

From “Enemy” to “Kinship”: Covenant Dynamics in Rahab’s Narrative in Joshua 2

Ebenezer Asibu-Dadzie Junior

(MTh) 

Asbury Theological Seminary,
USA

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Correspondence

Ebenezer Asibu-Dadzie Junior

ebenadjnr@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This article examines the narrative of Rahab in Joshua 2, with particular attention to her transition from “enemy” to covenant “kinship” within the Israelite community. The paper addresses the interpretive tension between Rahab’s Canaanite identity and her incorporation into Israel’s covenant community, despite divine commands for the destruction (*herem*) of the Canaanites. The research employed literary-theological and exegetical methods to demonstrate how covenantal motifs subvert ethnic boundaries within the African/Ghanaian context. It explored key themes such as “enemy,” “kinship,” and covenant and offers exegetical analysis of the passage in light of these themes. The study concluded with theological implications in the African/Ghanaian context. Key highlights include Rahab’s recognition of Israel’s God, her courageous protection of the spies, and the covenant established using the scarlet cord symbol, which led to her inclusion in the Israelite community. The central argument is that Rahab’s story functions as a counter-narrative within the conquest tradition, showing that God’s covenant rests on faith and allegiance to YHWH rather than ethnicity or geography. The paper has implications for contemporary African/Ghanaian understandings of divine mercy, social solidarity, and faith-based community. It contributes to covenant theology and biblical scholarship, bridging textual exegesis with local cultural paradigms, and offering insights into divine mercy, social solidarity, and faith-based community in contemporary African/Ghanaian contexts.

Keywords: *Kingship, Covenant, Enemy, Joshua, Rahab, Jericho and Scarlet Cord*



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The narrative of Rahab in Joshua 2 presents a compelling account of transformation, faith, and covenantal inclusion. This narrative occupies a striking position within the conquest traditions of the Hebrew Bible. It records the story of Rahab, a Canaanite woman residing in the fortified city of Jericho, who was initially an outsider and an “enemy” in the eyes of Israel and later becomes a key agent in Israel’s strategy for entering Jericho. The reversal challenges conventional notions of insider and outsider, “enemy” and ally, and introduces a theological tension between divine destruction and mercy. This tension presents a significant interpretive problem: how can a Canaanite, belonging to the people destined for destruction, become a covenantal partner within the very community executing that destruction? Therefore, the central research problem concerns the interpretive tension between Rahab’s Canaanite identity and her incorporation into Israel’s covenant community—a contrast within an account otherwise characterized by divine commands for the total destruction (*herem*) of the Canaanites.

Traditional interpretations have tended to view the chapter as a spy narrative, reflecting a recurrent biblical motif of reconnaissance preceding conquest.¹ However, Richard S. Hess and other commentators have noted, the chapter is unusual in that Joshua himself plays no active role in the episode, thereby granting Rahab narrative centrality and theological prominence.² Lawson Stone also makes a significant example of the Rahab story in his discussion on the concept of violence in the Book of Joshua. Stone asserts that “Rahab the Harlot in Joshua 2 is Israel’s first contact with the “enemy.” Yet, the Israelites show mercy to Rahab.”³ Stones continues his assertion that “Rahab is incorporated into Israel and ultimately ends up in the genealogy of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, in Matthew 1.”⁴ Hess highlights a linguistic observation that the Hebrew words associated with “Rahab and mercy” occur eighty-six times, a figure notably close to the one hundred and two occurrences of terms related to “destruction” in the Book of Joshua.⁵ Hess argument is that this numerical proximity underscores the theological and literary significance of the Rahab story within the broader narrative framework of Joshua.

Modern exegetes have progressively acknowledged Rahab’s role as a literary and theological turn in the conquest narrative. Similar to arguments of Hess and Stone, Trent C. Butler opines that Rahab’s faith constitutes “a counter-tradition within conquest,” exposing divine grace amid judgment.⁶ Robert L. Hubbard also reads the Rahab story as “a narrative of reversal,” where marginal figures embody covenantal ideals typically reserved for Israel’s insiders.⁷ Susan Niditch further unravels Rahab’s actions as part of a subversive moral discourse, where women, foreigners, and the socially vulnerable present faith in surprising ways.⁸ These scholarly insights underscore that Rahab’s confession of faith, her covenant negotiation, and her integration into Israel illustrate a broader biblical theology of inclusion and transformation. It also calls attention to the theological depth of Rahab’s narrative and its role in reshaping Israel’s understanding of covenantal belonging.

¹ Douglas S. Earl, “Reading Joshua as Christian Scripture,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation*, supplement 2010, 124; Michael D. Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 348–350.

² Richard S. Hess, *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary*. (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2008), 106.

³ Lawson Stone, ‘7 Keys to Understanding Violence in the Book of Joshua,’ 2013, viewed on 30th May, 2024 from <https://seedbed.com/7-keys-to-understanding-violence-in-the-book-of-joshua/>.

⁴ Stone, ‘7 Keys to Understanding Violence in the Book of Joshua,’

⁵ Richard S. Hess, “Joshua and Genocide: The Question of Cruel God in the Bible,” Presentation at Asbury Theological Seminary Biblical Seminar on 22nd October, 2025.

⁶ Trent C. Butler, *Joshua*, WBC, vol. 7 (Dallas: Word Books, 1983), 31–33.

