
Joshua in the Shadows of Genocide: A Hagaric Decolonial Reading

By Shadia Qubti

The unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations

Introduction: Tasting Sweetness While Wrestling with Violence

For two years, many have been watching genocide unfold on screens. By September 2025, when this reading group convened for its three-month study, the death toll in Gaza had reached catastrophic proportions. Children pulled from rubble. Hospitals bombed. Families obliterated. Ancient olive trees uprooted. The logic of *herem*, total destruction of people, animals, and land—made manifest in real time. And through it all, sacred texts continued to be instrumentalized to justify the violence.

This weaponization of Joshua conquest narratives is not new. As Michael Prior demonstrates in *The Bible and Colonialism*, “the biblical claim of the divine promise of land is integrally linked with a divine mandate to exterminate the indigenous people,” a narrative that “has supported virtually all Western colonizing enterprises (e.g. in Latin America, South Africa, Palestine).”¹ Spanish conquistadors justified genocide in the Americas by citing Joshua’s divinely commanded extermination of Canaanites. European colonizers and American settlers explicitly used Joshua to frame Indigenous peoples in North America as “new Canaanites” whose dispossession was divinely mandated.² As Randy Woodley (Keetoowah Cherokee) observes, “Christian Zionism’s theological framework mirrors the colonial logic that devastated Indigenous communities, divine promises used to justify dispossession and violence.”³ Joshua’s conquest theology casts long shadows, from the Americas to Palestine.

During the 1948 Nakba, Zionist forces implemented Plan Dalet, systematic Palestinian expulsion documented extensively by Israeli historians, while religious justifications drew explicitly on Joshua’s campaign against Jericho.⁴ A decade later, in 1958, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion institutionalized this theological framework by convening academics and politicians to study Joshua explicitly “through the prism of Joshua.”⁵

This biblical weaponization extends beyond Israeli society to American evangelical Christians, who provide significant theological and political support for Israeli military operations. Polling data from 2024 reveals that 64% of white evangelical Protestants believe Israel’s military actions in Gaza are justified, with 82% maintaining that Israel was given to the Jewish people by God according to scripture.⁶

Sixty-seven years later, as Gaza burns, a small reading group gathered on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations from September through November 2025 to engage in what they described as an intentional undoing, an upside-down version of Ben-Gurion’s colonial Bible study.⁷ The group represented two primary faith traditions, Christianity and Judaism, with participants acknowledging potential pitfalls in Christian-Jewish interactions and ways interfaith communities can cause harm, whether intentionally or unintentionally. But this was not an attempt to redeem violent texts or find hidden liberation within conquest narratives. Instead, it was a bold willingness to sit with the discomfort of scriptures being instrumentalized, to centre Gaza itself in hermeneutical practice and make meaning together when traditional individual interpretation has catastrophically failed.

This article examines how Hagaric decolonial hermeneutics creates space for theological accountability to ongoing genocide by centring Gaza’s ongoing destruction in interpretive practice. Rather than seeking answers or transformation of violent texts, this approach generates questions that emerge from the shared experience of watching genocide justified through sacred scripture. The methodology changed not the biblical violence but the reading communities who refused to seek textual redemption at Gaza’s expense.

Hagaric Methodology: When Abraham’s Story Is Not Enough

This approach employs what might be understood as a theological application of Participatory Action

Research (PAR), positioning community members with lived experiences as co-researchers rather than study subjects. PAR explicitly challenges colonialist-infused research processes by democratizing sites of knowledge production and decolonizing conventional Western-based research approaches. As the document notes, PAR “begins from a social, ethical and moral commitment not to treat people as objects of research but, rather, to recognize and value the differing and diverse experiences and knowledge of all those involved.”⁸ This theological PAR approach created space for Palestinian Christian, anti-Zionist Jewish, and white queer Christian perspectives to function as interpretive authorities generating new knowledge through collective wrestling with violent texts.

The group deliberately chose Hagaric rather than Abrahamic to frame their work, centring the experience of Hagar, Abraham’s second wife within the patriarchal household structure, mother of Ishmael, and matriarch banished by Sarah while pregnant. As one leader explained, “Being a matriarch, it is kind of an interesting lens to throw on our [Abrahamic] religions. To centre it on the experience of women, the experience of childbearing,”⁹ recognizing the patriarchal violence embedded in traditional Abrahamic theological framings.

