronology of the plotline. The latter refers to the material used to deliver the narrative, namely, the length of the text itself.

7.    Adele Berlin (*Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994]), citing William Labov, states, 'The coda signals that the narrative has come to and end; it completes the narrative discourse' (p. 107).

8.    E.g. Butler, *Joshua*, pp. 27-32; J. Alberto Soggin, *Joshua: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), pp. 37-38.

## 2. Characterization

Throughout the episode, the narrator employs only external focalization, whereby the narrator presents the reader only with an external perspective on events and dialogue.[9] This results in our not receiving any evaluation—whether explicitly via the narrator's point of view, or implicitly via a character's point of view.[10] Therefore, we must reconstruct the narrator's evaluation of events by analyzing his use of artistry and characterization. The latter of these is an apt place to begin.

### Joshua

Joshua is primarily a background presence for the episode. As mentioned above, uses of his name form an *inclusio* about ch. 2. Perhaps the formal namings as *ben* Nun (vv. 1, 23) are meant to emphasize his official capacity as leader. In this way, the narrator indicates that Joshua's perspective is the primary interest perspective[11] for the episode in its wider literary context (though the prominence of dialogue in ch. 2 indicates an independent internal focus). That is, the spying mission has direct implications for evaluation of Joshua.

### Rahab

Rahab is the only other named character in ch. 2 (apart from Joshua, whom we noted is more a background presence than a character).[12] Along with this, she appears in every scene and is given the majority of dialogue. In this way, Rahab is identified as the sole full character[13] in the episode. Beginning with Josephus, interpreters have tried to soften Rahab's characterization as a 'prostitute' (זונה), arguing that she is

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9.     Ska (*Fathers*, pp. 66-67), using terminology of P. Lubbock, describes that *external focalization* refers to how the narrator refrains from reporting what any character knows internally or what he, as potentially semi-omniscient, may know. It is the 'fly-on-the-wall' perspective, as it were.

10.   See Ska, *Fathers*, p. 79, who takes 'Point of view' terminology from Meir Sternberg.

11.   See Berlin, *Poetics*, p. 47, who adopts Seymour Chatman's definition of *interest perspective* as 'the perspective of someone's benefit or disadvantage'.

12.   Cf. Richard D. Nelson, *Joshua: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997), p. 46.

13.   See Berlin, *Poetics*, p. 23, where *full characters* are defined as 'complex, manifesting a multitude of traits, and appearing as "real people"'. Ska (*Fathers*, p. 83) adds that *full characters* 'develop internally during the narrative'.

merely an innkeeper, and that her house is an inn (rather than exclusively a brothel).[14] However, nothing in the text suggests this softened interpretation.[15]

   Given that the 'narrator as artist works within a historically determined social world', a necessary supposition for Rahab and ch. 2 is 'the harlot [functions] as a marginal figure in the society, tolerated but despised'.[16] Since prostitution is a Deuteronomic metaphor for idolatrous apostasy,[17] Rahab's profession strengthens her identity as a Canaanite and underscores the Canaanite's threatening practice of 'whoring after idols'.[18] Thus the narrator sets up the reader to expect nothing positive from Rahab.[19]

## The Spies and Literary Agents

In the episode, the spies also function collectively as a single character. They are initially named in terms of their occupation, but after v. 1 are simply referred to as 'the two men'; to the Canaanites they are the anonymous men 'who came to root out the land' (v. 2-3). Therefore, in ch. 2 they function collectively as a single 'type'.[20] The narrator may be implying that Joshua picked any two nondescript men, neither especially prominent nor capable.[21] Throughout the episode their actions portray

   14.   Josephus, *Ant*. 6.2. See Phyllis Silverman Kramer's 'Rahab: From Peshat to Pedagogy, or: the Many Faces of a Heroine', in George Aichele (ed.), *Culture, Entertainment and the Bible* (JSOTSup, 309; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 156-72 (158-61), for treatment of this issue in early Jewish and Rabbinic interpretation. Frank Moore Cross ('A Response to Zakovitch's "Successful Failure of Israelite Intelligence"', in Niditch [ed.], *Text and Tradition*, pp. 99-104 [101]) makes the appeal that a brothel/inn is innocently the best place for the spies to obtain information, even if Rahab is a prostitute.

   15.   Phyllis A. Bird, 'The Harlot as Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts', *Semeia* 46 (1989), pp. 119-39 (127-31).

   16.   Bird, 'Harlot', p. 119.

   17.   E.g. Deut. 31.16-18; cf. also Exod. 34.14-16 (Hawk, *Promise*, pp. 61-62).

   18.   Frank Anthony Spina, 'Reversal of Fortune: Rahab the Israelite and Achan the Canaanite', *BR* 17 (2001), pp. 24-30, 53-54 (26).

   19.   Bird, 'Harlot', p. 130.

   20.   Cf. Berlin, *Poetics*, p. 23, who uses this term to describe 'flat characters', who 'are built around a single quality or trait. They do not stand out as individuals'.