⁷ Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Joshua*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 65.

⁸ Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 67–70.

Building on these scholarly foundations, the main objective of this article is to examine Rahab's transformation from "enemy" to "kinship" through an exegetical analysis of Joshua 2:1–24 and to offer some implications focusing on the African/Ghanaian context. The essence of bridging biblical theology with the African/Ghanaian context contributes to a deeper understanding of how biblical narratives can inform contemporary religious and communal practices. Therefore, the justification for this study lies in its dual contribution to biblical scholarship and contextual theology.

Having established the research problem, contextual background, and justification for this study, the paper proceeds to outline the methodological framework.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

The study employed a literary-theological exegetical approach to analyze Joshua 2:1–24. The approach is interdisciplinary, combining elements of textual analysis, narrative criticism, and socio-historical interpretation. The socio-historical dimension of this study places Rahab's story within the Ancient Near Eastern context of the Late Bronze Age. Drawing on archaeological and historical research, the paper examined the social, political, and religious environment of Canaan and the nature of Israelite conquest ideology.⁹ Narrative criticism focuses on characterization, plot, and narrative function, emphasizing that "content and forms are interlinked; observing the form of that narrative necessarily depends on one's understanding of its content."¹⁰ Textual analysis engages the Hebrew text of Joshua 2 and English translations. These interpretive models were employed to examined key terms such as *zonah* (prostitute) or innkeeper, *hesed* (loyal love), and *'ot* (sign or symbol). The literary-theological approach is based on the idea that biblical narratives convey divine truth through their storytelling. That is, the use of plot, character, and symbolism. Using these techniques, the paper dealt not only with the historical background of the text but also its theological purpose.

3.0 HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT

The events of Joshua 2, a pivotal moment in history, unfolded during the early stages of the Israelite conquest of Canaan. This period marks Israel's shift from wandering in the desert to establishing a permanent presence in the Promised Land—Jericho. Jericho, a key Canaanite city-state with formidable walls, was a crucial target in the conquest of Canaan. Archaeological excavations at Jericho have revealed ancient fortifications and destruction layers that some scholars associate with the biblical account of the city's downfall.¹¹ Stone asserts that "archaeologically, a reasonably consistent material culture unites the regions designated 'Canaan' in extrabiblical (especially Egyptian) texts. However, this does not appear to point to a single ethnic group but rather a population consisting of many ethnic identities subsumed under a city-state system dominated by New Kingdom Egypt."¹² The geographical term generally denotes "the traditional boundaries of the promised land, from a line between the southern tip of the Dead Sea to the "Brook of Egypt" to as far north as the city of Dan."¹³ Although interpretations vary, these discoveries enhance our understanding of the historical and archaeological context of the biblical narrative.

The political and cultural dynamics of Canaanite resistance provide valuable insights. Canaanite cities like Jericho are depicted as hostile and resistant to the Israelite invasion. This reflects

⁹ Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 183–188.

¹⁰ Yairah Amit, "Narrative Analysis: Meaning, Context, and Origins of Genesis 38," pp. 271–91 in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen*. Richards, Kent Harold, David L. Petersen, and Joel M. LeMon (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 272.

¹¹ Lawson Stone opines that "the terms "Canaan" and "Canaanite" appear 160 times in the Old Testament, and their preponderance is in Genesis through Judges. For details, see Lawson Stone, "Early Israel Appearance in Canaan," pages 127–64 in *Ancient Israel's History: An Introduction to Issues and Sources*, eds. Bill T. Arnold and Richard S. Hess (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishers, 2014), 128.

¹² Stone, "Early Israel Appearance in Canaan," 129.

¹³ Stone, "Early Israel Appearance in Canaan," 128.

their efforts to defend their land against external threats. The cooperation between Rahab and the Israelites illustrates the potential for alliances, even among “enemies,” motivated by shared interests or a mutual fear of a common threat. As Thomas B. Dozeman opines, Rahab’s interaction with the spies highlights the intricate political dynamics of the era.¹⁴

In considering the literary context of Joshua 2, it is important to consider the overarching theme of the entire book. While there is no specific theme, it is generally accepted that the book depicts the Israelites' journey to the Promised Land and their acquisition of this covenantal territory. The Book of Joshua can be seen as the fulfillment of the earlier promise made by God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob regarding the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:7; 15:18). It marks the beginning of the Historical Books in the Christian canon. Martin Noth's analysis in Deuteronomistic History shows how the Book of Joshua connects the Pentateuch and other Historical Books.¹⁵ Therefore, the Joshua 2 account serves as a crucial element that is carefully structured to serve as a plot development with a thematic focus on Israel's entrance into Canaan. It bridges Yahweh's commissioning in chapter 1 and the actual entrance described in chapters 3 and 4.¹⁶ The spies' encounter with Rahab and the return report to Joshua affirms and assures the Israelites of having the Promised Land. This refutes the ideology that Joshua 2 is an interpolated text that fails to fit into the larger context.¹⁷