The methodological framework employed PaRDeS+, an expansion of the classical four-level hermeneutical approach found in both Jewish and Christian interpretive traditions. The fourfold interpretive method appears in medieval Jewish mysticism as PaRDeS (*Peshat, Remez, Drash, Sod*) and in Christian patristic and medieval exegesis as the *Quadrigena* (literal, allegorical, moral, anagogical), with both traditions recognizing Scripture’s capacity for multiple simultaneous meanings.¹⁰ This study group added a fifth interpretive lens, “+Justice,” centring how conquest texts connect to contemporary liberation struggles, specifically Gaza’s destruction, thereby refusing the comfortable distance that allows scriptural violence to remain abstract rather than confronting its contemporary deployment in ethnic cleansing.

Three Voices Wrestling Under Gaza’s Shadow

1. Palestinian Christian Reading: Rahab as Indigenous Collaboration

The Palestinian Christian perspective read Rahab through the lens of Indigenous women forced into impossible survival choices under imperial occupation. Drawing on Musa Dube’s postcolonial analysis, this reading sees Rahab as a native woman who aids and

abets the colonizers of her land, not from treachery but from the cruel calculus of survival under occupation.¹¹

Contemporary parallels emerged immediately: Bethel, mentioned in Joshua as near the conquest site, is now an illegal Israeli settlement, *Beit El*, near Ramallah, where Palestinian families face ongoing displacement.¹²

This reading refused the comfortable distance of historical interpretation. Rahab’s choice—collaborate with invaders or face annihilation with her people—mirrors choices Palestinians face daily under occupation. The text presents her salvation as divine providence, but from an Indigenous perspective, her story represents the tragic necessity of seeming betrayal for survival. The Palestinian reading centred not Palestinian identity but Gaza’s current destruction, asking: What impossible choices are Gazan families making right now? What stories of collaboration and resistance are being written in rubble?

The Palestinian Christian perspective, presented by study co-leader Shadia Qubti, read Rahab through the lens of Indigenous women. This reading refused comfortable historical distance by creating contemporary Palestinian readings. Drawing inspiration from PaRDeS+ traditions, one such reading reimagined Rahab in contemporary Gaza, centring both gender and survival under impossible conditions.

A Contemporary Retelling: Rahab in Gaza

Rahab had learned to live in the spaces others couldn’t see. The corner apartment on the third floor, damaged in 2021 but still standing, gave her what she needed: distance from neighbors who might ask too many questions about why Ahmad from the corner shop had quietly become Rahab, growing her hair long and wearing her sister’s old clothes when her sister died in the bombing.

At twenty-eight, she survived by knowing things others didn’t—which routes the drones avoided, which commanders took bribes, which families were desperate enough to pay for passage documents that might or might not work. Living as herself had made her invisible to some, dangerous to others, but also useful to those who needed someone operating outside normal social networks.

The siege made everything possible and impossible at once. No hormones, no surgery, no official recognition—just the quiet determination to be who she was with scarves, makeup when she could find it, and the voice she’d taught herself in the privacy of bombed-out buildings.

Some neighbors whispered, others looked away, most were too busy surviving to care.

When the knock came at 2 AM, she assumed it was another desperate family seeking her services. Instead, two men stood in the shadows, speaking Arabic with accents she recognized—not local, not Egyptian. “We need shelter for three days,” the older one said quietly. “We’re... documenting conditions here for international observers.”

She saw through the lie immediately but also understood the game. Intelligence gathering. They needed someone who wouldn’t be missed, whose apartment wouldn’t be searched, whose death wouldn’t be investigated if things went wrong.

“Five hundred dollars American,” she said. “Half now.”

For three days, she hid them in the bombed-out section of her apartment—behind collapsed walls that looked impassable but weren’t. She brought them water, bread when she had it, and information about patrol schedules they claimed was for their “documentation.”

On the third night, as drones whirled overhead and buildings shook around them, the younger one asked why she was helping them. “Because staying alive means making choices that keep you alive,” she said simply. “Tomorrow you leave. I give you the signal cloth for your people to recognize, and my building gets ‘accidentally’ spared in the next bombing. My elderly aunt downstairs gets to live a little longer.”

The red headscarf she tied to her balcony railing the next morning felt like both salvation and damnation. In the apocalypse, there are no pure choices—only degrees of survival.

