

"Righteousness from rescue, rescue in the place of praise and adoration—*these* are the contexts to which the Bible, the basis of the lives of Jews and Christians, belongs." This insight, drawn from reflection on Psalm 36, forms the central hub around which the essays collected in this book turn. Though focused on individual texts from the Hebrew Bible, all the chapters, originally public lectures, seek to draw the reader into the movement from a mysticism of human introspection to a mysticism of the presence of God in the world and society.

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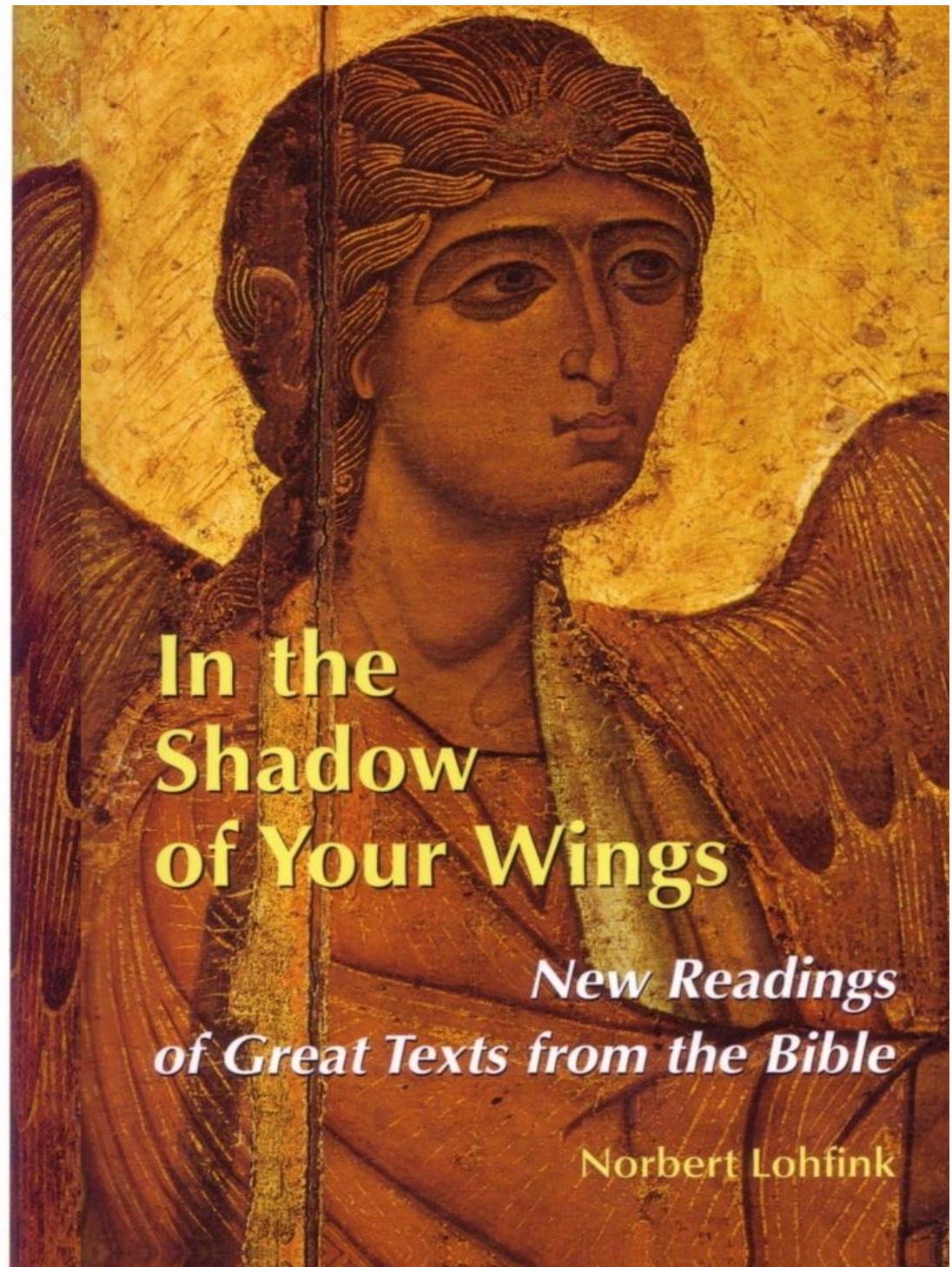
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In the Shadow of Your Wings

*New Readings
of Great Texts from the Bible*

Norbert Lohfink

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For my brother Gerhard

On his 65th Birthday

Chapter Three

Conquest or Return?

Reading Joshua Today

Oslo 1994: it was like the dawn of hope. Can there yet be peace in the “Holy Land”? Since then the situation is again such that no one can tell what may happen. Why, we wonder, is everything about this question so unspeakably grim? We know that somehow it has something to do with the Bible. But if that is the case, then we European and American Christians are not mere observers. We, too, live out of the Bible, no matter how seldom we give it a thought. So I, as an Old Testament scholar, will presume to ask the question: “Does the Bible say anything about who owns the Holy Land today, and how the people who live there now should behave toward one another?”