   21.   Tikna Simone Frymer-Kensky 'Reading Rahab', in Mordechai Cogan *et al.* (eds.), *Tehillah le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), pp. 57-67 (58-59). Zakovitch ('Humor', p. 81) likewise observes how these are foiled by spies elsewhere: tribal heads (Num. 13.2-3), men of valor (Judg. 18.2), and well-born men (2 Sam. 15.35-36). Further, they are

them as passive: they are sent, instructed, sought, in hiding, etc. Their interest perspective would mainly be one of escaping Jericho with their lives intact. However, because the spies, who are sent by Joshua, are merely types, they do not have a strong interest perspective of their own; instead, they carry Joshua's interest perspective to Jericho and back, so that they function, in part, as an extension of Joshua's characterization.

Finally, the king of Jericho and his soldiers all function as agents[22] in the episode. The unnamed king is a background presence in the episode (similar to Joshua), Joshua's antagonist and a source of danger to the spies. And the soldiers are employed as a device that is utilized for advancing the plotline.

Thus, for ch. 2, Joshua provides a background interest perspective at the edges of the episode, Rahab is the only full and primary human character in the episode, the spies are a collective type character, in part representing Joshua's interest perspective, and the remaining characters are mere agents. Having surveyed the characters in ch. 2, we are now prepared to analyze the text, paying close attention to literary artistry and technique. We begin with the first scene of the episode, in 2.1-7a.

## 3. Poetic Analysis

### Joshua 2.1-7a: Rahab and the Spies

In Josh. 1.2, God commanded Joshua to 'rise, cross the Jordan'; instead, in Josh. 2.1, Joshua sends spies.[23] Their instructions are to go (הלך) and see (ראה) the land around Jericho; so they go (הלך) and instead enter (בוא) Rahab's house. These actions are the first indication something is amiss: the first instance of the command/fulfillment pattern in the book of Joshua, here as the book opens, is *prima facie* an instance of command/failed fulfillment. By amplifying this further, through the use of

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diminutively 'two lads' in Josh. 6.23 (the LXX of 2.1 also reads δύο νεανίσκους, likely in order to harmonize with 6.23). There may be the possibility, at this point, that the *two* spies intertextually echo the two faithful spies, Joshua and Caleb, in Num. 13, having here 'left behind' the ten unfaithful spies. But whether this was in Joshua's mind is speculation (sending only two spies may have purely logistic purposes), and the connection between this account and that of Num. 13 is examined more closely in a moment.

22. Cf. Berlin, *Poetics*, p. 23. She cites M.H. Abrams, stating that all narratives '"have some characters who serve as mere functionaries and are not characterized at all"'. Here, an *agent* is a functionary, a device the narrator uses to advance the plot.

23. Cf. Robert Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), pp. 85-86.

negative language and imagery, the narrator cultivates a motif that we might label a 'calamity motif'.

**Verses 1-3: Calamity Motif.** One example of negative language in ch. 2 is spying/pursuit language, which is potentially neutral but here is cast in a dubious light. Joshua sends the two spies *secretly* (חרש), hiding the mission from Israel.[24] The narrator also chooses terms with possibly negative connotations: such as רגל ('to go about maliciously', v. 1) and חפר ('to maliciously set a trap/snare', vv. 2-3). Then the spies are quickly driven into hiding as the spying language is subverted into pursuit language.[25] The *hinneh* clause[26] in v. 2 decisively moves the perception perspective[27] to within the walls of Jericho and beyond the reach of Joshua's influence, cutting off the spies. And just as Joshua *sent* (שלח) the spies (v. 1), the king of Jericho *sends* (v. 3) soldiers to capture them. The narrator thus depicts the spies as pawns in Joshua's struggle against the king: Joshua has tactically overextended himself, and consequently placed his men in danger.

    The narrator also employs pervasive sexual imagery. The spies are dispatched from Shittim, where in Num. 25.1 the Israelites had sexual relations with Moabite women and were enticed into apostasy.[28] Again, the narrator selects terminology (e.g. בוא, vv. 1, 3-4; שכב, v. 1; ידע, v. 4) that can function as common Hebrew sexual euphemisms. Even Rahab's name (related to רחב, 'to open wide/stretch out') might be an instance of paronomasia, a name appropriate for a prostitute.[29] Hawk comments, 'we

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24.  As most commentators note, חרש is *hapax legomena* in the Old Testament (possibly accounting for its exclusion in the LXX). Joshua sends and receives the spies at Shittim, and Israel was possibly encamped elsewhere—in Josh. 3.1, only after Joshua returns with an unspecified 'they' (the spies?) from Shittim, 'he and all the Israelites came to the Jordan'. At this point, the adverb may simply indicate Joshua's skill at guile (launching the mission while successfully concealing it from the Canaanites), but a preponderance of evidence (below) supports our interpretation.

25.  הלך and רדף also occur seven times each in ch. 2, and most of the narrative time is spent in hiding during v. 22.

26.  See Berlin, *Poetics*, pp. 62-63.

27.  *Perception perspective* is, according to Berlin (*Poetics*, p. 47), 'The perspective through which the events of the narrative are perceived'.