Three weeks later, when the bombing stopped and she realized her building still stood while others around it had fallen, her aunt came upstairs for the first time in months. “How did you know to mark the building?” the old woman asked. Rahab looked out at the wasteland that used to be her neighborhood. Her aunt waited for an answer, but Rahab only adjusted the red cloth on her balcony. Some questions carry their answers in the asking, and some silences hold more truth than words.¹³

Rahab’s Genealogy: From Conquest Collaborator to Christ’s Ancestor

Rahab appears in Jesus’s lineage (Matthew 1:5), connecting the Canaanite woman who aided Joshua’s conquest to the one whose Hebrew name Yeshua,

Jesus, derived from the same root as Yehoshua, Joshua, means “God saves.”¹⁴ Both names proclaim salvation, yet their theologies diverge radically. Joshua saved through conquest and elimination of Canaanites; Jesus saves through inclusion of their descendants, born into Rahab’s lineage. Where Joshua commanded destruction of Jericho’s inhabitants, Jesus emerges from that very people, his genealogy deliberately including four women whose stories involve sexual complexity, foreign origins, and survival through impossible circumstances: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba.

The irony demands theological attention: the Prince of Peace descends from Indigenous collaboration with conquerors. What does it reveal about divine presence in occupied territories that messianic lineage includes a woman who aided occupation forces to save her family? The Palestinian reading asks: If God’s salvation plan required Rahab’s survival through collaboration, what does this say about how contemporary Gazans navigate impossible choices? The genealogy refuses simple moral judgments, instead centring survival’s complex calculations under occupation.

2. Queer Christian Reading: Rahab and Scapegoating Systems

Beth Carlson-Malena¹⁵ applied René Girard’s scapegoating theory to examine how Rahab’s salvation functions within systems of sacrificial violence.¹⁶ Her extensive analysis revealed the disturbing logic of selective salvation: Rahab and her family survive precisely because everyone else must die. The text requires mass extermination to make individual salvation meaningful.

This reading employed rigorous textual criticism, examining Hebrew terms, editorial choices, and narrative structure. She focused particularly on the story of Achan in Joshua 7, the Israelite who took forbidden items from Jericho’s destruction, leading to military defeat and his eventual execution. She noted the “spoiler alert” beginning of Joshua 7, where the editor reveals Achan’s guilt immediately, creating dramatic irony that implicates readers in the scapegoating process. Her analysis of the lottery system, drawing straws to find the guilty party, revealed how divine choice through chance absolves leaders like Joshua of personal vendetta while maintaining the illusion of justice.

The Valley of Achor, which literally means the “valley of trouble,” became central to her interpretation. Achan’s execution created a geographical memorial to collective punishment, an entire valley named after one person’s supposed sin (Joshua 7:24-26). Carlson-Malena examined the wordplay between Achan’s name, possibly meaning “serpent,” and Achor (*akor*),

noting how the text creates linguistic connections between individual transgression and communal disaster. This scapegoating mechanism requires one person's death to restore group unity and divine favour.

Qubti provided linguistic analysis connecting the Hebrew *Achor* (*akor*) to the Arabic *akar*, which means water becoming unclear, diluted from its transparency. This connects to the text's description of hearts 'melting like water' in fear (Joshua 7:5), suggesting contamination and unclear vision under the pressure of conquest.

Carlson-Malena connected this ancient scapegoating to contemporary Gaza, where collective punishment is justified through individual "bad actors." The logic remains the same: identify the contaminating element, eliminate it publicly, and restore group cohesion through shared violence. Her "reverse stoning" practice, dismantling the pile of stones and carrying individual rocks as tools of remembrance, offered embodied resistance to this valley-of-trouble mentality.

Drawing on her evangelical background, Carlson-Malena exposed how conquest narratives function in contemporary Christian nationalism. She cited the "supermarket theology" phenomenon—treating scripture like grocery shopping, selecting comfortable passages while ignoring violence. Her session included extensive archaeological evidence from Dr. Kate Common's *Undoing Conquest*, noting the absence of historical evidence for Joshua's military campaigns and contextualizing the text as sixth-century BCE propaganda written during Assyrian threats to create national unity.¹⁷

The queer dimension of her reading emerged through analysis of belonging systems and boundary policing. She examined how violence against external enemies always results in internal surveillance and paranoia, connecting this to her own experience of evangelical gatekeeping around sexuality. "I know that from being queer and the insidious way that community discipline and policing works ... you're guilty by association,"¹⁸ she reflected, connecting personal experience to textual analysis.

Under Gaza's shadow, the questions became: How does collective punishment create "valleys of trouble" in Gaza? How does identifying contaminating elements justify group violence today? Who becomes the scapegoat when things go wrong?