If we put the question this way there is only one thing to do: look closely and see what the Bible says—especially what place, on the whole, the Bible assigns to violent force. Of course that will not give us a complete view of the conflict, and certainly will not furnish any political advice. But it may help us to understand. It may even force us to reflect a little on ourselves. Ultimately the task is to find the hermeneutic concealed in the Bible itself for the texts that drive the participants today.

First I need to limit the question. On the basis of the media reports, often highly simplified, we almost always accept what is happening as a hot point in the conflict between the Judeo-Christian civilization of the West and the Islamic civilization of the Middle East. Palestine appears to be a boil on the surface of the globe, the point of a feverish eruption that may soon engulf the whole body: the clash between a culture that has experienced the Enlightenment and what is basically a medieval fundamentalism. That is how the Islamic world sees it, and we accept their schema of friend and foe.

But this theory of the conflict in Palestine cannot be accurate, for the people of Palestine are not only Muslims. There are many Arab Christians

who are often completely missing from the picture. They are the most destitute victims of the conflict, as is clear from the fact that their number is steadily shrinking. Many see no way to save themselves and their families except by leaving their homes and emigrating. A few decades ago, Bethlehem was still a Christian city—Arabic, Palestinian, but Christian. Now there is no longer a Christian majority. Everyone who could manage it has emigrated.

Because this is about the Bible, I want to set aside the usual schema altogether. I will eliminate the Muslim majority of Palestinians, which forms our picture of the population, from my reflections. That group is not shaped by the Bible, at least not directly. I will speak only of the Israelis on the one hand and the Christian Palestinians on the other.

These two groups are located within the biblical field of gravity. There is more reflection recorded on the Israeli side. There is an argument about what the Bible really says—parallel to the political divisions in Israel as well—right up to the biblical reasons given for the murder of the Israeli Prime Minister on November 4, 1995. Yitzhak Rabin was not alone; he had a large portion of the population behind him. He sought peace, seeing it as the real Judaism. Thus his murder also indicates dissension over the Bible. The Christian Arab side is more muffled, more confused. It has few intellectuals, and it does not have its own tradition of theological reflection on the Bible. There are almost no offers of help from Christian theologians in other places, and those that exist scarcely penetrate this suffering world. But for that very reason, theologians from other countries need to think through these questions.

Popular hermeneutics, Palestinian and Israeli

Let me first attempt to describe the average conception of the Bible in each of these two groups—the Christian Arabs and the Israelis—in the context of the present struggle. As far as the Bible goes, what is mainly at issue is the book of Joshua and its depiction of the radical destruction of all the residents in the land, the “seven nations” (cf. Deut 7:1), through the *herem* (“*ban*,” “dedication to destruction”). This cruel conquest of the land took place in every detail at God’s command, as the book of Joshua repeatedly emphasizes. The theory behind it is found in the book of Deuteronomy, and consequently we must keep that book in view as well.

How did Arab Christians read the book of Joshua in the past? They were small farmers in the countryside, craftsmen or merchants in the towns; they were the women of those families. They liked to listen to the Old Testament at worship or in religious instruction classes. They knew it

well. It told about their own homeland. They knew the places that were conquered in the book of Joshua; maybe they even lived in one of them. As a matter of course they identified with the Israelites who entered the land under Joshua's leadership. They felt themselves to be successors to those Israelites. God had given the land, back then, to the Palestinians of today. The history of Israel was their own history. At some point these Jews had become Christians. Probably no one, or scarcely anyone, considered the idea that they were descended from Philistines or other non-Jewish inhabitants of the land in ancient times. They had some vague notion that there was still a Jewish people living in small groups in Palestine and dispersed throughout the whole world, and that these people's heart was still attached to the land, that in spite of the long time that had elapsed they still thought of themselves as people driven from their homeland—but that had nothing to do with the Arab Christians' understanding of who they themselves were.

Then the Jews arrived in great numbers. The state of Israel was established. The various Arab-Israeli wars were fought. In the end the whole land was in the hands of Israel. At this point our Arab fellow Christians experienced a rupture in their relationship to the Bible that still shapes the picture today. They suddenly realized: this is a different people, who lay claim to the same holy books as their Bible. They identify, just as we do, with the Israelite conquerors of the land in the book of Joshua. In their eyes we, the established inhabitants of the land, represent the seven nations whom Joshua exterminated at God's direction. The shock was so great that the normal reaction of Christian communities today is: we don't want to hear any more about that book; it is not to be read in our worship services. Away with the Zionist Old Testament!

Alongside this picture we should place a model of the Bible-oriented Israelis. In the first phases of the Zionist immigration these were for the most part not Torah-observant Jews. There were some of those, but the Zionist immigrants were more likely to be emancipated, educated civil libertarians, perhaps agnostic, perhaps imbued with anarchist or socialist ideas of the previous century, especially those involved in the kibbutz movement. But even in this non-religious milieu the Bible quickly became the most important book. It was the classic document of Ivrit, successfully developed out of ancient Hebrew to be the language of Israel. It helped the immigrants to feel at home in the hills and valleys of the land as they had in their old homes. It awakened love for this land, to which they may at first have fled purely as a refuge from the perils of Antisemitism and the Shoach. For the next generation, born in the land, it was the classic school textbook. Most Israelis know large chunks of it by heart.