28.  Hawk (*Promise*, p. 61) further suggests that if Shittim can be identified with Abel-Shittim in Num. 33.48-56 (where Moses warned about failure to dispossess Canaan), then Rahab's preservation is a further ominous feature.

29.  Cf. Athalya Brenner, 'Wide Gaps, Narrow Escapes: I Am Known as Rahab, the Broad', in Philip R. Davies (ed.), *First Person: Essays in Biblical Autobiography*

are left with the impression that Israel enters the land and immediately engages in forbidden activity with the very people who are to be destroyed'.[30] That is, it is difficult to ignore how the narrator apparently implies that the spies quitted one place of prostitution only for another, to the neglect of their mission.

The reason for the spies' quick discovery is gapped. However, this gap is not there to be filled, but rather in order to communicate that the spies' mission was hopeless from the beginning, and thus they ought not have been placed in such a suggestive and dangerous situation. This is reinforced by several intertextual connections. Since one question in the book of Joshua is how the new generation compares to that of their parents, who perished in the wilderness, the element of spying as a prelude to invasion in our episode most directly parallels Numbers 13 (cf. Deut. 1.22-28). There, the Israelite's desire to spy out Canaan before invading culminated in their wandering in the wilderness.[31] And the other instance of spying in the book of Joshua, at 7.2-5, is associated (though not causally) with Israel's defeat at Ai. This isn't to say spying is *a priori* negative in the biblical tradition, but it seems to be difficult to find a depiction with positive associations.[32] At the very least, following God's command to 'Rise, cross' (Josh. 1.2) is in Joshua 2 replaced by spying without the minimal consideration of first inquiring of God.

Other intertextual connections give ch. 2 further negative overtones. In relating the story of Rahab and the spies, the narrator appropriates

(Biblical Essays 81; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), pp. 47-58 (47-48). *Rahab* may also aurally echo רהב, an ancient Near Eastern chaos goddess, so tentatively connoting further impropriety and foreboding.

30. Hawk, *Promise*, p. 62.

31. Num. 13.1 reports that *God* told Moses to send the spies; Deut. 1.22-28, however, states that the Israelites initiated the spying. I offer a harmonization, wherein the Israelites persisted in asking permission from Moses, and God finally conceded to their request. (A similar pattern occurs with Balaam seeking God's permission to accompany Balak in Num. 22.1-22, and with Gideon's repeated inquiries of God in Judg. 6.36-40; 7.9-15.) Despite its negative results, Moses' mission was at least better orchestrated than Joshua's in our episode. Compare, for instance, Moses' detailed instructions in Num. 13.17-19 with Joshua's scant 'Go, see' in Josh. 2.1.

32. Judg. 1.22-26 might prove to be an exception. Although there, too, after several rousing accounts of military success (and immediately preceded by a potentially foreboding and negative note in v. 21) we are told 'YHWH was with them' (v. 22), which seems to make redundant any need for spying. And then vv. 24-26 are positive not in regard to spying, but to the Israelite's victory and the conversion and inclusion into Israel of a collaborative Canaanite and his family—two positive elements we find also in Josh. 2 (and Josh. 6).

language from the story of Lot and his angelic visitors in Genesis 19.[33] Besides linguistic influences, the two episodes share the elements of strange visitors, a night setting, and characters escaping a doomed city, and also share similar storylines,[34] 'thereby placing [Josh. 2] against a dark and threatening backdrop' similar to that of Genesis 19.[35] Furthermore, darkness is intoned by 'this night' (v. 2), along with bedding down (vv. 2, 8) and the shutting of the gates (vv. 5, 7), both of which implicitly involve nightfall. Weston Fields argues that, in connection with other episodes involving destruction and narrow scrapes with death, the night setting strongly denotes an atmosphere of danger.[36] The spies are supposed to hide out just until morning, but this one frantic night takes up nearly the entire discourse.[37]

Through combination of the intertextuality with other spying accounts and Genesis 19, and negative language and imagery—spying become pursuit, innuendo regarding inappropriate sexuality, and darkness/night —the narrator establishes a calamity motif. This sets up the reader to expect that disaster will fall upon the spies, and that Joshua's mission will end in failure. The narrator's use of artistry affects the reader on a visceral level, by drawing in the reader the same way an accident draws a crowd, and perhaps furnishes a touch of trepidation that tragedy might befall the Israelites (specifically the spies), the protagonists with whom the reader has presumably begun to identify. This pulls the reader's attention forward, to see how the calamity motif will be resolved.

33. The parallels are noted by both Hawk ('Houseguests', pp. 90-91, and *Joshua*, pp. 36-40) and especially Weston W. Fields ('The Motif "Night as Danger" Associated with Three Biblical Destruction Narratives', in Michael Fishbane *et al.* [eds.], *Sha'arei Talmon: Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns 1992], pp. 17-32). I rely on these scholars for the intertextual connection between Gen. 19 and Josh. 2 (and Judg. 19–20).