3. Anti-Zionist Jewish Reading: Talmudic Wrestling with Conquest

Orev Reena Katz brought Talmudic wrestling tradition to bear on Joshua's violence.¹⁹ Citing Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb's work on Jewish revolutionary nonviolence,

this reading distinguished between a "Torah of conquest" and a "Torah of compassion," arguing that Jewish communities can choose interpretation that serves justice rather than domination.²⁰

They introduced participants to actual Talmudic methodology, showing images of Talmudic pages with their characteristic layout, central text surrounded by centuries of rabbinic commentary and argument. "The spaces that are the frames that have no letters in them are just as important," they explained, "because they're framing time and they're framing conversation."²¹ This visual representation demonstrated how Jewish interpretation has always been communal, argumentative, and ongoing rather than settled.

The Talmudic approach revealed rabbinic discomfort with Joshua's violence, including traditions questioning whether Achan's confession was coerced and whether the conquest required such brutality. They shared specific Talmudic discussions about the walls of Jericho, noting how rabbis created alternative images—the walls being "swallowed up" by the earth rather than simply falling down, suggesting divine intervention that minimized human violence.

Central to their interpretation was the concept of "living Torah"—understanding contemporary experiences as part of ongoing revelation. "The lives we live today are part of the Torah that we read that is thousands of years old,"²² Katz explained. This means Gaza's destruction must be included in any honest Jewish theological reflection, not as external political issue but as essential theological content.

They presented devastating contemporary data revealing that 47 percent of Jewish Israelis agreed that "when conquering an enemy city, the IDF should act as the Israelites did in Jericho, under Joshua's command, killing all its inhabitants."²³ This statistic exposed what Katz called the "genocidal imperative of Israeli Jewish society," demonstrating how "the settler colonial context has both enabled and reinterpreted Jewish religious texts as operative guidelines for genocidal violence."²⁴

The anti-Zionist Jewish reading rejected both Christian supersessionism, the Church replacing Israel, and Jewish supremacy, claiming exclusive textual authority. Instead, it reclaimed "Israel" as "God-wrestler" rather than nation-state supporter, positioning anti-Zionist Jewish theology as faithful response to traditional halakhic interpretive obligations. As Katz explained, "We're God wrestlers. We're not supporters of the state called Israel."²⁵

This perspective challenged the assumption that faithfulness to Jewish tradition requires support for the Israeli state. Instead, they argued, faithfulness requires

wrestling with God when God's name is used to justify genocide.

Under Gaza's shadow, the questions became: What does Jewish faithfulness require when Jewish power crushes Gaza? How do we wrestle with God when God's name justifies genocide? What does it mean to practise living Torah when Torah is being instrumentalized for ethnic cleansing?

Shared Focus on Herem

All three interpreters grappled with the Hebrew concept of *herem*, items or people "devoted to destruction" or "prescribed for God."²⁶ This term appears throughout Joshua's conquest narratives, describing both objects that must be destroyed and the fate of Canaanite populations. The word carries connotations of sacred contamination, things so dedicated to divine purposes that human contact renders them dangerous.

Qubti noted the Arabic cognate *haram*, meaning forbidden, connecting ancient prescription to contemporary religious language about forbidden actions. The linguistic resonance suggested how conquest theology embeds itself in everyday religious vocabulary, making violence seem divinely mandated rather than politically motivated.

Carlson-Malena examined how *herem* functions in the Achan narrative: his theft of "prescribed" items contaminates the entire community until he and his family are eliminated. The concept justifies collective punishment by suggesting that contamination spreads from individuals to communities, requiring violent purification to restore divine favour.

Katz brought Talmudic perspectives on *herem*, noting rabbinic discomfort with the concept's implications. Some rabbis questioned whether such total destruction was actually commanded or represented human misinterpretation of divine will. The tradition of Jewish wrestling with scripture included wrestling with its most violent implications.

Under Gaza's shadow, *herem* became uncomfortably contemporary. The logic of sacred contamination, identifying populations or individuals as so dangerous they must be eliminated for divine/national security, operates throughout Israeli military doctrine.

Shared Themes Emerging from Community Wrestling

Across all three perspectives, consistent themes emerged through the questions participants generated rather than the answers they provided.

Questions of survival and complicity dominated the discussions, as recurring concerns examined impossi-

ble choices under occupation. How do we understand collaboration versus resistance when survival is at stake? What responsibility do colonized peoples bear for their own survival strategies? These survival questions led naturally into broader concerns about divine sanction of violence. Multiple questions challenged theological foundations, asking what kind of God orders extermination, how we read texts where divine command includes genocide, and when faithfulness requires rejecting sacred text.