Later there came new waves of Jewish immigrants, some from Arab lands. They brought a greater measure of religious zeal than the first waves. Those who returned from Yemen may be seen as typical. For them the book of Joshua, which for the previous immigrants was only a geographical guide and a classic of their native language, had religious authority. The inhabitants of the land against whom Joshua once fought merged in their minds with the Palestinians who attempted to prevent Jewish settlements in the land and created bloodbaths with their suicide bombs. The book of Joshua offered a model for how to behave toward such people in the land. At least one could claim the right to armed defense of one's own settlements not only as an emergency measure but also on the basis of the Bible. Was one not, in fact, obligated to prevent a Prime Minister from violating the command of God given on Sinai: "Take care not to make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you are going" (Exod 34:12; cf. Exod 23:32; Deut 7:2)? That was exactly what Yitzhak Rabin had done, and therefore a law student of Yemeni descent, Yigal Amir, felt obliged to "execute" him in the name of God at the end of a peace rally.

But it is not just a question of such extremes. More important is what perhaps half or more than half of the ordinary Israeli population feels today, even many who wept over this murder. It can be stated this way: The Bible expects us to fight for this land, just as Joshua and the people of the twelve tribes once did. We not only have a right to settle there: we are required to do so.

Thus two completely opposite ways of applying the same book of Joshua, and with it the whole of the Old Testament, to oneself and to one and the same land of Palestine stand opposed to one another. It is no help at all to tell both sides something like: "Let the Bible be the Bible and think more about tolerance and human rights!" Obviously we have to think constantly of tolerance, justice, and the obligation to keep the peace. But neither of these groups is prepared to let the Bible be the Bible, neither those who read in it a promise of the land to their people nor the others who now refuse to read it in their worship, although they suffer greatly from it. On both sides the people's existence is much too deeply rooted in the Bible for that to happen.

It is clear that both mentalities are not as inaccessible to mutual understanding as appears to the parties involved, if only from the fact that they both have to work hard to find a basis in their own traditions for the way they deal with the book of Joshua.

There is a hardcore group of traditionalist Jews with a mystical style of devotion who reject the state of Israel altogether. According to them the

land will not be given back to the people of Israel through human might, but only by God, when the Messiah comes. This attitude has good roots in the classical Jewish tradition of biblical interpretation. For example, Moses Maimonides, the greatest Jewish scholar of the Middle Ages, explicitly refused to see God's commandment to Joshua to destroy the inhabitants of the land as applicable to his own time. It was still fully valid, but it did not refer to just any inhabitants of the promised land; it applied only to seven named nations, and they no longer existed. So much for the rootedness of present Jewish reference to the book of Joshua in the Jewish tradition.

On the other side, we must ask where in all of worldwide Christianity we would find anyone who shares the conviction that the Christians who now live in the Holy Land have a different relationship to their land than Christians in other lands throughout the world have with respect to their native lands. Are there any Christians who think that Palestinian Christians have taken on the role of the nation of Israel in some special way? I see nothing of the sort, nor do I find it in the classical theological traditions of Christianity. Perhaps there is a connection between this and the fact that in recent years Christianity has not developed a particularly notable solidarity with Palestinian Christians. In fact, there is scarcely any to be found.

Hence we must admit that there is a lack of tradition on both sides, both in Christian Palestinian indignation about the "Zionist" character of the Old Testament and in the new Israeli interpretation of the book of Joshua in their confrontation with the Palestinian inhabitants of the land.

One other thing should be noted: both interpretations of the book of Joshua and the whole of the Old Testament are as similar in their basic position as they are opposite in their end results. That position is, ultimately, fundamentalistic, but to avoid that negative label I would prefer to say that on both sides the book of Joshua is being read "typologically." That is: at the time when the Israelites first entered their land there occurred the "type" of an event that has recurred in our own time in its "antitype." It is the immigration of a people chosen by God into the land of Palestine, then as now. Hence according to the typological view it is true that the way things happened before is the way they should happen now. God's commandments at that time are also God's commandments for today. Because the book is read in this way the Jewish settlers, on the one hand, can find their legitimation in it, while on the other hand the Christian Palestinians feel so rejected that they are no longer willing to read the book of Joshua as the word of God in their worship services. Both find in it the basis for their convictions about divinely willed violence.

The hermeneutical question, then, seems to me to be: is it the sense of the Bible that the book of Joshua be read typologically with regard to

present problems? The answer, in my opinion, must be given in terms of biblical scholarship, and not merely in light of a modern hermeneutics that we might find it comfortable to fling over it. The answer is: no. Now let us see why that is so.