Joshua 2 has been divided into several sections by different scholars. Two of such scholars whose outlines are relevant to this paper are Richard Nelson, and Nicolai Winther-Nielsen.¹⁸ Both Nelson and Winther-Nielsen see 2:1 and 2:23 – 24 as *inclusio*. As Nelson opines, in between are adventures of play. He develops dialogues in 2:3–5, 2:8–14, and 2:16–21.¹⁹ Winther-Nielsen creates the following episodes: Inciting (2:2), Incident (2:2–8a), Complication (2:2–8a), Climax (2:8b–14), Resolution (2:15–21), and Lessening Tension (2:22).²⁰ Chapter 2 also shifts characters. The characters are Joshua, Rahab (including the family), spies, the king of Jericho, and his messengers. These characters create literary devices such as dialogue and oath, contrast, and irony that foreshadow the conquest of the land. These raise several themes, such as covenant, “kinship”/foe, and salvation which affirm God’s commitments from Joshua 1. Joshua inarguably laid down the foundation for the conquest described in the book. Therefore, Joshua 2 serves as a historical continuity since it links the historical narrative of Israel’s journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. This bridges the gap between the wilderness wanderings and the settlement of Canaan. It is also in this passage that Israel encounters its enemies, their greatest opposition to having the promised land. I will proceed with the terminologies and will begin with “enemy.”

4.0 CLARIFICATION OF TERMINOLOGIES

4.1 “Enemy”

My “enemy,” a foe, an opposition, and such synonyms are words used to describe an individual or group of people who are usually hostile to another. When such words are used, one party feels threatened because they see the other party as an antagonist who can create harm or adverse effects on them. The effect can be on their lives, property (ies), and all that belongs to them. Generally, the Old

¹⁴ See details in Thomas B. Dozeman. *Joshua 1-12: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

¹⁵ See details in Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, trans. from the German: *Überlieferungsgechichtliche Studien*, 2nd edn, JSOTSup 15 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991).

¹⁶ John Stek, ‘Rahab of Canaan and Israel: The Meaning of Joshua 2’, CTJ 37/1 (2002), 28–48, 30.

¹⁷ Aaron Sherwood, “A Leader’s Misleading and a Prostitute’s Profession: A Re-examination of Joshua 2.” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* Vol 31.1 (2006): 43–61, 43.

¹⁸ I have adapted their structure to help me develop a structure that will aid the flow of my exegesis. My outline will be stated in the exegesis section of the paper.

¹⁹ Richard D. Nelson, *Joshua: A Commentary*. OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 40; Pekka Pitkänen, *Joshua*. (Nottingham: Appolos, 2010), 162.

²⁰ Nicolai Winther-Nielsen, *A Functional Discourse Grammar of Joshua. A Computer-Assisted Rhetorical Structure Analysis*. CBOTS 40. (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1995), 113.

Testament frequently addresses the presence of national “enemies” within the framework of Israel’s interactions with neighboring nations, depicting these foes as significant menaces to Israel’s safety and survival. Although the concept of “enemy” may seem general in the Old Testament, the idea of who an “enemy” is still multifaceted. This multifaceted concept results from the complexities of ancient Near Eastern politics, culture, and theology.

Nelson opines that “the concept of the “enemy” is expressed in terms of nations and city-state kings.”²¹ In referring to an analysis of the theological and literary role of the “enemy” in Joshua by Gordon Mitchell,²² Nelson postulates that in the Deuteronomistic History (DH) form of the book of Joshua, such nations appear in a stereotypical list of six or seven.²³ Nelson concludes that in the Joshua account, “enemies” of the Israelites are “generally termed Amorites and Canaanites, though without much geographic consistency (5:1; 7:7, 9; 10:5-6, 12; 17:16, 18; 24: 12, 15, 18).”²⁴ Philip D. Stern suggests that “the “enemy” is treated as *herem*, something devoted to destruction.”²⁵ Nelson proposes that, “The most expansive application of the category is described at Jericho: all the people and all the booty are *herem*. Obviously, from a narrative point of view, only this exceptionally unrestricted version of *herem* could be used to lead into the Achan story.”²⁶

Joshua 2, which happens to be the focused chapter for this work, sets the stage for the “enemy” motive in the Book of Joshua. In Joshua 2, the concept of “enemy” mainly focuses on the tension between the Israelites and the Canaanites as they prepare to enter the Promised Land. The fulfillment of having the Promised Land was achieved through an “enemy” – a Canaanite woman (Rahab) as a result of an oath they took. Hence, in the case of Rahab’s household, the strict requirements of *herem* were overlooked due to the overriding obligation to uphold unbroken oaths. Therefore, Joshua 6:22-25 describes how Rahab and her family were spared from destruction. The freedom of the household led to her “kinship” with Israel, as opined in the New Testament (Matt. 1:5). This movement from “kinship” becomes a reality based on the oath she established with the spies (Josh. 2:12–21). Therefore, before examining the term “kinship,” I will briefly discuss the theme of covenant relationships.

4.2 Covenant Relationships

A covenant is traditionally defined as a bond between two people. This can be between two individuals, two groups, or individuals and a group of people or organizations. In the Old Testament concept, a covenant is often an agreement between the divine and human. These covenants often involve promises, obligations, and conditions. It also establishes relationships with specific commitments, which usually leads to the creation of “kinship.” Joshua M. Matson had this to write on covenant-creating “kinship.” He opines

In the world of the Old Testament, covenants that create kinship can be categorized into three forms: familial, temporal, and divine. Familial covenants of kinship are the result of a shared parentage or lineage. Temporal covenants of kinship result from oaths and treaties made between nation-states or societal leaders intending to strengthen political alliances and dissuade against conflict. Divine covenants of kinship result from

²¹ Nelson, *Joshua*, 18.

