

Covenant, Mohar, and Shalom: A Contextual Theological Dialogue between Old Testament Marriage and Javanese Marriage Culture

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Article History:

Received: February 19, 2026

Revised: May 23, 2026

Accepted: June 1, 2026

Published: June 30, 2026

Citation:

Kristiani, A. B., & Wenno, V. K. (2026). Covenant, Mohar, and Shalom: A Contextual Theological Dialogue between Old Testament Marriage and Javanese Marriage Culture. *Jurnal Theologia*, 37(1), 85–98.
<https://doi.org/10.21580/teo.2026.37.1.31399>

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Abstract: This study analyzes the theological and cultural dimensions of marriage by examining key Old Testament texts and their dialogical engagement with Javanese marriage practices. The unit of analysis includes selected biblical passages (Gen 2:18–24; Exod 22:16–17; Mal 2:13–16; Hos 1–3; Ruth 4) alongside core elements of Javanese rituals such as *seserahan*, *panggih-sungkeman*, and *kenduri*. The aim is to construct a contextual theological framework that critically integrates biblical concepts of covenant, economic responsibility, and communal joy with Javanese cultural values. This research employs a qualitative, literature-based method combining historical-grammatical exegesis, Ancient Near Eastern contextual analysis, and anthropological interpretation of Javanese culture. A comparative thematic approach is used to identify points of resonance and tension between the two traditions. The findings reveal three key insights. First, the covenantal nature of Old Testament marriage resonates with Javanese ideals of harmony (*rukun*) and relational fidelity. Second, the concept of *mohar* parallels *seserahan* as a cultural expression of responsibility and respect toward women, while requiring critical evaluation to avoid economic excess. Third, communal celebration in biblical wedding feasts aligns with *kenduri* as an expression of shared joy and social cohesion. This study contributes a contextual theological model that affirms cultural values while offering critical discernment, thereby enriching contemporary discussions on marriage, theology, and culture in non-Western contexts.

Keywords: Old Testament marriage; covenant; mohar; Javanese culture; contextual theology; rukun; wedding rituals

1. Introduction

Marriage has long functioned as a foundational social institution across cultures, serving not only as a mechanism for family formation but also as a site for transmitting values, identity, and social cohesion (Cherlin, 2004; Goody, 1976; Stone, 1977). In many societies, marriage is not merely a private union between two individuals but a communal and symbolic act embedded in broader social and religious systems (Durkheim, 1912/1995; Levi-Strauss, 1969; Coontz, 2005). This is particularly evident in non-Western contexts, where marriage rituals often reflect collective values such as honor, reciprocity, and social harmony (Thornton & Philipov, 2009; Hirsch & Wardlow, 2006). In Indonesia, especially within Javanese culture, marriage is deeply intertwined with ethical principles such as *rukun* (harmony), *tepa selira* (empathy), and *pangestu* (blessing), which structure interpersonal relationships and communal life (Koentjaraningrat, 1994; Magnis-Suseno, 1997; Geertz, 1976).



Anthropological studies have shown that Javanese marriage ceremonies—including *seserahan*, *panggih*, and *kenduri*—function as symbolic mechanisms that reinforce social solidarity and moral order (Beatty, 1999; Woodward, 2011; Mulder, 2005). At the same time, global transformations—such as modernization, urbanization, and individualization—have reshaped the meaning of marriage, often reducing it to a personal and emotional contract rather than a communal and sacred covenant (Giddens, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Cherlin, 2010). This tension between traditional communal values and modern individualistic tendencies raises important questions about how marriage should be understood theologically and culturally in contemporary contexts.

Within biblical scholarship, marriage in the Old Testament has been widely examined as a covenantal, legal, and socio-religious institution embedded in the life of ancient Israel (de Vaux, 1997; Westbrook, 2003; Matthews, 1991). Scholars such as Goldingay (2006), Brueggemann (1997), and Wright (2006) emphasize that marriage in the Old Testament is not merely a social arrangement but a theological reality that reflects God's covenantal relationship with His people, particularly through metaphors found in texts such as Hosea and Malachi. Studies on Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) contexts further highlight the legal and economic dimensions of marriage, including the role of *mohar* (bride price) as a mechanism for protecting women and ensuring familial responsibility (Westbrook, 2003; Meyers, 2013; Walton, 2006). Recent research has also explored the ethical implications of Old Testament marriage, including fidelity, justice, and communal accountability (Hess, 2021; Greer, 2023). However, while biblical scholarship has made significant progress in understanding the theological and historical dimensions of marriage, it often remains disconnected from contemporary cultural contexts, particularly in non-Western societies. Conversely, anthropological studies of Javanese marriage—conducted by scholars such as Koentjaraningrat (1994), Geertz (1976), and Beatty (1999)—tend to focus on ritual symbolism and social structure without engaging deeply with theological interpretation. As a result, there remains a significant gap in interdisciplinary research that integrates Old Testament theology with local cultural practices in a systematic and critical manner.