First I want to ask in what sense the book of Joshua could be at all relevant to the present struggle in Palestine, in terms of the book itself and of the present historical hour. I will first proceed in terms of history.

*The promise of return that concerns us today has no prototype
in the book of Joshua*

Israel's seizure of the land as depicted in the book of Joshua, as a single campaign by the people of the twelve tribes involving the destruction of all the inhabitants of the land, never happened. In spite of the scholarly controversies about Israel's early period that are constantly bubbling up, there is general agreement on this point. The migration of the people and the complete conquest of the land and radical elimination of the seven nations described in the book of Joshua, in the striking narrative form it now has, stems at the earliest from the time of King Josiah of Judah in the seventh century B.C.E. It certainly contains older elements of tradition, but they are erratic, and they have been deliberately manipulated, systematized, and generalized by the authors. The narrative technique was inspired by certain topoi in the Assyrian royal inscriptions. We cannot even suppose that the composition was intended to present a "historical" reconstruction of Israel's beginnings. Thus no one can say that it happened the way it is described.

What was the authors' intention at the time? If I am right in placing the fundamental conception of the book of Joshua under Josiah, the book made its statement at a time when Israel, at the end of the royal era, had once again lost almost the whole of its land, with nothing left except the city of Jerusalem and a few remnants of the land of Judah surrounding it. In the form of a grand saga of the beginnings, the book said to its addressees of that time, in a broadly sketched symbolic portrait: By the will of your God, the whole land belongs to you. God would leave it to you, and to the extent it has already been lost would restore it to you, if only you would radically trust in God. God is victorious over all opponents, on behalf of all who trust in God.

It is necessary to read this whole depiction from the margins; in its totality it begins at the opening of Deuteronomy, with the failure of the attempt to conquer the land described in the narrative of the spies, directly after Israel has left Sinai. Moses explicitly states that this was because of a

lack of faith (Deut 1:32). The successful conquest under Joshua was a pure gift of God, as the summation by the narrator at the original end of the book of Joshua emphasizes (Josh 21:43-45). The key point is the radicality of the wars described, which is the narrative symbol for the radicality of Israel's trust in God and not a historically-understood assertion of a military scorched-earth technique at the beginning of Israel's history. All that is part of the original intention of the book, and is not a reinterpretation later imposed on it.

It is true that at the end of the seventh century, under Josiah, there existed the intention to win back the lost parts of the land, since the Neo-Assyrian empire was collapsing. But Josiah could scarcely have had in mind a campaign of conquest and destruction. His intention was rather a process of annexation, carried out quietly and with a wink of agreement from the neighboring powers, especially Egypt. In this last case it appears to have failed, as shown by Josiah's death at Megiddo in the year 609. Apparently Egypt regarded the whole Syro-Palestinian region as its sovereign possession in which individual states could lay claim only to as much territory as Egypt permitted them. Josiah evidently exceeded those limits. Under such circumstances there could have been no thought whatsoever of real military actions.

In order that there might be no mistake, and so that it would be clear from the outset that the techniques of war depicted in the book of Joshua were not valid for the present time of Josiah, the book of Deuteronomy, which was combined with the book of Joshua even in this early stage of the history of their composition, made some clear theoretical statements. While it is true that Moses commanded the destruction of the seven peoples of the land in the name of God at the time of the conquest (Deut 7:1-2 and frequently thereafter), in Deut 20:10-20 he established a law of warfare that drew a clear distinction between later wars and the unique war of conquest under Joshua (Deut 20:15-18). The latter touched only the seven peoples, and for all later wars such a strategy of elimination was expressly forbidden. In Josiah's time the seven peoples had long since disappeared. Some of them were in any case only matters of rumor and may never in fact have existed. Hence there should be no doubt that, even at the moment when the book-complex of Deuteronomy and Joshua was first conceived, the destruction of the inhabitants of Palestine was reported not as a model for current or later imitation, but with the intention I have described above.

Soon after the book of Joshua was completed in its formal and critical basic structure, in 587 B.C.E. Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians. The elite of the land were deported to Babylon. Israel's autonomous existence in the land promised to its ancestors had come to an end. A literary

reflection of the new situation is found in the books of Deuteronomy to 2 Kings, a complex unit developed during the period of the Exile. This complex of texts is effectively a look backward at seven centuries of failed history. At the end Israel is no longer in its land; God's promise of the land was made in vain. The books are intended to explain how this collapse of all the promises came about. The high point of the portrayal is the existence of Israel as a state. The kings drove Israel into the abyss because they broke it away from its God and from full reliance on God alone.

Within this historical work interpreting the past, the book of Joshua has a fixed function in service of the principal statement. At the beginning of this course of history it presents a brilliant contrast to what later occurred when Israel took form as a state. It depicts a faithful immediacy to God, concentrated in the time of the beginnings, mediated only by Joshua, not by a state. In this immediacy of faith Israel acquires its land—that is, its happiness. Then, in light of later epochs, it is shown how the people frittered away what they had won.