²² Gordon Mitchell, *Together in the Land. A Reading of the Book of Joshua*. JSOTS 134 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1993), 122–84.

²³ Nelson, *Joshua*, 18.

²⁴ Nelson, *Joshua*, 18.

²⁵ Philip D. Stern, ‘The Biblical Herem: A Window in Israel’s Religious Experience.’ *Brown Judaic Studies*, 2020. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvzpv53h>. Accessed 13 Aug. 2024.

²⁶ Nelson, *Joshua*, 19–20.

accepting a religious law through formal rites that emphasize one's shared equality with others of the covenant in the eyes of the deity (*God*).²⁷

Rahab's narrative aligns well with Matson's definition. In this context, it can be described as both temporal and divine based on the oath she established with the spies. An affirmation of this is that “kinship” through temporal and divine means, however, is associated with the Hebrew term *bērît* (בְּרִית), usually translated as “covenant,” “contract,” or “agreement.”²⁸ In addition, Cross argues that “*bērît* is related to various words in Akkadian, Arabic, Aramaic, and Hebrew that are translated as “covenant, treaty, or oath.”²⁹ Johannes Pedersen also explains *bērît* as “the relationship between those who belong together (in terms of both or treaties) with all the rights and obligations which spring from this relationship. It consequently encompasses the relationship between those related by “kinship” and those united by covenant.”³⁰ In summary, Rahab's covenant is temporal in the sense that she allies with the spies – the delegates of the Israelite nation. It is divine because she confesses her faith and believes in the Supreme Being (YHWH).

Covenants of this nature, as opined by Pedersen, promote “kinship” when the parties involved are obliged to the terms. The opposite is that they become “enemies” when treaties or oaths are broken, which mostly leads to destruction (*herem*). To avoid such *herem*, nations and people can betray their “kin.” Rahab's case in Joshua 2 is evident. This led her into “kinship” with Israel, an “enemy” to her own “kinship.”

4.3 “Kinship”

Mark R. Glanville asserts that people have been connected through “kinship” networks since the dawn of human relationships. The term “kinship” denotes solidarity and pertains to our obligations towards others and the support we can expect in return.³¹ Hence, “kinship” can be described as individuals who are deeply intertwined in each other's lives and, therefore, integral parts of one another. The Old Testament places a significant emphasis on “kinship” because it plays a pivotal role in shaping social structures, legal codes, and narratives. The key elements of “kinship” can be summarized in terms of family structure, tribal/clan organization, levirate marriage, inheritance laws, and covenantal relationships.³²

The family structure consists of immediate family units (parents and children) and extended family units (relatives such as cousins and in-laws). Levirate Marriage was a custom where a man was obligated to marry his deceased brother's widow to produce offspring for the deceased and carry on the family line. Inheritance laws were crafted to safeguard family property and ensure it remained within the tribe or clan.³³ “Kinship” was also demonstrated through covenantal relationships, whether divine or human. Divine relationships included those between God and people. Human covenants are typically fictional types of “kinship” resulting from a covenant between two groups of people. Cross

²⁷ Joshua M. Matson, “Covenants, Kinship, and Caring for the Destitute in the Book of Amos,” 399–420 in *Covenant of Compassion: Caring for the Marginalized and Disadvantaged in the Old Testament*, eds. Avram R. Shannon, Gaye Strathearn, George A. Pierce, and Joshua M. Sears (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2021), 400. Italics mine.

²⁸ HALOT, s.v. בְּרִית.

²⁹ Frank Moore Cross, *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 16–17. Cross identifies these terms as follows: Arabic ‘ahd, Aramaic ‘âdayyâ’, Akkadian *rikšātum*, and Hebrew ‘êdôt (עֵדוֹת).

³⁰ Johannes Pedersen, *Der Eid bei den Semiten in seinem Verhältnis zu verwandten Erscheinungen sowie die Stellung des Eides im Islam* (Strasbourg: Karl J. Trübner, 1914), 8.

³¹ Mark R. Glanville, “‘Festive kinship’: Solidarity, responsibility, and identity formation in Deuteronomy.” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 44(1), (2019): 134.

³² Glanville, “Festive kinship,” 133–52.

³³ For details, see Glanville, “Festive kinship,” 133–52. Further reference include (from Glanville): Marshall Sahlins, *What Kinship Is – and Is Not* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 74–86; Hebert Applebaum (ed), “Kinship, Nationality, and Religion in American Culture: Toward a Definition of Kinship,” 63–71 in *Perspectives in Cultural Anthropology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987).

notes that in the ancient Near East, one of the essential aims of covenant-making was to establish “kinship.” Therefore, at the core of covenant-making lies the responsibility of a “kinsman/woman” to protect the well-being of his fellow “kinsman/woman.”³⁴

“Kinship” is a pivotal theme in the narrative of Rahab and her family. Glanville states “kinship” is “the language and conceptuality of ‘natural’ relations as a metaphor for socially negotiated relationships which create communities of people, with and without blood ‘kinship.’”³⁵ This definition is fitting because it allows us to examine both fictive and true “kinship,” as seen in Joshua 2. Moreover, “kinship” has not always been defined solely by biological relationships.³⁶ The spies sent by Joshua and the king’s messengers can be considered true “kins” to their various tribes, while the connection between Rehab and the Jews develops into fictive “kinship.” Therefore, Glanville’s definition is appropriate for understanding the dynamics of the “enemy” and “kinship” covenant in Joshua 2. The next section will provide an exegetical study of Joshua 2, highlighting the concept of “enemy” and the “kinship” covenant in the passage.