Contemporary parallels persistently surfaced as participants connected ancient and current patterns. How do Joshua's conquest tactics appear in Gaza today? What rhetorics of divine mandate justify contemporary ethnic cleansing? The community also grappled with how historical liberation movements, including the Civil Rights era, problematically identified with biblical Israelites, as exemplified in Mahalia Jackson's performance of "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho" with Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.²⁷ Participants noted the troubling irony that liberation songs celebrated conquest while omitting the massacre that followed, raising questions about selective appropriation of biblical narratives.

Issues of hermeneutical accountability generated consistent concerns about interpretive responsibility. Who gets to interpret these texts? What obligation do religious communities bear when their scriptures justify violence? How do we account for weaponized interpretation? Related to this were persistent questions about absent voices, as participants repeatedly asked about missing perspectives. Whose voices are erased from conquest narratives? What would this story sound like from other Canaanite women who didn't "choose correctly"? How do we centre those being conquered rather than the conquerors?

These themes revealed a community grappling with how sacred texts justify contemporary violence rather than seeking interpretive resolution. Gaza's ongoing destruction interrupted every traditional reading and demanded new forms of accountability.

Praxis: Gaza-Centred Meaning-Making

The study group's methodology deliberately centred embodied practices that resisted interpretive closure. Rather than resolving textual difficulties, physical practices created space to sit with discomfort and generate questions emerging from collective witness to genocide.

The community's wrestling generated questions that extended far beyond the Book of Joshua to fundamental issues of biblical interpretation under conditions of ongoing violence. Participants asked, "What exists in those frameworks for us?" when confronting other

biblical violence, such as the flood narrative and its trauma for Noah's family. Questions emerged about reading the New Testament's violence, the stoning of Ananias and Sapphira, Jesus defending the woman caught in adultery, asking whether divine sanction makes violence more palatable or reveals the horror of all sacred justification for harm.

The archived questions revealed patterns applicable to any contested biblical text. Who decides which voices matter in interpretation? How do we read texts that have been weaponized for violence? When does faithfulness require rejecting rather than explaining problematic scripture? These questions suggest a broader methodology for engaging biblical violence that moves beyond individual text analysis toward community accountability structures for all sacred interpretation.

Each session included embodied disruption through physical practices that interrupted traditional Bible study format. The first session shared dates from Palestinian farms in Jericho, literally tasting the land being conquered while reading a prayer that connected ancient roots to contemporary *sumud*, meaning steadfastness. The choice of dates carried deep significance beyond mere symbolism. Palm trees develop extensive underground root networks extending horizontally up to about 15 metres and reaching depths of 6 metres or more. These "nurse root systems" allow older established palms to support younger trees through interconnected networks, sharing water and nutrients across groves.²⁸ Each date represented not just individual Palestinian *sumud* but invisible networks of mutual support that sustain communities through occupation and theological violence. Like Palestinian farmers' hidden systems of knowledge and care, the palm's underground networks remain invisible to those who see only individual trees above ground, a perfect metaphor for *sumud* that conquest narratives cannot see or eliminate. The second session concluded with "reverse stoning," dismantling monuments to violence and carrying stones as tools of remembrance. The third session concluded with Katz blowing an anti-Zionist shofar, made by a gender-fluid queer artisan in Colorado using a ram's horn from a free-range farm, representing "the horns that we read about in this story"²⁹ but sourced from animals that lived free rather than being sacrificed for conquest.

The shared experience of collective witnessing provided the interpretive foundation, as watching Gaza's destruction for two years became the hermeneutical centre. Gaza's presence interrupted every interpretive move, demanding accountability to ongoing suffering rather than textual sophistication. The praxis revealed how Gaza-centred hermeneutics generates meaning differently than traditional historical-critical biblical

interpretation. Rather than extracting timeless truths from ancient texts, the community created meaning by bringing Gaza's destruction into interpretive space and allowing current genocide to interrupt traditional readings. The transformation was not of violent texts but of interpretive communities willing to centre Gaza rather than their own theological comfort.

Theological Implications: Toward a Hagaric Hermeneutics

This Gaza-centred interpretive work generates crucial theological insights for liberation theology and contributes to emerging academic frameworks for postcolonial biblical interpretation. While "Hagaric tradition" is not yet established academic terminology, this approach resonates with several scholarly developments in postcolonial and feminist biblical studies. Key developments include Musa W. Dube's "Rahab's reading prism," Kwok Pui-lan's creation of interpretive "space" for women in colonized contexts, and Judith E. McKinlay's postcolonial feminist hermeneutics. These approaches share concerns about how biblical interpretation can perpetuate colonial ideologies and seek to "unmask the myriad ways in which biblical scholars, feminists among them, have been complicit with or oblivious to colonialism and neocolonialism."³⁰

The Hagaric approach aligns with Mitri Raheb's recent articulation of Theology After Gaza, which argues that Gaza's destruction represents a hermeneutical watershed requiring new theological methodologies.³¹ Raheb's framework emphasizes that traditional systematic theological categories become inadequate when confronted with livestreamed genocide, demanding hermeneutical approaches that centre rather than marginalize Palestinian suffering. He argues that "Gaza is an urgent wake-up call to decolonize theology," functioning as a hermeneutical interruption that exposes the inadequacy of traditional theological frameworks when confronted with livestreamed genocide.³² This resonates with the study group's refusal to seek textual redemption, instead practising sustained discomfort as theological methodology.