On this literary level also, then, there is nothing to be found that would signal any further insistence on the historicity of the things depicted in the book of Joshua. The older description was simply taken over and given a broader function in the new complex of statements. At this literary level there can be no question of any idea of a return to the land. To that extent any notion of an intended typological statement regarding the future is simply inappropriate.

The Babylonian Exile was a radical caesura in Israel's history. It could even have been the end of that history. But prophets appeared, promising a new beginning and a new future. There was a movement of conversion that took those promises seriously and thus contained the possibility for a new beginning. In this connection the theme of "land" was, of course, acute once more. The leaders were exiled abroad. Where would the future of the people of God take place? Somewhere else? Or in the land once promised, inhabited, and then lost through their own sins? The promise of the land to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, presumed by the Deuteronomy of Josiah's time, was effectively finished. Or was God maintaining it, and was it still valid? Would there be a return, a kind of new entry into the old land?

The prophets of the Exile promised that return. God would again gather Israel from among the nations in which it was scattered and replant it in its old land. In fact, from the time of the conquest of the Babylonian empire by Cyrus the Persian groups had repeatedly returned from the diaspora to the homeland. Around the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem there arose a new Jewish community life. It was only the destruction of the Temple by

the Romans in 70 C.E., and ultimately the Islamic conquest of the land half a millennium later, that again broke apart Israel's presence in its land. From then on there were only tiny, oppressed Jewish groups living there, but they were no longer normative for the place—until the Zionist return movement began.

It is important for the historical assessment of these things that since the Babylonian Exile all of Israel has never returned to its homeland. From that time onward a large portion, ultimately the vast majority of the people has lived in other nations, believing the prophetic promises that some day the hour of return would strike for all of them. If we look for the foundations of the belief in this return to the land so long awaited, now occurring before the eyes of our generation, they are not to be found in the promise of the land to the ancestors, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That is only indirectly a part of this context, as a provisionally failed prehistory. The Zionist movement, to the extent that it places value on biblical foundations, is sustained by the exilic prophets' promise of return, after the catastrophe had already happened. That is how the early Zionists always understood it. It is by no means automatically the book of Joshua that sets the standard for the return. It is not a matter of a historical process supposedly depicted there and to be analogically repeated. Joshua belongs within the context of the first promise of the land and its fulfillment, not in that of the promise of return.

In addition, the prophets' promises of return contain no trace of a typological reference to the book of Joshua comparable, for example, to the consistent typologies of a new Exodus that we find in these same prophets, such as Deutero-Isaiah. At any rate, the few remote plays on it do not refer to the element of the population-destroying war of conquest. According to the prophetic texts that announce the return, that event is always a divine miracle having nothing to do with warfare. Nowhere do we find a post-exilic command of God to reconquer the land militarily.

There are only two small texts, Obad 17-21 and Zech 9:13-16, that appear to depict the repossession of the land in images of struggle. In Obadiah 18 we find the image of fire from which, it is said, there will be no escape. The key Deuteronomistic word *yāraš*, "take possession," is also key in this verse. But it is all the more striking that the other words associated with it in Deuteronomy and in Joshua, especially *herem* ("dedication to destruction") are absent. Thus from the context fire and the inability to escape it can certainly be read as metaphorical. In no way can this passage be read as an instruction for action.

Nor is that the case in Zech 9: 13-16. It is true that this text follows immediately after a statement about the final return from afar to the homeland,

which will occur in the time of the Messiah (9:11-12). But the statements about war that follow in the text (9:13-14) do not refer to fighting against the inhabitants of the land, but rather to struggles with the “sons of *yāvān*,” that is, the Greek world empire. However, here in a context in which the coming messianic king is depicted as absolutely peaceful (9:9-10) it appears that the idea of a final eschatological battle has been inserted, with the full reign of peace to follow afterward. This is probably because the peaceful king in 9:9 was described as “victorious.” It has something to do with the return of the last “prisoners” from the, “waterless pit” of the diaspora (9:11), but at most in a temporal and not a causal sense. In this scenario Israel has already been restored for a long time to the whole of its land (cf. 9:1-8).

To conclude this historical review: the book of Joshua depicts the fulfillment of the promise of the land to the patriarchs, but the gathering of the people of Israel in their ancient land in our century is not—biblically speaking—to be associated with that promise. It answers rather to the promise of return given to Israel, once again scattered among the nations of the earth. It has *nothing* to do with military conquest. A typological repetition of the conquest under Joshua is never in view in the biblical text in this context. In fact, the presentation in the book of Joshua itself, at the time when it was written, was not intended as a historical report, but as an image of radical trust in God.

The entire Bible read as “canon” does not make the book of Joshua a set of instructions for today.

The question of the proper hermeneutic for reading cannot be settled through historical observations. Neither Jews nor Christians read the Bible simply for historical information, as testimony to a historical development from which we might be able to draw lessons. We regard this book as the word of God. When we listen to it read in worship, when we pray or sing its texts, we apply it immediately to ourselves, taking it at least in some respects out of its original context.