34. Hawk ('Houseguests', pp. 89-90) catalogues such features as, 'Two men enter a city doomed to destruction and take shelter in the house of a citizen…in the evening [men] of the city come to the house and demand that the strangers be brought out… The crisis is averted', etc. Additionally, both episodes share overtones of sexuality.

35. Hawk, 'Houseguests', p. 96. Also interesting is where the episodes diverge. For example, in Gen. 19, the angelic visitors save the day, whereas in Josh. 2, Rahab assumes their role, saving the Israelite spies (and her own family): 'The Canaanite acts, in short, like an angel of God and succeeds, like Sodom's visitors, in rescuing an entire family from death' (Hawk, *Joshua*, pp. 39-40).

36. Though according to Fields ('Night as Danger', p. 24), the rape of the concubine in Judg. 19–21 uses 'night-as-danger' to the greatest extent.

37. Fields 'Night as Danger', pp. 25-26.

**Verses 4-7a: Disorientation, Suspense, and Reorientation.** The first half of the two-part climax to the episode is found in vv. 4-5. The calamity motif builds suspense regarding the spies' safety, so that expectations are thrown into confusion when Rahab responds to the soldiers' demand (v. 3) by committing treason (vv. 4-7a). After v. 5, there is suspense over whether the soldiers will leave, and over whether the hiding of the spies was rushed and inadequate. The parenthetical comment of v. 6 is even chronologically displaced (from v. 4a) to foster suspense until v. 7a.[38] At this point there may not yet be sufficient evidence to decide on the narrator's evaluation of Joshua, but there are ample data to declare that the spies' circumstances anticipate nothing short of disaster.

But the narrator's technique deflects interest away from why the spies entered a brothel and their activities within, and onto Rahab's actions.[39] He thereby replaces dramatic tension concerning what unhappy fate would befall the spies with that of discovering Rahab's motives. By thus placing Rahab in the role of a *deus ex machina*, the calamity motif, instead of being followed through logically, is unexpectedly transformed into a deliverance motif. Then, in vv. 7b-21a, and especially in vv. 9-12, comes the second half of the two-part climax of the episode. In this way the focus of the episode, formerly the spies' mission (and subsequently their predicament), is reoriented around Rahab's profession of faith.

## Joshua 2.7b-21a: Rahab and Israel

**Ironic Deliverance.** The narrator draws out as long as possible the tension surrounding the unclear motives behind Rahab's actions, even to the point of using parataxis throughout v. 9;[40] it is not until v. 10 that we get a causal כי, filling the gap of Rahab's motives. The extended use of dialogue, where narrative time passes at nearly the same rate as the discourse, emphasizes the importance of this section. Also, that vv. 9-14 are the spatial high point in ch. 2—seen in the upward movement in vv. 6a and 8a and descending movement after v. 15a (and down through the hills, later in vv. 22-23)—might be a further cue that this section of dialogue is climactic for the episode.[41]

In vv. 5-8 the narrator employs previously negative language more neutrally. For example, ידע in v. 5 and שכב in v. 8 seem to occur devoid

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38. Cf. Zakovitch, 'Humor', p. 88.
39. Bird, 'Harlot', p. 129.
40. Although the LXX interprets v. 9b as a causal clause (using γάρ).
41. Klassen, *Rahab Narrative*, p. 89; cf. Hawk, *Joshua*, p. 50.

of sexual connotations. Or consider יצא, used of the soldiers' demand for the spies in v. 3 (and therefore falling under the rubric of pursuit language), but reused by Rahab in v. 5 to mislead the soldiers, and used again for reporting the soldiers' misdirection in v. 7. Then, because of the positive connotation to Rahab's profession in vv. 9-10, the narrator redeems the language completely when Rahab tells the spies she *knows* (ידע; cf. v. 4) YHWH gave them the land/Land[42] because (כי) he brought (יצא; cf. v. 3) them out of Egypt. The narrator thus uses Rahab's saving of the spies to transform the calamity motif into a deliverance motif.

Further, the newly revealed *Leitmotif* is one of *ironic* deliverance. For instance, Butler states (with his own hefty note of irony):

> Repeatedly the spies do just what one expects in [a house of prostitution]: they bed down… When the lady of the house finally has time to come to the men in their beds, her bedtime story for them is just what is expected in such an establishment: a confession of religious faith, and act of religious conversion.[43]

The irony in the episode is underscored by the intertextuality between Joshua 1–2 and Deut. 11.23-26. YHWH commanded Joshua to invade the given[44] Land (Josh. 1.2b) and emphasized (via its centrality in the structure of the passage) Joshua's obedience in this (1.7-8), which corresponds to Deut. 11.22. Likewise, Josh. 1.3-5a corresponds to Deut. 11.24-25a, which ought to have brought YHWH's disclosure of the Canaanites' vulnerability in Deut. 11.25b to the fore of Joshua's mind. But instead, it is Rahab who declares YHWH's promise of Deut. 11.23 (Josh. 2.9a) and the Canaanites' vulnerability (2.9b).[45] And the spies' lives are ironically safer in the hands of a Jericho native than in Joshua's.