This work builds on foundational critiques by Robert Allan Warrior (Osage Nation), whose seminal essay "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians" exposed how liberation theology's identification with biblical Israelites inadvertently justifies Indigenous displacement. Warrior's insight that "the Canaanites were the Indians of the Israelites" reveals the colonial logic embedded in Exodus-based liberation theology.³³ The Hagaric framework responds to this critique by centring Hagar's experience of displacement rather than Israel's experience of liberation, creating interpretive space for those positioned as "Canaanites" in colonial narratives. As Warrior asks: "Is there a god, a spirit,

who will hear us and stand with us in the Amazon, Osage Country, and Wounded Knee? Is there a god, a spirit, able to move among the pain and anger of Nablus, Gaza, and Soweto?”³⁴

Similarly, this approach draws on Naim Stifan Ateek’s pioneering Palestinian liberation theology, particularly his development of contextual biblical interpretation that centres Palestinian experience rather than treating it as peripheral to “universal” theological concerns.³⁵ Ateek’s work at Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center established methodological foundations for reading biblical texts through Palestinian Christian experience, challenging both Western theological assumptions and Zionist biblical interpretation.

In contexts where answers have become violent, sustained questioning becomes the primary theological methodology. The archived questions from this study represent genuine academic contribution, community wrestling with how sacred texts justify violence that generates new research questions for biblical studies, systematic theology, and ethics. The work examined here embodies what interfaith practitioners call “learning to ask the question ‘What does it feel like to be the other?’” Yet, it goes further: rather than seeking empathy that maintains separation, the Gaza-centred approach demands recognizing that the other’s suffering implicates one’s own theological tradition. Jewish participants confront how Torah justifies contemporary genocide. Christian participants grapple with supersessionism’s legacy. Palestinian Christians refuse to let their experience be theologized away.

The Hagaric framework enables interfaith academic work that neither erases religious differences nor claims false scholarly neutrality. Palestinian Christian, white queer Christian, and anti-Zionist Jewish perspectives remain methodologically distinct while sharing Gaza-centred analytical commitment. This challenges both Christian supersessionism and Jewish supremacy in biblical studies while creating genuine scholarly collaboration across traditions.

The theological implications extend beyond biblical interpretation to fundamental questions about religious community formation under conditions of ongoing violence. How do faith communities practice accountability to genocide while maintaining connection to sacred traditions? How does collective theological wrestling create different possibilities than individual interpretation? What does it mean to read scripture when scripture justifies contemporary ethnic cleansing?

Conclusion: Companions in Sacred Uncertainty

Two years of watching Gaza’s destruction has revealed the deadly consequences of weaponized scripture. The stakes of biblical interpretation become matters of life and death when religious texts justify contemporary genocide.

The Hagaric decolonial reading practice examined here offers one model for theological response to scriptures being used to justify violence. By centring Gaza rather than traditional hermeneutical concerns, this approach creates space for communities to wrestle with the discomfort of violence-justifying scripture without rushing toward premature resolution or false redemption of problematic texts.

The work accomplished not textual transformation but community transformation, centring Gaza’s destruction within hermeneutical practice. Questions archived through collective wrestling become theological practice adequate to contexts where answers have become violent. Embodied practices create accountability structures that intellectual interpretation alone cannot provide.

Perhaps most significantly, this work demonstrates that faithful engagement with sacred texts may require reading against dominant exegetical traditions when those traditions justify genocide. The choice between “Torah of conquest” and “Torah of compassion” challenges Jewish communities to choose between scriptural authority and accountability to ongoing suffering.

The questions generated through this Gaza-centred interpretive practice remain open. How do we read sacred texts when those texts justify contemporary genocide? What does theological accountability require when traditional interpretation has catastrophically failed? How do we practise faithful wrestling with scripture while Gaza burns? These questions do not require immediate answers. They require sustained community commitment to sitting with discomfort, generating meaning through collective struggle, and maintaining theological accountability to those suffering under violence justified through their sacred traditions. In a world where biblical interpretation continues to kill, such questioning communities become essential spaces for faithful response to the shadows genocide casts over all our sacred texts.