This is the very point at which we find the origins of typological reading of the Bible, and this is where it is appropriate. Certainly the current typological treatment of the violent conquest of the land under Joshua arose, both for Jews and for Christian Palestinian groups, out of that kind of reading of the Bible, no matter how great a role archaeological and historical interests may have played, especially in Jewish circles. Hence we have to ask ourselves whether this kind of immediate and synchronic reading of the Bible does not lend the book of Joshua and its statements about destruction a new kind of authority.

In my opinion that is not the case, if we read carefully enough. Even when read canonically and synchronically the biblical text itself forbids an interpretation of the book of Joshua as a direct typological instruction manual for the return of Israel to its land. Within the book complex Deuteronomy-Joshua itself, in the prophets of the return, in the Old Testament canonical structure as a whole, and finally—at least for Christians—in the New Testament, a set of four barriers or restraints has been set up, one after another, to prevent such a reading.

1. Most important is the barrier set in the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua against a typological reading of the command to destroy the peoples of the land. The decisive statements are not in the book of Joshua, but in Deuteronomy, which proposes the theory. The book of Joshua only tells how it was carried out.

At the heart of the book of Deuteronomy, within the history told by the book's narrator, Moses makes laws. These are directly addressed to his audience within the story, the generation of Israel in Moab, not the readers of the book. But these are laws, that is, instructions for behavior that are valid from the time of their promulgation onward. So they apply to the readers as well.

This is a phenomenon similar to typological thinking: such laws are valid for Israel in perpetuity, that is, today as well. But Moses makes distinctions within the laws themselves. Some of them begin: "When you come into the land and live there, then" That means that these laws are attached to the land. When Israel is not in its land such laws do not apply. Something similar is true of the commandments to destroy the peoples of the land. According to their formulation and context they are valid for the moment when Israel under Joshua conquers its land. Moses says nothing about their validity in a repeated or similar situation centuries or millennia later. These are not even laws in the strict sense of the word; they are instructions for action in a particular, unique historical situation.

Even so, to prevent anyone from interpreting them typologically Moses builds something like a prophetic view of the future around the book of laws, all within the narrative world. As early as ch. 4 of the book of Deuteronomy he announces that Israel will be driven out of the conquered land because of its sins (4:25-31). Then in the threats in the chapter of sanctions (28:47 and following) and in 29:16-29 [MT 29:15-28] he takes up those prophecies again, and in ch. 30 he even promises a return to the land after exile and conversion (30:1-10). Thus Moses himself is a kind of prophet of the return.

Especially relevant for our question is the text of Deut 30:1-10. It is part of Moses' speech in 29:2-30:20 [MT 29:1-30:20] which, within the narrative world, draws together the ritual texts of the making of the covenant in Moab.

Two things strike us at the very beginning of this speech. In the review of the conquest of the northern lands east of the Jordan in 29:7-8 (MT 29:6-71, despite the frequent borrowings from the language of Deuteronomy 2 and 3, every single element of the destruction of the peoples is avoided. In addition, when the human partners to the covenant are listed in v. 11 [MT 10], “those who cut your wood and those who draw your water” refers to the Gibeonites of Josh 9:27, the only group of people who, according to the book of Joshua, managed to avoid being dedicated to destruction. The participants in the making of the covenant and, beyond them, the later readers are thus set at least mentally within a world in which destruction of peoples is not at issue.

From 29:22 (MT 29:21] onward Moses looks prophetically into the future—first, in 29:22-28 [MT 29:21-27], to the Exile. Here, in the rhetorical construction of a future scene, “all the nations” of the world appear on the world stage as an interpretive choir, with the descendants of Moses’ current audience forming only a small part of the whole (v. 24; MT 23). They will all ask the reason for the catastrophe and will answer themselves, moving toward a confession of faith in YHWH, the God of Israel, who does justice within history. Thus in light of the catastrophe all distinctions between Israel and the other peoples disappear. What made the seven peoples so dangerous—that they could bring Israel to turn away from its God—is here reversed. The time will come when all the nations, together with Israel, will confess this God as the one who acts in history.

Then follows the prophecy of return in 30:1-10, sustained throughout its palindromic structure by the word *šub*, “turn,” “return,” “restore,” “bring back,” repeated seven times (30:1, 2, 3a, 3b, 8, 9, 10). The culminating statement in the text is not about return, but about the “circumcision of the heart” associated with it, accomplished by God. Its effect is that Israel can finally and enduringly love its God with its whole heart and soul (30:6). But before this, 30:5 has to speak of return. The accents set in 30:1-10 can only be fully perceived in an intertextual reading, with the reference texts especially ch. 4 and the last part of ch. 28, which together with Deuteronomy 29-30, as I have said, represent a future-directed frame around the laws. However, other passages of Deuteronomy also contribute. Formulations from those texts are taken up and incorporated. This reading technique also, of course, takes account of texts not referred to in the proof context, because non-reference or non-incorporation can also be a statement, namely a statement of omission.