And the source of the ironic deliverance? YHWH alone offers Israel success against Jericho at the height of its power, and so in vv. 9-12 he wages divine warfare on Israel's behalf.[46] One way that the narrator's use

42.   Rahab is caught between the Israelite and Canaanite understandings of הארץ (which occurs ten times in ch. 2), which was for her formerly Canaanite 'land', but, because of her treason and newfound allegiance, is now 'the Land'.

43.   Butler, *Joshua*, p. 31.

44.   נתן occurs in eight times in Josh. 1; cf. Rahab's acknowledgment in 2.9.

45.   Zakovitch ('Humor', p. 89) further suggests that v. 9 and Exod. 15.15-16 comprise an instance of what he calls 'chiastic internal biblical quotation'. Appealing to *ipsissima vox* (the sense of what was said) for vv. 9-12, instead of *ipsissima verbum* (verbatim report of the words used), assuages concerns regarding Rahab here as a Deuteronomic creation.

46.   Dennis J. McCarthy, 'Some Holy War Vocabulary in Joshua 2', *CBQ* 33 (1971), pp. 228-30 (228); see McCarthy for divine warfare language in Rahab's speech, for example, אימה ('terror', v. 9) and מוג ('to melt', v. 9), which semantically overlaps מסס

of irony affects the reader is by establishing an expectation that human characters (initially Joshua, but now Rahab) will effect a 'happy ending' to the episode; when YHWH is finally mentioned, it is all the more potent for his having been hitherto neglected—almost absent—in the episode. Because of Joshua's leadership misstep, YHWH is their—the spies' and Joshua's—only hope. Moreover, every occurrence of יהוה in ch. 2 issues from Rahab's mouth.[47] By this and in introducing the theme of divine warfare in Rahab's profession, the narrator makes plain that it is YHWH, through Rahab, who delivers the spies.

**Rahab's Covenant**. Rahab argues that, by her treason, she has shown Israel חסד (v. 12) and wants their חסד in return. Her request (demand?) in v. 12a is rhetorically forceful, predicated upon her careful presentation of her fear of Israel and reverence for YHWH.[48] Usually, 'there is no place [for faith and/or wisdom] in the [stereotype] of the harlot', but here, in keeping with Rahab's unexpected and complex characterization and the irony of the episode, 'the harlot as heroine involves a conflict of expectations'.[49] It is because of her faith and wisdom that the Canaanite prostitute recognizes YHWH as the divine warrior (despite the passive

('to melt', v. 11). See also Robert G. Boling and G. Ernest Wright (*Joshua* [AB, 6; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982], p. 27); and Richard S. Hess (*Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996], p. 43), who notes correctly that חרם ('to devote to the ban', v. 10) is total war that is 'holy', in the sense of being dedicated to the glorification of a nation's deity. For an excellent introduction to divine war, see P. D. Stern, *The Biblical HEREM: A Window on Israel's Religious Experience* (BJS, 211; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991). Distinctive to biblical divine warfare is that it is God himself who wars for the sake of his own name and for his people. Perhaps a better term is 'YHWH warfare', to distinguish biblical divine warfare from other ancient Near Eastern or modern equivalents. As noted above, some scholars challenge the theological coherence of the episode (as a reason for seeing ch. 2 as a redactional interpolation) because the spies covenant with Rahab instead of devoting her to the ban along with the rest of Jericho (e.g. Butler, *Joshua*, pp. 27-32; Soggin, *Joshua*, pp. 37-38; Polzin, *Deuteronomist*, pp. 86-87; cf. Deut. 7.1-5; 9.4-5; 20.15-18). However, 'it remains for Rahab's critics to explain why the author includes in her words the one term [*ban*] that would remind the spies of their supposed obligation to kill Rahab and her family' (Hess, *Joshua*, p. 44; see also Boling and Wright, *Joshua*, pp. 150-51). That is to say, this is not an instance of Israel covenanting with Canaanite(s), but rather one of Rahab professing faith and covenanting with Israel (and so with YHWH).

47. The spies' use in v. 14 is at Rahab's behest, and in v. 24 a report of her own words.

48. Klassen, *Rahab Narrative*, p. 86.

49. Bird, 'Harlot', p. 131.

spies before her), moving her to covenant with Israel and YHWH. Thus, YHWH *qua* divine warrior delivers not just the spies through Rahab, but also Rahab herself.[50]

Campbell analyzes the form of Rahab's covenant as common to ancient Near Eastern covenants,[51] and identifies: a preamble (v. 11); a prologue (vv. 9-11); stipulations by Rahab and the spies (vv. 12-13, 18-20, respectively—in this case, protection for her house on condition of obedience); sanctions (vv. 18-20—in this case, either salvation or death); an oath (vv. 14, 17); and a sign (vv. 18-20), which is a cord. Though the elements do not occur in formal sequence, the analysis is still helpful, in that we see how the spies are thrust into an ambassadorial role for YHWH, Rahab's new suzerain.