5.0 ANALYSING JOSHUA 2 IN LIGHT OF “ENEMY-KINSHIP” COVENANT DYNAMICS

The analysis will address how oath between Rahab and the spies) interplay with the “enemy” and “kinship” motive. The passage will be divided into the following subthemes:³⁷

- I. Introduction: Setting the stage for the narrative (2:1).
- II. Meeting “kins” and “enemies:” Rahab’s Ethical Risk and Protective Action (2:2–7).
- III. Setting the stage for the covenant: a precursor to the covenant agreement (8–11).
- IV. Establishment of Covenant: the transition from “enemy” to “kinship” (2:12–14).
- V. Reaffirming the covenant – The scarlet cord as a symbol of the covenant (2:15–21).
- VI. Concluding the narrative – Men (spies) return and report to Joshua (2:22–24).

5.1 Introduction (2:1)

The first verse, which serves as an introduction, sets the stage for the narrative and, in effect, the whole conquest story in the book of Joshua. The passage begins with two spies sent by Joshua to Jericho. Therefore, right from the onset, we see the Israelites entering the camp of their “enemies.” It informs both the characters and the location. Two locations are indicated here—‘Shittim’ and ‘the land.’ The term “land” (*eretz*) used here refers to the geographical location of Canaan and, more specifically, Jericho. This assertion is based on the fact that the Hebrew language uses two keywords for land – *eretz* and ‘*adamah*. “The most common one is ‘*eretz*, meaning geographical territory or country or the whole earth.”³⁸ Nelson asserts that “Shittim (also 3:1; location uncertain) is the traditional east bank staging point in the Tetrateuch (Num. 25:1; Mic. 6:5). The phrase ‘the land, especially Jericho’ implies that Jericho is the key to Canaan, both strategically and in the plot of the chapters to follow (8:2; 9:3; 10:1).”³⁹

Joshua 2:1 also introduces the principal characters of the narrative: Joshua (son of Nun), the spies, and Rahab. Here, Joshua’s name is mentioned in full. He sent the spies to view the land. The narrative opens with the spies entering Rahab’s house, described as that of a ‘*ishah zonah*—a term variously translated as “prostitute” or “innkeeper.”⁴⁰ Commentators detect inference here with the use of the verb (*šākab*) בָּקַבְתִּי. The meaning of the name Rahab influences such inference. For example,

³⁴ Cross, *From Epic to Canon*, 11–13.

³⁵ Glanville, “‘Festive kinship,’ 135.

³⁶ Sahlin, *What Kinship Is – and Is Not*, 74–86.

³⁷ The structure developed is based on the outline in Nelson, *Joshua*, 40; Pitkänen, *Joshua*, 162, Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12*, and Winther-Nielsen, *A Functional Discourse Grammar of Joshua*, 113.

³⁸ Roy H. May, *Joshua, and the Promised Land*. (New York: UMC, 1997), 1.

³⁹ Nelson, *Joshua*, 47,

⁴⁰ Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 349.

Douglas S. Earl references sources that suggest *rhb* is used in the Ugaritic epic to refer to female genitals.⁴¹ Phyllis A. Bird also opines that “social evidence on the status of the prostitute in antiquity suggests that Rahab’s place was an inn or public house.”⁴² This has led some scholars to interpret “Rahab as a merchant or innkeeper, … such an interpretation may be supported by evidence on the keeper of the Old Babylonian *bêt šabî(ti)* ‘inn,’ who dealt in all sorts of commodities and had to notify the palace of intruders.”⁴³ For Donald Wiseman, “her status as an inn-keeper implies that she was a practicing prostitution a state-employed informer and a female small broker.”⁴⁴

The debate raising such issues relating to the identity of Rahab is the verb *šākab*. This is because some believe an act of sex could have gone on, but “the verb *šākab* is not a two-place predicate with the obligatory direction argument ‘lie down at’ in contrast to the one-place predicate ‘lie or sleep’ as in verse 8.”⁴⁵ Again, there is no hint of sex in the Rahab story. The concept of Rahab has a professional prostitute from the word *zonâ*, the same word (*zanâ*) with which Israel is described as going astray at Shittim. In addition, Rahab’s very name means wide in a sense – broad.⁴⁶ The description of Rahab may rather suggest a person who does not align with the actions and acts of God. Hence, the introduction is to signal an action being taken to occupy the covenantal land occupied by their “enemy.” The other characters (King of Jericho and his messengers) appear in verse 2.

5.2 Meeting “kins” and “enemies” (2:2–7)

In 2:2, Rahab encounters both her “enemies” (spies) and her “kins” (messengers from the Jericho king). Having set the reader up to expect disaster, the story takes a new twist, losing interest in the question of sex (2:1) but with a further expectation of the tragedy introduced by the king of Jericho sending messengers to Rahab (2:2). The king of Jericho sent messengers because he was informed of the spies’ arrival. It is difficult to postulate how the king heard about the spies. However, the introductory formula in verse 2, which uses the passive construction (it was told to the King), emphasizes the information rather than the person delivering it.