This article seeks to address this gap by constructing a contextual theological dialogue between Old Testament marriage and Javanese marriage culture. While previous studies have either focused on biblical theology or cultural anthropology, few have attempted to bring these two domains into a coherent analytical framework that allows for both affirmation and critique (Bevans, 2002; Schreiter, 1985; Sanneh, 2009). Existing works in contextual theology emphasize that the Gospel does not exist in abstraction but is always embodied within specific cultural contexts, requiring processes of translation, inculturation, and critical engagement (Walls, 1996; Bevans, 2002; Schreiter, 1985). Nevertheless, there is still limited research that applies these theoretical insights specifically to the domain of marriage as a theological and cultural institution. In the Indonesian context, studies on Christian marriage often focus on pastoral or doctrinal issues rather than engaging with local cultural practices in depth (Sutarto, 2020; Syam, 2020). Consequently, the present study aims to fill this gap by (1) analyzing key theological concepts of marriage in the Old Testament, (2) examining the cultural values embedded in Javanese marriage practices, and (3) developing a comparative framework that identifies points of resonance, tension, and transformation between the two. By doing so, this research contributes to the broader field of contextual theology and offers a model for engaging biblical texts with local cultures in a critical and constructive manner.

The central argument of this study is that Old Testament concepts of marriage—particularly covenant (*berît*), economic responsibility (*mohar*), and communal joy (*shalom*)—provide a theological framework that can both affirm and critically transform Javanese marriage culture. On the one hand, there are significant points of resonance between the two traditions: the covenantal nature of marriage aligns with the Javanese emphasis on relational harmony (*rukun*), the concept of *mohar* parallels the symbolic function of *seserahan*, and the communal celebration of marriage in biblical feasts corresponds to the practice of *kenduri* as an expression of shared joy (Goldingay, 2006; Walton, 2006; Koentjaraningrat, 1994). On the other hand, this study also argues that such resonances must be approached critically, as certain cultural practices may diverge from biblical principles, particularly when they reinforce economic burdens, social inequality, or the suppression of justice (Micah 6:8; Isaiah 1:17). Therefore, rather than proposing a simplistic equivalence between biblical and cultural practices, this research advances a dialogical model in which culture is both affirmed and evaluated in light of theological norms (Bevans, 2002; Schreiter, 1985). In this sense, marriage is understood not merely as a cultural tradition or religious institution, but as a dynamic space where theology and culture intersect, negotiate, and mutually shape one another.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Old Testament Marriage: Covenant, Law, and Social Institution

The study of marriage in the Old Testament broadly places it as an institution that is not only social, but also theological and normative within the framework of the covenant between God and His people (Goldingay, 2006; Brueggemann, 1997; Wright, 2006). In classical studies, de Vaux (1997) asserts that the family structure of ancient Israel was the center of social and religious life, where marriage functioned as a means of preserving collective identity and the transmission of faith between generations. Legal-historical approaches show that practices such as *mohar* are not merely economic transactions, but part of the social protection system in patriarchal societies (Westbrook, 2003; Matthews, 1991; Meyers, 2013). Contemporary research also highlights that marriage laws in the OT, including the prohibition of indiscriminate divorce and the protection of women, reflect normative efforts to maintain community stability (Hess, 2021; Greer, 2023; Instone-Brewer, 2002). Within this framework, texts such as Genesis 2:24, Malachi 2:14, and Hosea 2:19–20 are understood not only narratively, but also as theological constructions of loyalty, commitment, and sacred relationships (Longman, 2006; Block, 2014; Walton, 2006). In addition, intertextual studies show that the metaphor of marriage was widely used by prophets to describe the God-Israel relationship, thus reinforcing the theological dimension of this institution (Fretheim, 2005; Olyan, 2008; Yee, 2003). Thus, the literature shows that marriage in the OT cannot be reduced to a mere social contract, but must be understood as a meeting space between law, culture, and theology.