Action in vv. 15-16 interrupts negotiation. Scholars are at odds as to how vv. 15-21 should be interpreted, and whether the spies are renegotiating the covenant once out of danger.[52] But Rahab has been in control since v. 4, where she sent away the soldiers *sent* (שלח) to her house, and she later *sends* (v. 21) the spies away when she is finished with them.[53] Twice the spies implore Rahab to conceal the incident (דבר) of their presence (vv. 14, 20), and she agrees as per their own words (דבר, v. 21), rhetorically implying that because of their obligation she controls their situation. Given the spies' passivity, vv. 17-20 is not a renegotiation but

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50.   Here my reading differs from Zakovitch's understanding of Rahab as a 'comic-book' character used by the narrator solely as a means to the end of creating an inspiring text.

51.   K.M. Campbell, 'Rahab's Covenant: A Short Note on Joshua 2.9-21', *VT* 22 (1972), pp. 243-44 (244).

52.   E.g. Hawk (*Promise*, p. 92, and 'Houseguests', p. 93) reads the chronology straightforwardly, and argues that once safe on the ground and outside the wall, the spies are eager to escape their 'bargain'. He praises Rahab's wisdom in leaving no loopholes, and condemns the spies' buffoonery, yelling up to her despite being sought men—though this casts them too strongly as mechanicals—and concerned only with saving themselves (*contra* Rahab's praise to YHWH). Other scholars argue that vv. 17-20 occur as the spies dangle from Rahab's window, ignoring the illogic of 'renegotiating' is such a vulnerable position. Hess (*Joshua*, p. 93) avoids these machinations by interpreting ותאמר in v. 16 as a pluperfect (in agreement with the NIV), so that v. 15 is a parenthetical flash-forward, and vv. 9-14 and 16-21 are immediately consecutive; but Hess offers no reason as to why the narrative would be presented thus. See Klassen, *Rahab Narrative*, p. 92 n. 48, for a survey of readings of ותורדם in v. 15 as pluperfect, inchoative ('she *began* to lower them'), future ('she *was about* to lower'), etc.

53.   Furthermore, Hawk (*Joshua*, pp. 43, 45, 47-48) observes how Rahab speaks to both the soldiers and the spies in imperative forms, in contrast to spies, who merely use indicative forms.

a 'cover-our-backside' clause: Rahab must demonstrate her Israelite allegiance to make clear that they are not covenanting with a Canaanite under the ban.[54] This small disclaimer is hardly a reversal of power.

The spies have yet to return to Israel—indeed, the vast majority of narrative time has yet to pass—but through the ironic deliverance motif the narrator assures that the episode will end well. Still, lest the reader forget how poorly it might have gone, vv. 15-21a contain a number of negative echoes. In v. 16, the spies will *go* (הלך) into hiding (חבא and ישב in v. 22) to avoid their pursuers (רדף), recalling the pursuit language resulting from Joshua's miscalculation.[55] And Rahab must 'bind' (קשר, vv. 18, 21) the cord, where קשר also means 'to conspire', recalling the negative connotations of spying language. Some scholars also argue that the scarlet (שני) cord she ties may be akin to 'hanging out the red light' in modern times.[56] But overall the danger has passed and the situation has been redeemed: Rahab's conspiratorial cord (תקוה) can also mean 'hope', so that she hangs out the hope of her deliverance to approaching Israel.[57]

## Joshua 2.21b-24: Coda

The coda of the episode is found in vv. 21b-24. The return to descriptive narration within this scenic episode is marked by the saturation of *wayyiqtol* forms in theses verses. The narrator fulfills the ironic deliverance motif, in that the spies follow Rahab's instructions to a fault and are indeed delivered safely home. The perception perspective follows the spies back to Joshua. They relate their discoveries (v. 23), namely, what God has already told Joshua in ch. 1 (Josh. 2.24; cf. 2.9-11), which is the narrator's parting implicit criticism of the spying mission.[58] Also, the

54.   Hawk (*Promise*, p. 69) notes that נקי (×3 in vv. 17-20) means both 'release from obligation' and 'moral blamelessness'.

55.   Cf. n. 25, above.

56.   So Bird, 'Harlot', p. 130. This is further suggested in analysis offered by Spina, ('Reversal', pp. 28-29), who compares Gen. 38.28, 30 (a *scarlet* thread is used to identify the firstborn of Tamar, who posed as a prostitute); Jer. 4.30 (a desolated Israel is a vain, painted lady wearing a *scarlet* dress); and Song 4.3 (the bride's lips are as *scarlet*). Hawk (*Joshua*, p. 36 n. 2) also points out the similarities of Tamar and Rahab, as two Canaanite women who come into Israel by way of a scarlet cord.

57.   Cf. Hawk, *Promise*, p. 70. Moreover, there are also likely connections between the spies instructions and Rahab's actions, and Israel's fist Passover. See, e.g., Hawk, *Joshua*, pp. 49-50.