It is true that Deut 30:1-10 speaks of “nations” or “peoples,” but first of all, in vv. 1 and 3, only of the nations among which Israel was scattered, and from which it will then be gathered. God’s “gathering” Israel from

there (30:4) recalls the Exodus from Egypt (cf. 4:20). But nothing is said about the warlike actions of God at that time (cf. the long descriptive series in 4:34). Apparently no divine act of violence needs to be mentioned in connection with this gathering of Israel from among the nations.

The statement about the return to the land itself is formulated as a deliberate reflection of Deut 7:1, the introduction to the first appearance of the command to destroy the peoples of the land. The crucial word *yāraš*, “take possession of,” also recurs, but there is nothing said about destroying the peoples of the land. While in 7:1 God clears away “many nations” from before Israel, according to 30:5—and the same word root is used, so that the text of 7:1 echoes in the ears of the hearers—God makes the returning people themselves “numerous” in their land.

In 30:7 there is talk of curses that God removes from Israel and imposes on others. But those others are “your enemies and . . . the adversaries who took advantage of you.” Thus nothing is said about whole peoples, certainly not about the peoples of the land into which Israel is returning. The reference is probably to the oppressors of the Exile. Since there is a clear reference to Deut 7:15 and 28:60, there is also no thought of war and destruction; the background idea is the “diseases of Egypt” (28:60). Thus here again there is no notion of violent actions carried out by Israel in connection with the return.

In summary, we must say that for the readers of the whole book of Deuteronomy a typological application of the instructions for the destruction of the peoples of the land in connection with the conquest under Joshua is excluded not only as regards later wars following the conquest (cf. the war rule in Deuteronomy 20), but at least as clearly for Israel’s return from the Exile. Thus a barrier is set up in the two interconnected books of Deuteronomy and Joshua against any typology of destruction on the model of Joshua.

2. For the prophets of return, as I have already said, Israel’s return to its land is not only described as a pure divine miracle. Alongside the statements about the return are others that again work as a barrier against all attempts that may be made, despite the obstacles, to transfer the Joshua narratives through typological application.

First, there is the fact that these same prophets do indeed often predict gruesome and bloody fates for the nations of the world in times to come. The judgments pronounced over the nations are by no means mild. But it is all the more amazing that they are not directly connected with Israel’s return to its land. They stand alongside it, but do not connect. This is again an eloquent statement by omission.

But then we find another group of texts in this context, having to do with Israel’s relationship to the nations at the time when Israel will return

to its land. At the end of the ages the nations will confess the one God, and the pilgrimage of nations to Zion will begin. In Jerusalem they will learn to beat their swords into plowshares (Isa 2:2-5//Mic 4:1-5). But that means the beginning of a positive relationship between Israel and the nations. It can even be said of them that when they “diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name,” they “shall be built up in the midst of my people” (Jer 12:16). They, too, will “possess the land” (Ps 25:13).

It is true that, as regards the groups from among the nations who will dwell with Israel in the land in time to come, the statements are at odds with one another. Often these are individual late additions to the primary texts that, depending on their authors and those authors’ hopes and expectations, point in different directions. Thus the completely positive statement of Jer 12:16 contrasts with Isa 14:1-2 and 61:5, which seem to refer instead to a subjected group of people acting as servants. However, the very end of the book of Isaiah appears to say that there will even be priests and levites from among the nations on Zion (Isa 66:21). In any case, even in texts that seem to indicate a class distinction and a relationship of servitude there is nothing said about destruction or extermination.

The late prophets of the Old Testament thus see the Israel of the future days of promise restored to its land and enjoying prosperity there. This is accomplished through a broad communication with the other nations, who in the mean time have come to revere the true God, and that communication extends to those nations having a share in the land of Israel, even though it is decisively Israel’s land. Such a sphere of promise surrounding the promise of return is undoubtedly a second barrier placed by the Old Testament against the application of a typology of Joshua-style violence.

3. Thus there arises a further question. The Old Testament is made up of its individual books, arranged in a particular order. Does this arrangement of the books alter the situation and give the book of Joshua a higher rank? But the third barrier arises precisely here.

The most fundamental canonical structure is created by the deep caesura between the book of Deuteronomy and the book of Joshua. Deuteronomy is the last of the five books of the Torah, which ends after the death of Moses. The book of Joshua is no longer part of it, and hence it is decidedly not part of Israel’s exemplary “primeval history.” This is also reflected in the order of Sabbath readings in the synagogue. There the Torah is read. After the death of Moses the reading begins again with the creation; it does not continue with Joshua. Through this delimitation the book of Joshua becomes the beginning of a description of an initial period in the history of Israel in its land, a period that is long since ended and cannot return in the same form because it was a failure.

For the “basic myth,” contained in the Torah alone, the “gathering of Israel” in its land is still in the future. It is to be thought of as a return. Thus in a sense the Torah looks past the book of Joshua, directly to the return to the homeland. Thus the whole canonical structure of the Old Testament, through its innermost basic structure, also calls into question any typological understanding of the Joshua narrative.