Recent studies expand this understanding by highlighting the ethical and performative dimensions of marriage in the context of OT (Collins, 2018; Loader, 2004; Satlow, 2001). Research by Meyers (2013) emphasizes that women in ancient Israel had more complex roles than is often assumed, especially in domestic and economic contexts, thus challenging overly simplistic readings of patriarchy. Studies by Westbrook and Wells (2009) show that family law in ancient texts had a restorative, not merely repressive, function, aimed at maintaining social balance. Meanwhile, an anthropological approach to the OT text shows that the practice of marriage is inseparable from the

broader cultural context of ANE, where symbolism, ritual, and economics are intertwined (Walton, 2006; Hallo & Younger, 2003; Sparks, 2005). In the realm of theology, Wright (2006) and Goldingay (2006) affirm that the concept of *covenant* is the key to understanding marriage as a form of fidelity that reflects the character of God. However, some critical studies also remind that OT texts should be read contextually, as they contain tensions between ideal norms and historical social practices (Collins, 2018; Olyan, 2008; Yee, 2003). Therefore, the existing literature suggests that the understanding of marriage in OT requires a multidisciplinary approach that combines exegesis, history, and anthropology to produce a more comprehensive interpretation.

2.2. Javanese Marriage Culture: Ritual, Ethics, and Social Harmony

Studies of Javanese marriage culture consistently emphasize that marriage is a social institution that is loaded with symbolic, ethical, and spiritual meanings (Koentjaraningrat, 1994; Geertz, 1976; Beatty, 1999). In the framework of classical anthropology, Geertz (1976) shows that Javanese people understand social life through complex symbolic categories, where rituals such as *panggih*, *sungkeman*, and *feasting* serve as a means to maintain cosmic and social balance. Koentjaraningrat (1994) added that marriage in Javanese culture not only unites two individuals, but also two extended families, thus involving the dimension of honor (self-worth) and social responsibility. Research by Magnis-Suseno (1997) confirms that the value of *harmony* is the main ethical principle that governs relationships in the family and society, where harmony is considered more important than open conflict. Contemporary studies also show that values such as *tepa selira* and *pangestu* play an important role in shaping relational ethics in Javanese families (Mulder, 2005; Woodward, 2011; Beatty, 1999). In addition, the practice of *handing over* is understood as a symbol of responsibility and respect for women's families, not just an economic transaction (Geertz, 1982; Koentjaraningrat, 1994). Thus, the literature shows that Javanese marriage culture is a complex symbolic system, in which rituals and ethical values interact with each other to form social and moral identities.

Recent research shows that Javanese marriage culture continues to undergo transformation in line with social, economic, and religious changes (Sutarto, 2020; Syam, 2020; Hefner, 2011). Studies by Hefner (2011) show that Islamization and modernization have influenced Javanese marriage practices, resulting in hybrid forms that combine local traditions and religious norms. Meanwhile, research by Sutarto (2020) confirms that the value of *harmony* remains the dominant principle, even though faced with the challenges of individualism and urbanization. Syam (2020) also noted that the practice of *feasting* and *slametan* still functions as a mechanism of social solidarity, even though the meanings are increasingly diverse. From a sociological perspective, Mulder (2005) shows that the Javanese family functions as a "moral community" where ethical values are taught through daily practice. However, some critical studies have also shown that social pressure to maintain harmony can inhibit the expression of conflict and justice, especially in the context of gender relations (Brenner, 1998; Robinson, 2009; Bennett, 2005). Therefore, the literature shows that Javanese marriage culture is not static, but dynamic and full of tension between tradition and change. An awareness of this complexity is important to avoid cultural romanticization and allow for a more critical analysis in dialogue with a theological perspective.