Again, “the speech verb ‘āmar is in passive *niphal* to allow for the 3rd argument recipient (to the king of Jericho) to be introduced postverbally.”⁴⁷ So it can be deduced that “a sentence-initial deictic particle *hinnēh* ‘look’ is used in attention arousing function.”⁴⁸ Thus, the new development heightens the drama as the reader senses a threat to the spies and may fear Rahab’s betrayal.⁴⁹ The challenge here is how Rahab’s deception (to her kinsfolk) is to be viewed and how her agreement with the spies (her “enemies”) is understood with the *herem* injunction of Deuteronomy 7: 1–5.⁵⁰ Rahab took a faith action and provided protection and hospitality for the spies (2:4–7). This implies that she deceived her own people against the “enemy.” In other words, Rahab is now on the edge of becoming an “enemy” of her own “kinship.” The only alternative option for her will be to affiliate with her supposed “enemy.” Hence, she initiates a covenant to help her transition from an “enemy” of the Israelite-to-Israelite “kinship.”

⁴¹ Earl, “Reading Joshua as Christian Scripture,” 125.

⁴² Phyllis A. Bird, “The Harlot as Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in three Old Testament Texts,” *Semeia* 46: 119 – 39, 127

⁴³ See Winther-Nielsen, *A Functional Discourse Grammar of Joshua*. 118; Donald Wiseman, Rahab of Jericho. *The Tyndale House Bulletin*. 14:8–11, 9.

⁴⁴ Wiseman, Rahab of Jericho, 9.

⁴⁵ Winther-Nielsen, *A Functional Discourse Grammar of Joshua*, 118.

⁴⁶ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Reading Rahab” pages 57–68 in *Tehillah le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg* eds by Mordechai Cogan, Barry L. Eichler and Jeffrey H. Tigay, (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1997), 66.

⁴⁷ Winther-Nielsen, *A Functional Discourse Grammar of Joshua*, 119.

⁴⁸ Winther-Nielsen, *A Functional Discourse Grammar of Joshua*, 119.

⁴⁹ Winther-Nielsen, *A Functional Discourse Grammar of Joshua*, 119.

⁵⁰ Earl, “Reading Joshua as Christian Scripture,” 125.

It must be noted that Rahab is not the only woman in Scripture who betrays her people. There are other examples of biblical women who demonstrated their loyalty by hiding and lying in 2 Samuel 17:17–22 and Judges 4:18–20.⁵¹ Similarly, several passages describe how people betray their “kins” and align with their “enemy.” Such instances include the Shechemites (Judg. 9), Jephthah’s Daughter (Judg. 11), King Manasseh of Judah (2 Kgs. 21; 2 Chr. 33), and a man who betrayed his people in Judges 1:22–26. When it comes to lying, even the two Hebrew midwives lied to save Moses at his birth (Exod. 1:18–19). Therefore, Rahab’s action is not exclusive. However, her decision makes her an adversary to her own people. This moment marks Rahab’s decisive act of allegiance, as she rejects her own people and aligns herself with Israel. Her declaration in Joshua 2:4–5 demonstrates this shift, and in verses 9–21, she solidifies her commitment through a covenantal oath that establishes her new identity and loyalty to Israel.

5.3 Setting the stage for the covenant (8–11)

After deceiving her people (“kin”) for not knowing the location of the spies, she initiates a conversation with them. She appeals for her life in conversation, as indicated in 9. This appeal prompts the response of the spies, as outlined in 14. Before her appeal, she confesses her belief in YHWH and its effect on the land of Canaan. Such a confession clearly indicates her willingness to betray and affiliate. She is sure YHWH has given Israel the land, demonstrating trust in YHWH. Rahab’s speech reflects her awareness of covenantal history (2:8–9: especially verse 9, where she said, “I know” which indicates her knowledge). This is because the phrase *ki, Adonai Eloheichem - hu Elohim bashamayim mi-ma'al, ve'al haaretz mi-tachat* used by Rahab is also used by Moses and Solomon in Deuteronomy 4:39 and 1 Kings 8:23 respectively which “guarantee of the conquest of the land.”⁵²

Her confession and knowledge are deep as she recites and interprets the significant past events of Israel’s people in 2:10–11. Her recounts of past events, such as the crossing of the Red Sea and victories at East Jordan by the conquering of Sihon, Og, and Amorites kings, are evidence for the confession. In addition, Rahab acknowledges God with the words “I know,” the very words with which Jethro pronounces his faith in God (Exod. 18:11) and with which the Syrian general, Naaman, declares God’s greatness (2 Kgs. 5:15).

The phrase, ‘I know,’ is a formula by which people from foreign nations come to acknowledge God. Hence, “this literary use may have its origin in a rite of passage, a kind of proto-conversion that may have been practiced in ancient Israel.”⁵³ This evidence shows that Rahab knew who God was and the covenant he had with his people. Earl posits that “the way she deals with the spies is interpreted using the fundamental covenant characteristic of *hesed* (חֶסֶד) and appeals to the *hesed* (חֶסֶד) that she has shown as the basis for her hope in 2:12.”⁵⁴ A new turn is, therefore, made at the beginning of 2:12.