In her wilderness of displacement and survival, Hagar models what we practise: companionship in sacred uncertainty rather than warfare for religious certainty. We become companions tasting the sweetness of dates while wrestling with the violence that sacred texts have been used to justify, trusting that divine

encounter happens not in conquest but in the spaces where we tend each other's stories.

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1 Michael Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 287.

2 Steven Newcomb, *Pagans in the Promised Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2008), 89–104.

3 Randy Woodley, "When Faith Funds Genocide," *Decolonizing Faith and Society* (Substack newsletter), August 5, 2025, <https://rwoodley7.substack.com/p/when-faith-funds-genocide>.

4 Rachel Havrelock, *The Joshua Generation: Israeli Occupation and the Bible* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 110.

5 Havrelock, *The Joshua Generation*, 17.

6 Al Jazeera, "Conservative Christians, Israel and the US vote in 2024 election," November 1, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2024/11/1/conservative-christians-israel-and-the-us-vote>; Chicago Council on Global Affairs, "American Evangelicals' Support for Israel," September 30, 2024, <https://globalaffairs.org/commentary-and-analysis/blogs/american-evangelicals-unique-support-israel>.

7 Beth Carlson-Malena, Joshua Study Session 2, October 2025, Trinity Grace United Church, Vancouver. While a fragile ceasefire came into effect on October 10, 2025, violence against Palestinians continued throughout the period of this study. According to Al Jazeera's tracking of ceasefire violations, "Since the ceasefire took effect one month ago, Israeli attacks have killed at least 242 Palestinians and injured 622" as of November 10, 2025. Al Jazeera analysis showed Israel attacked Gaza on 25 out of 31 days during the ceasefire period, meaning there were only six days with no reported violence. Despite these ongoing violations, the United States maintained that the "ceasefire" was still holding. Al Jazeera, "How many times has Israel violated the Gaza ceasefire? Here are the numbers," November 11, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/11/11/how-many-times-has-israel-violated-the-gaza-ceasefire-here-are-the-numbers>.

8 Nat Nesvaderani, "Participatory Action Research: A Theoretical and Critical Introduction," in *Popularizing Scholarly Research: Working with Nonacademic Stakeholders, Teams, and Communities*, ed. Patricia Leavy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

9 Orev Reena Katz, Joshua Study Session 3, November 2025.

10 John-Joseph Martin, "The Four Senses of Scripture," Teaching document, 2023. The Catholic Quadriga tradition is rooted in patristic interpreters including Origen, Augustine, and John Cassian, becoming systematized in medieval scholasticism. The Jewish PaRDeS method has ancient rabbinic roots, with its mystical dimension (*sod*) explored extensively in Kabbalistic texts like the 13th-century *Zohar*. Both traditions maintain that the literal sense provides foundation for allegorical, moral (topological), and mystical (anagogical/*sod*) readings. Eastern Orthodox hermeneutics similarly employs layered interpretation with *historia* (literal), *theoria* (allegorical), *tropologia* (moral), and *anagoge* (mystical).

11 Musa W. Dube developed the concept of "Rahab's reading prism" to address the complex position of colonized women who, like Rahab, must negotiate survival by "submit[ting] to the imperial power

of biblical Israel." Dube argues that Rahab "is a politically problematic female character with whom postcolonial feminists should not identify," yet significant because "her story illustrates the multiple positioning of colonized women" who encounter colonizing powers and must negotiate "their own and their family's survival." Dube's reading prism provides "a postcolonial feminist eye of many angles" that resists "imperial and patriarchal oppressive structures" while recognizing the survival strategies of colonized women. See R.S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Biblical Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 624–25.

12 The Ramallah governorate, which includes Beit El settlement and surrounding Palestinian villages, experienced 634 documented settler attacks between January 2024 and August 2025, the highest number of any West Bank region. In April 2024, settlers launched deadly attacks on villages including Beitin and Deir Dibwan near Beit El, with Israeli forces present but failing to intervene. In June 2025, around 70 armed settlers attacked the nearby village of Kfar Malik, throwing Molotov cocktails at homes and cars; Israeli soldiers responding to the attack killed three Palestinians. Across the occupied West Bank, 1,860 settler attacks were documented between October 2023 and December 2024, an average of four attacks per day. See Amnesty International, "State-backed deadly rampage by Israeli settlers underscores urgent need to dismantle apartheid," April 22, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/04/state-backed-deadly-rampage-by-israeli-settlers-underscores-urgent-need-to-dismantle-apartheid>; Al Jazeera, "Mapping the rise in Israeli settler attacks across the occupied West Bank," October 14, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/10/14/mapping-the-rise-in-israeli-settler-attacks-across-the-occupied-west-bank>.