2.3. Contextual Theology and the Dialogue between Scripture and Culture

In the study of contextual theology, the relationship between biblical texts and local cultures is understood as a dialogical process involving affirmation, criticism, and transformation (Bevans, 2002; Schreiter, 1985; Sanneh, 2009). Bevans (2002) argues that theology is always contextual because the Christian faith is never present in a vacuum, but always interacts with a particular culture. Schreiter (1985) added that the construction of local theology requires a deep understanding of local cultural symbols, languages, and practices. In this context, Walls (1996) emphasizes the principle of "translation" in Christian missions, in which the gospel is translated into cultural categories without losing its theological essence. Other research suggests that this approach allows for creative inculturation, where cultural values can be enriched by a theological perspective (Hiebert, 1985; Bosch, 2011; Bediako, 1995). In the study of religion and culture, the dialogue between sacred texts and local practices often results in unique and contextual forms of religiosity (Turner, 1969; Asad, 1993; Geertz, 1973). Thus, the literature shows that contextual theology is not just an adaptation, but a process of critical reflection that allows for dynamic interaction between faith and culture.

Recent developments in contextual theology emphasize the importance of a critical approach that not only affirms culture, but also evaluates it in the light of theological values (Bevans, 2002; Schreiter, 1985; Sanneh, 2009). Research by Bosch (2011) shows that Christian missions must be able to distinguish between constructive and potentially oppressive cultural elements. In this context, Hiebert (1985) proposed a model of "critical contextualization" that allows local communities to assess their cultural practices based on biblical principles. Other studies have also shown that dialogue between texts and cultures often reveals the tension between social harmony and moral justice, which requires mature theological discernment (Bediako, 1995; Asad, 1993; Turner, 1969). In the Asian context, some studies have shown that contextual approaches can produce theology that is more relevant to local experiences without losing theological depth (Sugirtharajah, 2006; Phan, 2003; Kim, 2009). Therefore, the literature suggests that dialogue between the Old Testament and Javanese culture should be conducted critically and reflectively, taking into account both points of resonance and significant differences. This approach allows for the development of marriage theology that is not only faithful to the text, but also relevant to the contemporary cultural context.

3. Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design based on a literature-driven approach to explore the theological meaning of marriage in the Old Testament and its dialogical engagement with Javanese marriage culture. Rather than conducting empirical fieldwork, this research relies on textual and contextual analysis of primary and secondary sources. The primary data consist of selected Old Testament texts that are representative of key theological themes of marriage, including Genesis 2:18–24, Exodus 22:16–17, Malachi 2:13–16, Hosea 1–3, and Ruth 4:11–12. These texts are chosen because they reflect core dimensions of marriage such as covenant, economic responsibility, fidelity, and communal recognition. Secondary data include scholarly works in Old Testament theology, Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) studies, and anthropological literature on Javanese culture. Accordingly, this research is best categorized as qualitative textual analysis combined with interdisciplinary literature synthesis.

The analytical framework integrates three complementary approaches. First, a historical-grammatical method is used to conduct exegetical analysis of the selected biblical texts. This involves examining key Hebrew terms (such as *berît*, *dābaq*, *hesed*, and *’ēmûnâ*), literary structure, and historical context in order to identify the theological meaning embedded within the texts. The exegesis is informed by contemporary biblical scholarship to ensure interpretive rigor and avoid anachronistic readings. Second, the study employs a socio-historical approach to situate the biblical texts within the broader cultural context of the Ancient Near East. This step aims to clarify the social functions of practices such as *mohar*, family structure, and communal feasting, thereby providing a historical control for interpreting Old Testament marriage practices.

Third, the research utilizes an anthropological-literature approach to examine Javanese marriage culture. Instead of field observation, the study draws on established ethnographic and cultural analyses from authoritative sources. Key practices such as *seserahan*, *panggih-sungkeman*, and *kenduri* are analyzed as symbolic and ethical systems that reflect underlying cultural values, including *rukun* (harmony), *tepa selira* (empathy), and *pangestu* (blessing). This approach allows for a systematic understanding of Javanese marriage as a cultural institution without making unwarranted generalizations based on limited empirical data.

The core analytical procedure of this study is a comparative thematic analysis. The findings from Old Testament exegesis and Javanese cultural studies are brought into dialogue through three major thematic axes: (1) covenant and relational fidelity (Old Testament covenant ↔ Javanese *rukun* and *pangestu*), (2) economic responsibility and social honor (*mohar* ↔ *seserahan*), and (3) communal celebration and shared joy (biblical wedding feast ↔ *kenduri*). This comparison is not intended to equate the two traditions, but to identify points of resonance, divergence, and potential transformation.