5.4 Establishing the Covenant (2:12–14)

Rahab initiates the covenant that alludes to her transition (2:12). The confession in 2:9–11 justifies Rahab’s plea for an oath to guarantee her alliance with the Israelites. She opines *ki asiti imakhem hesed; va'asitem gam atem im-beit avi, hesed*, literally, since I have dealt “hessed” with you, you will also *hesed* my father’s house. Her words *ki asiti imakhem hesed* evokes several texts such as Deuteronomy 5:10 and Exodus 20:6.⁵⁵ *Hesed* is also “a hendiadys for covenantal integrity.”⁵⁶ Earl has much to say about *hesed* (חֶסֶד). He opines

⁵¹ Frymer-Kensky, “Reading Rahab,” 60.

⁵² Winther-Nielsen, *A Functional Discourse Grammar of Joshua*, 129.

⁵³ Frymer-Kensky, “Reading Rahab,” 62.

⁵⁴ Earl, “Reading Joshua as Christian Scripture,” 126.

⁵⁵ Earl, “Reading Joshua as Christian Scripture,” 126.

⁵⁶ Robert G. Boiling, *Joshua: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary*. AB vol 6 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1982), 147.

hesed is that which characterizes how YHWH deals with Israel and occurs in the command relating to avoiding idolatry, which is undoubtedly a concern to Rahab. Likewise, *hesed*, characters YHWH in the foundational Exodus 34:6–7, being the basis of Israel’s hope, and *hesed* is also identified in Micah 6:8 as one of the three characteristics that are taken together, what it essentially is that YHWH requires of the Israelites. Thus, despite appearing to be a paradigmatic outsider, Rahab manifests precisely that which characterizes the center of Israel’s identity and existence. Moreover, *hesed* is a term that occurs in Deuteronomy 7:12 in the context of YHWH keeping his covenant according to what he swore to the ancestors. This same important word now appears in Joshua 2:12, 17 and 20. Rahab uses the term for the first time in Joshua 2:10.⁵⁷

In the analysis so far, we can see how the covenant of oath based on *hesed* aids the transition process of Rahab from being an “enemy” of the Israelite to becoming an Israelite “kinship.” Therefore, it can be argued that Rahab used the concept of “*hesed*,” as covenant ideology to transition to “kinship” (2:12–13). The feedback of the spies in 2:14 affirms this.

5.5 Reaffirming the covenant (2:15–21).

Scholars mostly argue that these verses (2:15–21) repeat 2:9–14. However, I consider it as a reaffirmation of the covenant. My assertion comes from two main points. The first is the introduction of the scarlet cord, which does not appear in 2:15–21. Second, the spies, not Rehab, initiated this side of the covenant. They feared Rahab could still possibly betray them. Hence, their promise (2:14), “Save our lives, and we will save yours.” They mirror her choice of words (cf. their v. 14 with her vv. 9, 12, and 13), recognizing that she controls the situation. It is fitting that they later refer to this agreement as “your oath” (vv. 17, 20; cf. Gen. 24:8).⁵⁸

The scarlet cord that Rahab hung in her window was a sign for the Israelites to spare her and her household during the conquest of Jericho. This cord represented a covenant, designating Rahab and her family as allies of Israel rather than “enemies.” Frank Anthony Spina proposes that it “evokes erotic and sexual imagery, being a sign of prostitution.”⁵⁹ However, Daniel L. Hawk suggests the “reddish color at the widow recalls the Israelite’s deliverance from death in Egypt (Exod. 12:1–32).”⁶⁰ Hess suggest Rahab’s scarlet cord echoes the Passover in Exodus 12.⁶¹ The significance of the scarlet cord is highlighted by its historical interpretation, often seen as a foreshadowing of the blood of Jesus.⁶² In a nutshell, it can be argued that this narrative depicts the cord as a distinguishing mark that secures life and salvation for Rahab and her loved ones.

Another aspect is the spies’ descent through the window. This act can be termed as ratification of the covenant. Thus, Rahab needs to affirm her alignment with the Israelites, confirming her move from “enemy” to “kinship” (2:21). This is because the king already knows their identity and mission. However, they have something else to hide: the escape plan Rahab has proposed for them. Therefore, when they keep the covenant, they become “kins,” and when they disobey, they remain “enemies” (2:19). Hence, the scarlet cord hangs as a visual symbol/sign of the covenant.

5.6 Concluding the narrative (2:22–24)

⁵⁷ Earl, “Reading Joshua as Christian Scripture,” 126–27.

⁵⁸ Nelson, *Joshua*, 51–52.

⁵⁹ Frank Anthony Spina, *The faith of the outsider: Exclusion and Inclusion in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 62.

⁶⁰ Daniel L. Hawk, *Joshua* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 49.

⁶¹ Richard S. Hess, “Joshua” in NIV Zondervan Study Bible. ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015). Note on 2:18.

⁶² Justin Martyr, *Dial. 111*, 3-4.