13 Shadia Qubti, "When the Margins Meet the Centre: A Palestinian Rahab in Gaza," August 31, 2025, <https://www.shadiaqubti.com/blog/when-the-margins-meet-the-centre-a-palestinian-rahab-in-gaza>. This contemporary retelling was created for the Joshua study sessions and subsequently published as part of ongoing Palestinian theological reflection.

14 "G2424 – *lēsous* (ἰησοῦς) – Strong's Greek Lexicon (KJV)," Blue Letter Bible, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2424/kjv/tr/0-1>.

15 Beth Carlson-Malena (she/her) is a co-pastor at Open Way Community Church and a member of the Lead Team of Christians for a Free Palestine Vancouver. She grew up as a pastor's kid in the Canadian Baptist denomination and studied at Regent College.

16 René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

17 Kate Common, *Undoing Conquest: Archaeological Evidence and the Joshua Narrative* (New York: Academic Press, 2023), 78–92.

18 Beth Carlson-Malena, Joshua Study Session 2, October 2025.

19 Orev Reena Katz (they/them) is an anti-Zionist prayer leader, Hebrew Priestess, and psychotherapist. They are a member of Independent Jewish Voices-Vancouver, and a co-founder of Women for Palestine in Treaty 13-Tkaronto/Toronto. As resistance to the genocide in Gaza, apartheid across Palestine, and the profound Jewish exceptionalism of this time, Orev is excited about and committed to understanding texts central to Jewish practice and history from a decolonizing lens.

20 Lynn Gottlieb, *Shomeret Shalom: Replanting Seeds of Jewish Revolutionary Nonviolence After October 7* (Self-published, 2024), 23.

21 Orev Reena Katz, Joshua Study Session 3, November 2025.

22 Orev Reena Katz, Joshua Study Session 3, November 2025.

23 Tamir Sorek, "Religious Zionism and Genocidal Thinking," University of Pennsylvania study, Spring 2024; Orev Reena Katz, Joshua Study Session 3, November 2025.

24 Orev Reena Katz, Joshua Study Session 3, November 2025.

25 Orev Reena Katz, Joshua Study Session 3, November 2025.

26 These phrases reflect translations from Joshua 6:17–18 across Jewish (JPS) and Christian (NRSV) sources. The concept of *herem* appears throughout conquest texts, referring to items and peoples that must be completely destroyed as an offering to God. See Joshua 6:17: "The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the LORD."

27 During her *PaRDeS* interpretation session, Katz played footage of Mahalia Jackson's performance of "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho" with Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to highlight the tension between Joshua's use in liberation theology and the hermeneutical blind spot of that era: the impact on Canaanites was not part of biblical interpretation at the time. This demonstrated how even liberation-focused readings failed to consider Indigenous displacement within conquest narratives.

28 Jacqueline Vayntrub, "Tamar and Her Botanical Image," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 139, no. 2 (June 15, 2020): 301–18, <https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1392.2020.4>.

29 Orev Reena Katz, Joshua Study Session 3, November 2025.

30 Sugirtharajah, *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, 624–27; Kwok Pui-lan, "Making the Connections: Postcolonial Studies and Feminist Biblical Interpretations," in *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, ed. Kwok Pui-lan (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 77.

31 Mitri Raheb, "Theology After Gaza: Political Context and Theological Challenge," in *Theology After Gaza: A Global Anthology*, ed. Mitri Raheb and Graham McGeoch (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2025), 84.

32 Raheb, "Theology After Gaza," 84.

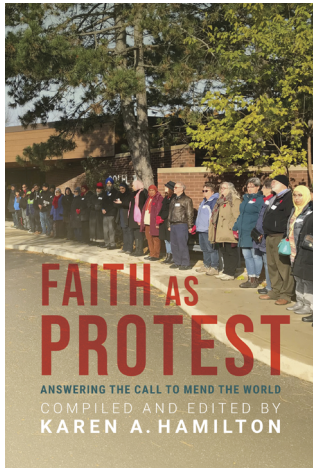
33 Robert Allan Warrior (Osage Nation), "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians: Deliverance, Conquest, and Liberation Theology in the Americas," *Christianity and Crisis* 49, no. 12 (1989): 261–65.

34 Warrior (Osage Nation), "Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians," 265.

35 Naim Stifan Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989).

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