Finally, the study adopts a contextual theological approach, particularly drawing on the framework of critical contextualization. In this perspective, cultural practices are neither uncritically accepted nor entirely rejected, but are evaluated in light of biblical theological principles. The criteria for evaluation include fidelity to the covenantal character of God, the promotion of justice and human dignity, and the integrity of communal life. Through this process, the study seeks to construct a contextual theological model of marriage that is both faithful to the biblical text and meaningfully engaged with Javanese cultural realities.

4. Result

4.1. Covenant and Relational Fidelity in Old Testament and Javanese Marriage

The analysis of Old Testament texts consistently demonstrates that marriage is framed as a covenantal relationship characterized by enduring fidelity and relational commitment rather than a temporary social arrangement (Goldingay, 2006; Brueggemann, 1997; Wright, 2006; Greer, 2023; Hess, 2021; Instone-Brewer, 2002; Collins, 2018; Olyan, 2008; Yee, 2003; Westbrook, 2003). Textual evidence from Genesis 2:24 shows the concept of *dābaq* (to cling), which is used elsewhere to describe Israel’s loyalty to God, indicating that marital union is framed in covenantal language (Block, 2014; Walton, 2006; Longman, 2006; Fretheim, 2005; Matthews, 1991). Malachi 2:14 further identifies the spouse as a “partner in covenant,” reinforcing the legal and theological nature of

marriage (Hess, 2021; Greer, 2023). Similarly, prophetic literature such as Hosea presents marriage as a metaphor for divine-human relations, emphasizing loyalty, restoration, and faithfulness despite failure (Brueggemann, 1997; Wright, 2006; Fretheim, 2005). These findings indicate that covenantal fidelity is not an abstract theological concept but is embedded in relational practices within the household and community structure of ancient Israel (Westbrook, 2003; Meyers, 2013). Therefore, the textual data show that Old Testament marriage is consistently framed as a covenantal bond that integrates legal, relational, and theological dimensions.

The examination of Javanese cultural practices reveals a comparable emphasis on relational continuity, particularly through the ethical framework of *rukun* and *tepa selira*, which regulate interpersonal harmony within marriage and extended family networks (Koentjaraningrat, 1994; Geertz, 1976; Beatty, 1999; Magnis-Suseno, 1997; Sutarto, 2020; Mulder, 2005; Woodward, 2011; Hefner, 2011; Robinson, 2009; Bennett, 2005). Anthropological studies show that *rukun* is not merely the absence of conflict but an active social obligation to maintain balance through emotional restraint and mutual adjustment (Magnis-Suseno, 1997; Beatty, 1999). Rituals such as *sungkeman* function as formalized expressions of reconciliation and relational restoration, where individuals seek forgiveness and blessing before entering marriage (Koentjaraningrat, 1994; Geertz, 1982; Woodward, 2011). Empirical studies also indicate that family-based decision-making processes in Javanese marriage emphasize long-term relational stability rather than individual preference (Hefner, 2011; Mulder, 2005). These practices demonstrate that marriage is embedded within a network of moral expectations that prioritize relational harmony and communal continuity (Sutarto, 2020; Syam, 2020). Thus, the data show that Javanese marriage practices are structured around relational fidelity, although expressed through cultural norms rather than explicit theological language.

A comparative reading of these two data sets shows that both Old Testament texts and Javanese practices emphasize relational continuity, but they articulate it through different frameworks (Goldingay, 2006; Koentjaraningrat, 1994; Wright, 2006; Magnis-Suseno, 1997; Greer, 2023). In the Old Testament, fidelity is framed as covenant obedience before God, while in Javanese culture, fidelity is expressed through ethical norms of harmony and social responsibility (Brueggemann, 1997; Beatty, 1999; Sutarto, 2020). Studies in comparative religion indicate that such parallels often emerge in societies where relational identity is prioritized over individual autonomy (Asad, 1993; Turner, 1969; Giddens, 1992). However, empirical data also show that Javanese emphasis on harmony may suppress open conflict, whereas biblical texts explicitly address conflict through prophetic critique (Micah 6:8; Isaiah 1:17; Collins, 2018). Therefore, the findings indicate that while both traditions share a concern for relational stability, the mechanisms and underlying frameworks differ significantly, providing a basis for further theological reflection without assuming equivalence.

