A CRY FOR HELP: A NOTE IN THE MARGIN OF ACTS 16:9

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As with other books of the Hebrew Bible the reception of the Book of Joshua in Christian tradition started with the earliest writings.¹ In the New Testament Joshua is mentioned by name in Stephen’s survey of Jewish history in Acts 7:45 (a reference to the Ark of the Covenant in Josh 3:14, with echoes also from 18:1; 23:9; 24:18) and in Heb 4:8, in the midst of an explanation of the concept of “rest” (with reference to Josh 22:4).²

There are few citations from the book and these are mostly open for discussion, but perhaps not lacking altogether. Mark’s citation of the first commandment (ἐξ ὅλης τῆς διανοίας) in Mark 12:30 may contain an element from Josh 22:5.³ NA²⁷ contains a number of other references to Joshua, some of which are quite indirect at best, while others are perhaps more pertinent. Among the latter are the references to Rahab the harlot (Josh 2:1, 15; 6:17, 22–25) in Matthew’s genealogy (1:5) and again in Jas 2:25 and Heb 11:31 (see also Acts 9:25).⁴ It is in Hebrews and Acts, more than

¹ The reception of the figure of Joshua had of course already begun in Jewish tradition. His deeds are recalled in detail in Sir 46:1–10 and referred to also in 1–2 Macc. Philo and Josephus obviously had to deal with him, both from their own quite distinct perspectives. See now T.R. Elsner, Josua und seine Kriege in jüdischer und christlicher Rezeptionsgeschichte (Theologie und Frieden 37; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008) 22–81 and 105–128. The evidence from the New Testament (or rather, Acts, Heb, and James), with special attention for the war motif, is discussed in Elsner’s Chapter Three (82–104). For a selection of excerpts from comments by the Fathers, see J.R. Franke (ed.), Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1–2 Samuel (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Old Testament IV; Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2005) 1–98. Although not reception history as such, the question of how the book can be read in Christian tradition (which evidently involves looking at its reception history) is dealt with by D.S. Earl, Reading Joshua as Christian Scripture (Journal of Theological Interpretation, Supplement 2; Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010).


⁴ Cf. Elsner, Josua, 93–94 and 96–100.
in any other writing from the New Testament, that Joshua has found an
echo. In Heb 11:30 reference is made to the fall of Jericho from Josh 6:14–16,
20.5 God’s “good words” (pl., Josh 21:45 and 23:15) occur in Heb 6:3 (sg.).
The phrase Moses “the servant” occurs several times in Joshua, in variant
forms, and is itself an echo of Num 12:7. A reference to the latter is found
in Heb 3:5 (printed in italics in NA27), with an additional reference to
Josh 1:2 (with θεράπων, as in Num 12:7). A variant form of the same phrase
occurs also in Rev 15:3 (with δοῦλος and additional references to Josh 1:7
and 14:7 that both read παις θεου, as in Josh 22:5). A similarly indirect refer-
ence to Joshua is found in Heb 13:5 citing Deut 31:6, 8 (the second element
also in Gen 28:15) to which allusion is made in Josh 1:5 (οὐκ ἐγκαταλείψω
σε). Of a similar category is the reference to the field Jacob gave to his son
Joseph; see Gen 48:22). The case for a reference to Josh 7:19 in John 9:24 for
the phrase δὸς δὸξαν τῷ θεῷ may be stronger, even though Joshua has a more elaborate form with τῷ κυρίῳ
θεῷ Ἰσραηλ
and also adds as a complement καὶ δὸς τὴν ἐξομολόγησιν. The same phrase
(and in an identical form as in John) is found also in Ps 67:35LXX, but the
explicit reference to Moses (and Num 12:2, 8) might be an indication that
John was rather thinking of the complex Num-Josh in this context. A few
loose (and not exclusive) echoes can be found in Rev: 8:2 (trumpets, and
Josh 6:4–6); 9:14 (the great river Euphrates, and Josh 1:4, but also Deut 1:7,
and again in Rev 16:12); 20:8 (the enemy is numerous “like the sand of the
sea,” and Josh 11:4, but also Judg 7:12 and 1 Kings 13:5). The Lord’s forceful
couragement of Joshua in 1:9 sounds through also in Acts 18:9–10, but
it is by no means the sole parallel that can be cited (see also Isa 41:10;
43:5; Jer 11:8, 19). The verb νοσφίζομαι in Acts 5:2, 3 (see also Tit 2:10) is as
exceptional in the New Testament as it is in the LXX and could be an
allusion to Josh 7:1 (or to 2 Macc 4:32, the only other occurrence of it).6 In
evoking Israel’s history Luke has Paul refer in Acts 13:19, in his speech at
Antioch, to the defeat of the seven nations (Deut 7:1) in combination with
the episode of the allotment of the Land by Eleazar, Joshua and the heads
of the tribes as described in Josh 14:1–2 (note the verb κατακληρονομέω).
Finally there is the puzzling reference to Josh 10:6 in the margin of
Acts 16:9, which invites creating a link between Joshua’s call to enter the

5 The reference to Josh 4:6ss at Heb 11:32 in the list of NA27 (p. 779) is a mistake and
should read Judg 4:6ss (so correctly in the margin at 11:32).
6 For Joshua, see H. Conzelmann, Die Apostelgeschichte (HNT 7; Tübingen: Mohr Sie-
beck, 1963) 49; E. Haenchen, Die Apostelgeschichte (5th ed.; KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck &
Ruprecht, 1965) 193.