4. Of course this is absolutely true of the Christian canon, expanded and modified by the New Testament. By no means is the New Testament untouched by the whole question of the “land”; in fact, it is a central question there also. The historical Jesus apparently regarded the “gathering of Israel”—no matter how he interpreted it—as his personal mission, and he rejected any kind of Zealot violence for that purpose. The evangelists underscore this. According to the writings of the New Testament, the time for the pilgrimage of nations to Zion has arrived with the advent of Jesus of Nazareth. The Sermon on the Mount is to be preached to the whole world (Matt 28:20), and according to it the meek will “inherit the land” (Matt 5:5).

What does this mean for those who believe in Jesus as Messiah—in the land of Israel and throughout the world? According to the letter to the Ephesians the “twoness” (of Jews and Gentiles) is made “oneness” in the Church because the dividing wall of hostility is broken down (Eph 2: 14). The people of the nations cease to be strangers and aliens in the midst of Israel; they are fellow citizens within the holy people and members of the household of God (Eph 2:19)—and according to Old Testament usage the “house” of God means the “land.”

This point of view is fully at home within the statements about Israel’s return and the pilgrimage of the nations in the exilic and post-exilic prophets. The book of Joshua, by contrast, is not honored with a single quotation in the New Testament, which as a whole contains almost four hundred Old Testament citations. This is indeed a fourth and last barrier against a typological reading of the picture of violent conquest in the book of Joshua.

Be it well noted: if the New Testament statements are more than metaphors then it is true above all that this land was originally Israel’s. On the basis of the New Testament it would by no means be legitimate to refuse the children of Israel the right to settle anywhere in the land, so long as they act justly. But at the same time, the nations are made companions of Israel. They receive a legitimate share in Israel’s gifts, among which is the land. This obviously does not mean that now all the nations should move massively into the land of Israel, and certainly not that they should oppress Israel there. The New Testament aims entirely at peace and has no thought of resettlement, but that peace also includes an encounter in the land of Israel.

Certainly it would never have occurred to the New Testament writers that the Jews who were Jesus' disciples must for that reason abandon the land of their ancestors. In the New Testament the Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem is the mother church for the new communities among the Gentiles. Paul brings to the "poor" in Jerusalem (a biblical name of honor!) the gifts of the nations promised by the prophets when he carries his collection to Jerusalem.

It makes no sense with regard to the Palestinian Christians of today to do research on the origins of individual families and then rely on these details. But that there is a broad genetic and historical continuity between Jews who accepted faith in Jesus and Jews who converted to Islam on the one hand and the present Christian and Muslim Palestinians on the other hand is not something that should be concealed or kept secret, even if the Arab Christians are not "Jewish Christians" in the strictest sense (which would include a certain degree of Torah observance). But are we not touching here on the theological basis of Palestinian Christianity?

Palestinian Christians in their function as "Jewish Christians"

What I am going to say in conclusion can of course only be the thought of someone who argues on the basis of a Bible that includes the New Testament. But nowadays it has to be said to almost all Christians as if it were something entirely new.

We Christians have suppressed the idea that we have our salvation only through a sharing in the gifts of Israel, and as a result are thoroughly related to Israel. In turn, the people of Israel are practically unaware that the pilgrimage of nations to Zion that is prophesied in their sacred scriptures has long since begun. Thus we have the dreadful consequence that, through a typological interpretation of the book of Joshua that is false in itself, Palestinian Christians are written in where the book speaks of pagan and utterly sinful peoples, the "inhabitants of the land," the "seven nations"—and many Israelis see the Palestinian Christians in that position, as do many Palestinian Christians themselves.

At least the Palestinian Christians must simply refuse to agree to such an identification. It is right that they should insist on their inherited rights and their rights as human beings, but that is not yet something at the level of faith. On that level they must seek themselves once more in the New Testament, in the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem. Then they, from among all the nations, would have a special assignment on behalf of the entire Church, namely to be the link to the Jewish people that still awaits the Messiah because it cannot see that he has already come, and that neverthe-

less, despite this whole salvation-historical confusion, remains God's people.

We Christians outside the promised land have the duty, on behalf of the abandoned and helpless Arab Christians, to become aware of this biblical situation, to think it through and tell of it, and then to apply it to our Palestinian fellow Christians. It is the most important aid we can give them, because it is an assistance already given in the Bible to enable them to recover their identity. I am also convinced that it is only through such a route into the land promised to Abraham and since become a "Holy Land" for so many people and groups, a route that goes to the depth of things, that the peace we all desire can be won.

We Christians read the writings of the prophets, just as the Jews do. We look to the future with them. We await the fulfillment of the promises, and at the same time we know that the fulfillment has already begun. The breathtaking struggle between the Palestinians and the Israel that has returned to its land is taking place in this context. It is imbued with infinite suffering on all sides. It takes place against a background of guilt on all sides. We too, if we do not make adequately clear how our Christianity depends on its Jewish connections, take ever more guilt on ourselves and make all these things still more difficult.

These knots in history are such that only One can untie them: the Lord of history. He alone can give us renewed hope that, through and despite all tears, he will bring to fulfillment the words spoken by his prophets.

Chapter Three: Conquest or Return?

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