4.2. Economic Responsibility: Mohar and Seserahan

The analysis of Old Testament legal texts indicates that *mohar* functioned as a structured economic institution within ancient Israelite marriage systems (Exod 22:16–17; de Vaux, 1997; Westbrook, 2003; Meyers, 2013; Matthews, 1991; Walton, 2006; Hess, 2021; Greer, 2023). Historical studies show that *mohar* was not a purchase transaction but a compensatory mechanism that provided financial security for women within a patriarchal framework (Westbrook, 2003; Meyers, 2013). Research in Ancient Near Eastern law demonstrates that similar practices existed across

surrounding cultures, indicating a broader socio-economic pattern rather than a uniquely Israelite institution (Hallo & Younger, 2003; Sparks, 2005). Textual evidence suggests that *mohar* also functioned as a deterrent against irresponsible marital behavior, as it imposed financial obligations on the husband (Instone-Brewer, 2002). Contemporary scholarship further highlights that such legal mechanisms contributed to maintaining family stability and social order (Hess, 2021; Greer, 2023). Therefore, the data show that *mohar* served multiple functions: economic protection, social accountability, and symbolic recognition of marital responsibility.

In Javanese culture, the practice of *seserahan* similarly functions as a symbolic expression of readiness and responsibility in marriage (Koentjaraningrat, 1994; Geertz, 1982; Beatty, 1999; Mulder, 2005; Woodward, 2011; Syam, 2020; Sutarto, 2020). Ethnographic studies indicate that *seserahan* items—such as food, clothing, and household goods—represent the groom’s ability to provide for the future household (Geertz, 1982; Koentjaraningrat, 1994). Sociological research shows that this practice also reinforces social expectations regarding gender roles and economic responsibility (Hefner, 2011; Robinson, 2009). Furthermore, studies in Indonesian anthropology reveal that *seserahan* functions as a communicative act between families, signaling mutual respect and social recognition (Beatty, 1999; Mulder, 2005). However, recent research also notes that economic pressures associated with marriage rituals have increased, particularly in urban contexts (Sutarto, 2020; Syam, 2020). These findings indicate that *seserahan* operates as both a symbolic and practical mechanism within Javanese marriage systems.

Comparative analysis shows that both *mohar* and *seserahan* function as institutionalized forms of economic responsibility within marriage, although their meanings and implications differ across contexts (Westbrook, 2003; Koentjaraningrat, 1994; Meyers, 2013; Beatty, 1999). In the Old Testament, *mohar* is embedded within legal structures that regulate marital obligations, whereas in Javanese culture, *seserahan* operates primarily within customary and symbolic frameworks (Walton, 2006; Woodward, 2011). Studies in economic anthropology suggest that such practices reflect broader patterns of exchange and reciprocity in kinship systems (Goody, 1976; Levi-Strauss, 1969). Empirical data also indicate that both systems aim to establish accountability and stability at the beginning of marriage (Hess, 2021; Syam, 2020). Therefore, the findings demonstrate that economic elements in marriage serve not merely transactional purposes but function as social mechanisms for structuring responsibility and recognition.

4.3. Communal Celebration: Wedding Feast and Kenduri

Old Testament texts consistently present marriage as a communal event marked by public celebration and collective participation (Ruth 4:11–12; Judg 14:10–12; Isa 25:6; Walton, 2006; Brueggemann, 1997; Goldingay, 2006; Meyers, 2013; Hess, 2021; Collins, 2018; Fretheim, 2005). Historical studies indicate that wedding feasts functioned as public acknowledgments of new family formation and social integration (Matthews, 1991; de Vaux, 1997). Archaeological and textual evidence suggests that such celebrations involved extended kinship networks and served as occasions for blessing and communal affirmation (Hallo & Younger, 2003; Sparks, 2005). Research also shows that feasting in ancient Israel carried theological significance, symbolizing divine blessing and provision (Walton, 2006; Goldingay, 2006). Therefore, the data indicate that wedding feasts were not merely social gatherings but integral components of communal and religious life.

In Javanese culture, the *kenduri* or *slametan* plays a similar role as a communal ritual that marks significant life events, including marriage (Geertz, 1976; Koentjaraningrat, 1994; Beatty, 1999; Mulder, 2005; Woodward, 2011; Hefner, 2011; Syam, 2020; Sutarto, 2020). Anthropological research shows that *kenduri* functions as a mechanism for reinforcing social solidarity through shared meals and collective participation (Geertz, 1976). Studies also indicate that the ritual embodies concepts of balance, harmony, and communal well-being (Beatty, 1999; Mulder, 2005). Sociological analyses further reveal that participation in such rituals strengthens social networks and reinforces communal identity (Hefner, 2011; Woodward, 2011). Thus, the data demonstrate that *kenduri* operates as a central element in maintaining social cohesion within Javanese communities.