58.   It should be noted, at this point, how ch. 2 intertextually contrasts the episode of Num. 13. In Num. 13, Moses' sending of spies was done in the open with God's eventual consent. The spies skillfully reconnoitered, and then delivered a despairing report that

narrator downplays this exchange as indirect discourse (the first person plural of v. 24 is not awkward in Hebrew), and the extent of the espionage effort is hearsay; the spies merely parrot Rahab's profession. Thus the narrator delivers a final irony: a 'prophetic prostitute gave Israel courage to carry out the divine command'.[59]

## 4. Evaluation

Having completed our poetic analysis, we are nearly in a position to evaluate ch. 2. It is not enough to observe poetic data; we must ask what function they serve. The narrator's use of literary sophistication, humor, and irony are not simply art for art's sake. Because of the narrator's technique, ch. 2 internally presents a negative critique of Joshua's choice to send spies rather than invade the Land. It turns out that this critique may also be present externally, which might be seen in the flow of the larger narrative. Consider the following offering:

*Narrative Skeleton of Exodus:*
*God Delivers his People from the Land of Oppression*

[0]   Divine warfare of ten plagues (Exod. 7.14-12.32)

  [1]   Yнwн, the Divine Warrior, defeats Egypt and takes his people out of the land of oppression (Exod. 1–12, esp. 12.33-41)

    [2]   Institutionalization of Passover and consecration of the firstborn (Exod. 13)

      [3]   God leads Israel out of the land of oppression through the divided Red Sea (Exod. 14–15)

        [4]   God gives torah on Sinai (Exod. 19–23)

          [5]   God's presence tabernacles among his people (Exod. 40.34-38)

*Narrative Skeleton of Joshua 1–12:*
*God Delivers his People into the Promised Land*

          [5′] and [4′]   God promises his presence (Josh. 1.5b, 9b) and charges Joshua to keep torah (Josh. 1.7-8)

      [3′]   God leads his people into the Land across the divided Jordan (Josh. 3–4)

    [2′]   Circumcision of Israel and reinstitution of Passover (Josh. 5)

  [1′]   Yнwн, the Divine Warrior, defeats Jericho and gives his people the Land (Josh. 6)

[0′]   Divine warfare of ten conquest episodes (Josh. 6–11)

resulted in wilderness exile. In Josh. 2, however, spying concealed from Israel and apart from consultation with God yields a favorable (albeit uninformative) report, and despite the folly of sending spies (and the spies' own passivity in their task), the result is not another wilderness exile but deliverance of the spies and eventual victory over Jericho.

   59.   Butler, *Joshua*, p. 34.

I suggest that the events of the book of Joshua allowed the narrator to pattern his narrative in Joshua 1–12 after landmark events in Exodus. The relationship is *not* chiastic, but rather mirroring, wherein the elements of a broad-stroke view of Exodus play out in reverse to form the skeleton of Joshua 1–12. This patterning—somewhat akin to narrative analogy—appropriately emphasizes that just as God took Israel out of the 'wrong' land in Exodus, so God brings Israel into the 'right' Land in Joshua.[60]

Some elements require clarification. In [2], institutionalization of Passover first signifies Israel's acceptability to God as his firstborn (cf. Exod. 4.22) saved from the night of death, and then Israel consecrates all *their* firstborn to dedicate themselves as belonging to God. These components are mirrored in [2′], where circumcision first marks rededication of new generation of Israel, newly born out of the death of wilderness wandering, and then reinstitution of Passover indicates that they are no longer under God's chastisement. A further parallel between [3] and [3′] is Moses' and Israel's commemorative song (Exod. 15), and Joshua's and Israel's memorial(s) of stones (Josh. 4). Finally, [0] and [0′] are approximate elements, since there are only perhaps ten conquest episodes in Joshua 1–12.[61]

For our purposes, this scheme is noteworthy in that it has no place for ch. 2. Ideally, we would hope the shape of the narrative would follow Joshua's successful leadership from Josh. 1.18 straight into 3.1; indeed, we noted above how ch. 1 could flow nearly seamlessly into ch. 3. We

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60.    I have not seen this scheme observed anywhere in the literature—if it could have been conveniently cited from a previous study, then it would have been well used in contextualizing ch. 2 prior to the above poetic analysis. This scheme is not in competition with additional literary schemes that may be present in the text. See, for example, the English summary of H.J. Koorevaar, 'De Opbouw van het Boek Jozua' (Theol. dissertation, Leuven University, 1990), pp. 281-304; cf. also George W. Coates, 'An Exposition for the Conquest Theme', *CBQ* 47 (1985), pp. 47-54 (49-51); Frymer-Kensky, 'Rahab', pp. 59-60.