The departure of the spies begins the fulfillment of the covenant. It also begins the transition of the Rahab household from being part of Israel's "enemies" to "kinship." The final fulfillment of Rahab's household transition is seen in 6:22–25 and related passages in the New Testament (Matt. 1:5, Heb. 11:31, and Jas. 2:25). The spies, now called men, return safely and report back to Joshua (2:23). Although these men were assigned the task of inspecting the target of Israel's attack, instead they return to Joshua with a report on the "enemy's" state of mind and a theological conclusion.⁶³ This is evident in following the report of the narrative of the spies' return. Here, the reader is presented with their final report (v. 24), which nearly repeats Rahab's confession in 2:9 word for word. Therefore, the conclusion of Joshua 2 confirms the theme of this work since they report back on the state of their "enemies." Such a report was only successful because of Rahab. Hence, the dynamics of covenant role lead this transition from "enemy" to "kinship" and vice versa. As Hess observed, "Rahab story does not lead to judgment, military loss or any lack of unity on the part of those who confess and follow Isreal's God...Rahab's confession moves her and her family from the status of Canaanite "enemy" to Israel "friend.'"⁶⁴ At this point, it will be appropriate to look at some implications before drawing the final conclusion.

6.0 SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

The implications of this narrative are multifaceted, affecting theological understanding, ethical considerations, social structures, historical perspectives, and cultural norms. I will outline a few of these implications below.

First is the consideration of "kinship" and covenant. The concept of "kinship" lies at the heart of both Rahab's story and African social thought. This is exemplified by Rahab's alliance with the Israelite spies and her subsequent protection of her family. Her request that the spies extend their covenant to include "my father's house" (Josh. 2:13) reflects a "kinship"-based understanding of salvation. This alliance evolved into a permanent covenantal relationship, illustrating how individual loyalty to God can result in inclusion in the broader covenant community. This highlights the dynamic nature of covenant relationships. Rahab's assimilation into the Israelite community and her inclusion in the genealogy of Jesus signifies the expansion of God's covenant beyond traditional boundaries. In Ghanaian and broader African cosmology, "kinship" is among the key forms of foundation if not the main foundation of social identity, mutual obligation, and belonging. Salvation or blessing is therefore not viewed as an individual experience but as a communal reality that embraces one's family and lineage. Hence, drawing her family into the covenant of deliverance, Rahab reflects an African theological sensibility. That is, one that sees redemption as relational, collective, and rooted in the well-being of the community.

The second implication pertains to Judgment and Redemption. The narrative contrasts the destruction of Jericho with the fact that some escaped such destruction. This contrast highlights themes such as divine judgment and redemption. The emphasis here is that while God pronounces judgment on those who oppose Him, there is still room for redemption and salvation for those who turn to Him in faith. The narrative resonates with indigenous African concepts of justice and reconciliation, in which wrongdoing is addressed through accountability. Nonetheless, forgiveness and the restoration of communal harmony remain central to social and moral order.

The next implication is that the inclusion of Rahab's family in the Israelite community symbolizes the emergence of new social identities and community formation. This type of implication strengthens group unity. Her narrative exemplifies the way societies form and redefine themselves by welcoming individuals who share common values and commitments rather than solely relying on prior associations. In an African, particularly Ghanaian, context, this aligns closely with local understandings of communal identity, where social cohesion and moral responsibility are rooted in

⁶³ Nelson, *Joshua*, 47–48.

⁶⁴ Hess, *Joshua*, 106–107.

shared ethical commitments, hospitality, and loyalty. Rahab's story, therefore, demonstrates how communities can welcome outsiders, fostering unity and reinforcing collective identity through shared faith and ethical alignment.

Another implication is that this study contributes to the ongoing conversation in African biblical hermeneutics by showing how contextual readings can uncover dimensions of Scripture that are often overlooked. The reading of Rahab's narrative in light of African societal values such as "kinship" reveals fresh theological insights. The African contextual approach does not distort the biblical text; rather, it brings its ethical and communal dimensions into sharper focus. It demonstrates that biblical interpretation is most faithful when it holds together the ancient world of the text and the lived realities of its contemporary readers. As Kwame Bediako observes, the encounter between the gospel and African culture represents a living continuation of the biblical story of faith and inclusion.⁶⁵ For African scholars and theologians, Rahab's story provides a compelling model for reading Scripture in a way that is both critically rigorous and theologically transformative.

7.0 CONCLUSION

The treatment of "enemy" and "kinship" in the Old Testament and specifically the Book of Joshua is a complex interplay of historical realities, theological perspectives, socio-cultural and ethical teachings. It sheds light on how adversaries are perceived within the framework of faith and covenant. The concept is particularly relevant in Joshua 2 as it highlights the tension between the Israelites and the Canaanites as they approach the Promised Land. Rahab's story empowers us to understand that there is space for reassurance, personal devotion, and divine mercy amid broader conflict and conquest. Rahab had the choice between the spies sent by Joshua and the messengers sent by the King of Jericho. Her decision to ally with the spies effectively established a fictive "kinship" by siding with the "enemy," which evolved into a permanent one. Therefore, Rahab got it right as she transitioned from an "enemy" to Israel "kin" through a covenant.

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⁶⁵ Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum, 1992), 232–234.

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About the Author

Ebenezer Asibu-Dadzie Junior is a PhD student in Biblical Studies and an ordained minister of the Methodist Church Ghana. His doctoral research focuses on the intersection of Religion, Translation, and Biblical Studies, examining their relevance to contemporary issues in both Africa and the global diaspora. His academic interests include exploring how religious texts and their translations shape social, cultural, and theological discourse, with particular attention to their practical implications for African and diasporic communities. As an Ordained minister, he is committed to integrating rigorous scholarly inquiry with practical ministry, contributing meaningfully to ongoing conversations at the nexus of faith, culture, and academic scholarship.