Comparative findings indicate that both Old Testament wedding feasts and Javanese *kenduri* serve as communal expressions of joy and social integration, although grounded in different symbolic systems (Walton, 2006; Geertz, 1976; Goldingay, 2006; Koentjaraningrat, 1994). In both contexts, communal participation is essential for legitimizing the new marital unit (Matthews, 1991; Beatty, 1999). Studies in ritual theory suggest that such practices function to reaffirm collective identity and social continuity (Turner, 1969; Asad, 1993). However, empirical data also show variations in meaning and practice, reflecting differences in theological and cultural frameworks (Hefner, 2011; Collins, 2018). Therefore, the findings indicate that communal celebration is a shared feature across both traditions, serving as a key mechanism for integrating marriage into broader social and religious life.

5. Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate three central patterns that emerge consistently across the Old Testament texts and Javanese marriage practices, namely covenantal fidelity, economic responsibility, and communal integration as defining elements of marriage (Goldingay, 2006; Koentjaraningrat, 1994; Greer, 2023; Sutarto, 2020; Walton, 2006). The textual findings show that Old Testament marriage is framed within a covenantal paradigm characterized by loyalty and divine accountability (Brueggemann, 1997; Wright, 2006; Hess, 2021), while empirical cultural data indicate that Javanese marriage emphasizes relational harmony through ethical constructs such as *rukun* and *tepa selira* (Magnis-Suseno, 1997; Beatty, 1999; Mulder, 2005). Similarly, the comparison between *mohar* and *seserahan* reveals that both systems function as mechanisms of economic responsibility, although articulated differently within legal and symbolic frameworks (Westbrook, 2003; Koentjaraningrat, 1994; Meyers, 2013). Furthermore, both traditions highlight communal participation through wedding feasts and *kenduri* as integral to legitimizing marriage within a broader social context (Geertz, 1976; Matthews, 1991; Walton, 2006). These patterns collectively indicate that marriage is consistently understood as a relational, economic, and communal institution rather than an individual contract (Cherlin, 2004). Therefore, the results provide a structured empirical basis for examining marriage as a multidimensional institution across both biblical and cultural contexts.

Reflecting on these findings, it becomes evident that both traditions share a common concern for relational stability, although grounded in distinct epistemological and theological frameworks (Bevans, 2002; Schreiter, 1985; Asad, 1993). In the Old Testament, relational fidelity is framed as covenantal obedience before God, emphasizing vertical accountability within divine-human relationships (Wright, 2006; Brueggemann, 1997), whereas in Javanese culture, relational harmony

is maintained through horizontal social ethics that prioritize communal balance (Magnis-Suseno, 1997; Beatty, 1999). Studies in comparative sociology indicate that collectivist societies often prioritize relational cohesion over individual autonomy, shaping marriage as a socially embedded institution (Thornton & Philipov, 2009; Giddens, 1992). However, the data also reveal that Javanese emphasis on harmony may suppress open conflict, while Old Testament texts explicitly address conflict through prophetic critique and ethical accountability (Micah 6:8; Collins, 2018). This tension suggests that while both traditions value relational continuity, they differ in how they negotiate conflict and justice (Bennett, 2005; Robinson, 2009). Thus, the reflection indicates that relational harmony alone is insufficient without mechanisms for justice and accountability.

Interpreting these results further, the comparative analysis highlights that economic elements in marriage function as institutionalized expressions of responsibility rather than mere transactional practices (Westbrook, 2003; Meyers, 2013; Koentjaraningrat, 1994). In the Old Testament, *mohar* operates within a legal framework that regulates marital obligations and protects women within a patriarchal system (Hess, 2021; Greer, 2023), whereas *seserahan* in Javanese culture functions symbolically to communicate readiness and respect between families (Geertz, 1982; Mulder, 2005). Studies in economic anthropology demonstrate that such practices reflect broader systems of reciprocity and social exchange that structure kinship relations (Goody, 1976; Levi-Strauss, 1969). However, empirical evidence also indicates that both systems are subject to transformation, particularly under modern economic pressures that may distort their original intent (Sutarto, 2020; Syam, 2020). This suggests that economic practices in marriage must be understood dynamically rather than statically (Hefner, 2011). Therefore, the interpretation of the findings underscores that economic responsibility in marriage is both culturally mediated and historically contingent.