61.    Jericho (ch. 6), Ai [successful] (ch. 8), Makkedah (10.28), Libnah (10.29-10), Lachish (10.31-32), Gezer (10.33), Eglon (10.34-35), Hebron (10.36-37), Debir (10.38-39), and Hazor (ch. 11). James K. Hoffmeier ('The Structure of Joshua 1–11 and the Annals of Thutmose III', in A.R. Millard *et al.* [eds.], *Faith, Tradition and History: Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994], pp. 165-79 [168-69]) includes Gezer as part of the preceding Lachish episode, while noting that K. Lawson Younger Jr (*Ancient Conquest Accounts: A Study in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical History Writing* [JSOTSup, 98; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990], p. 226) separates them as I have done.

have demonstrated that ch. 2 internally reflects poorly upon Joshua as a leader. This scheme indicates that ch. 2 also *externally* reflects poorly upon Joshua (which is especially ominous, given the narrator's initial ambivalence in ch. 1).[62]

However it is still early in the story, and it turns out ch. 2 is not absolutely negative, but merely negative relative to its immediate context. As Joshua's first opportunity at proving himself, ch. 2 is quite literally a false start in what turns out to be a career of overall successful obedience. Joshua, who is introduced merely as minister to YHWH's servant, Moses,[63] is himself named YHWH's servant at the end of his life (Josh. 24.29). And similarly, God resumes the patterning on Exodus with ch. 3, rather than abandoning it because of ch. 2, and does indeed fulfill his intention of bringing Israel into the Land.[64]

In contrast to how ch. 2 reflects upon Joshua, the episode reflects positively upon Rahab. Just as God delivers his people from a dark place in Exodus, Rahab delivers the spies from their dark place in Jericho. Also, she is an indication that, when the people of Israel become 'Land-ed' to become the nation of Israel, if they follow God's design then they shall 'Israel-ize' Canaan.[65]

But more than Rahab, ch. 2 primarily reflects positively upon God. Joshua's folly at the beginning of the episode provides an opportunity to demonstrate God's sovereignty and character in the body of the episode. He is able to redeem the situation for Joshua by providentially supplying Rahab to deliver his men. And through Joshua's error, God demonstrates grace to a Canaanite female prostitute, enabling her and her family to belong to his covenant people. Just as Rahab delivers the spies out of Jericho, when she covenants with them God also 'brings' Rahab out of

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62.   This perhaps accounts for the difficult chronology of chs. 1–3. Even if resolvable, as per, for example, David M. Howard, Jr ('"Three Days" in Joshua 1–3: Resolving a Chronological Conundrum', *JETS* 41 [1998], pp. 539-50), it would be a case of God accommodating for Joshua's misstep within his own large-scale purposes.

63.   Exod. 24.13; Josh. 1.1.

64.   At this point we go beyond Hawk's analysis, where he states (e.g. in *Joshua*, p. 51) that ch. 2 is simply an inauspicious beginning for the conquest, in which the spies neglect to report on the potential darkness and seduction of the Land.

65.   Again, *contra* Hawk (cf. n. 2, above), who judges that the positive evaluation of Rahab is subordinate to criticism of the Israelites. (This is mitigated somewhat when Hawk notes [in 'Houseguests', p. 96] that inclusion of Rahab 'elicits a significant challenge to exclusivistic notions of salvation'. But where in the biblical tradition is anyone who covenants with YHWH excluded?)

Jericho, and into Israel. But Israel's exodus was out of Egypt and into (eventually) the Land; whereas for Rahab, Israel and the Land overtake Jericho, and her exodus comes to her![66] This double display of grace, in a situation which ideally 'should not' have happened, bespeaks God's sovereignty and goodness, ensuring that when Joshua and Israel finally join him, he will surely be a triumphantly capable divine warrior.

## 5. Conclusion

In this study I have sought to make sense of the evaluation the narrator offers in Joshua 2, and to understand how ch. 2 fits into the larger narrative context. After establishing the text and characters, I provided a poetic analysis of ch. 2. We discovered that internally, the focus of the episode swings onto Rahab and evaluates her positively as an Israelite of wisdom and faith, and God's tool of ironic deliverance. At the edges of the episode, the focus is on Joshua, who is evaluated negatively. This was confirmed when the place of ch. 2—or lack thereof—in the larger narrative of chs. 1–12 was taken into account. However, ch. 2 does not dismiss Joshua as a failure, but represents a false start to his overall successful career. And finally, the episode focused primarily on God, who redeemed both Joshua's mistake, and through it Rahab and her family.

Because Joshua 2 is, in many ways, a self-contained episode, one option is to view the interpretive challenges it offers as too great to overcome and dismiss it as a textual interpolation. But my analysis has shown how the narrator's ambivalence from ch. 1 dovetails nicely into ch. 2. And in contrast to Zakovitch's analysis of ch. 2 as a caricature in support of the biblical wisdom tradition, or Hawk's relatively one-dimensional focus on a negative critique of the Israelites, we have seen that the narrator's primary critique in ch. 2 is of God, who is portrayed positively as a sovereign and gracious divine warrior, one whom Israel is invited to join in transforming Canaan into the Land. And this certainly fits well within the flow of the larger narrative. Indeed, the narrative that follows seems to be predicated upon this demonstration of God's character, which also fills out his assurances from ch. 1. It seems plausible, then, that although ch. 2 might initially seem out of place within its larger context, the interpretation proposed in this study is to be preferred.

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66. Cf. n. 57, above, regarding Passover and exodus for both Israel and Rahab.