A comparative perspective further reveals that communal celebration functions as a critical mechanism for integrating marriage into broader social and religious life (Turner, 1969; Asad, 1993). In the Old Testament, wedding feasts serve as public affirmations of divine blessing and communal recognition (Walton, 2006; Goldingay, 2006), while in Javanese culture, *kenduri* operates as a ritual that reinforces social cohesion and collective identity (Geertz, 1976; Beatty, 1999). Ritual studies indicate that such practices function to maintain social continuity by reaffirming shared values and relationships (Turner, 1969; Durkheim, 1912/1995). However, comparative data also show that the meanings of these rituals are not fixed but evolve in response to social change, including urbanization and religious transformation (Hefner, 2011; Woodward, 2011). This dynamic nature of ritual suggests that communal practices must be understood within their broader socio-historical contexts rather than as static traditions (Asad, 1993). Consequently, the comparison highlights both continuity and transformation in the role of communal celebration within marriage.

Based on these findings, a key implication emerges regarding the need for a critical and dialogical engagement between theological principles and cultural practices (Bevans, 2002; Schreiter, 1985). The data suggest that while significant points of resonance exist between Old Testament marriage and Javanese cultural practices, these resonances must be approached with discernment rather than uncritical acceptance (Bosch, 2011; Hiebert, 1985). Future research should therefore explore how these findings are embodied in contemporary Christian communities in Java, particularly through empirical studies that examine how individuals negotiate between theological teachings and cultural expectations (Hefner, 2011; Syam, 2020). Additionally, further investigation is needed to assess how changing socio-economic conditions influence marriage practices and their

theological interpretation (Cherlin, 2010). Thus, the study opens avenues for interdisciplinary research that integrates theology, anthropology, and sociology in understanding marriage as a dynamic and contextually embedded institution.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that marriage in the Old Testament and Javanese cultural practices share three fundamental dimensions: covenantal fidelity, economic responsibility, and communal integration. The analysis of biblical texts such as Genesis 2:24, Malachi 2:14, and Hosea 2–3 shows that marriage is consistently framed as a covenantal relationship grounded in loyalty, accountability, and divine witness. Similarly, the examination of Javanese practices reveals that values such as *rukun*, *tepa selira*, and *pangestu* function as ethical mechanisms for sustaining relational harmony within marriage and extended family structures. The comparison between *mohar* and *seserahan* further indicates that both traditions embed economic responsibility within marital institutions, while wedding feasts and *kenduri* demonstrate the importance of communal recognition. These findings confirm that marriage in both contexts is not merely an individual contract but a multidimensional institution involving relational, economic, and communal dimensions.

From an academic perspective, this study contributes to the field of contextual theology by offering a structured analytical framework that integrates Old Testament theology with Javanese cultural practices. Unlike previous studies that tend to separate biblical exegesis from anthropological analysis, this research demonstrates that a comparative thematic approach can identify points of resonance, divergence, and transformation between text and culture. The study introduces a conceptual model based on three axes—covenant, responsibility, and communal joy—which provides a more systematic way to understand marriage across different cultural contexts. Empirically, the findings also show that cultural values such as harmony and social responsibility can function as entry points for theological reflection, while at the same time requiring critical evaluation. Therefore, this research not only bridges the gap between theology and culture but also contributes to interdisciplinary discussions involving biblical studies, anthropology, and sociology.

However, this study is limited by its reliance on literature-based analysis without direct engagement with lived practices in contemporary communities. While textual and anthropological sources provide a strong foundation, they do not fully capture how individuals negotiate marriage between theological teachings and cultural expectations in real contexts. Future research should therefore incorporate empirical methods, such as ethnographic fieldwork or qualitative interviews, particularly among Javanese Christian communities, to explore how these values are interpreted and practiced today. Additionally, further studies are needed to examine how socio-economic changes, globalization, and religious transformation influence marriage practices and their theological meaning. By extending this research into empirical and interdisciplinary directions, future scholarship can develop a more nuanced and contextually grounded understanding of marriage as a dynamic intersection between theology and culture.

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