

JOSHUA

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Joshua contains four important themes that have practical values for today.

1. Joshua is a book on the covenant faithfulness of God. The power of God was not only declared in covenant agreement but also demonstrated.
2. Joshua demonstrates the importance of the written Word of God. (Joshua 1: 8:32-35; 23:6-16; 24:26-27) There was an authoritative body of written Scripture in the days of Joshua and this consisted of the book of Moses. There is no appeal to contemporary customs or oral tradition.
3. Joshua points out the utter failure of human effort apart from Divine directives. When Joshua and the children of Israel were faithful to God's Word and His will, there was victory. When they abandoned His will in favor of their own, there was failure and frustration.
4. Joshua is a commentary on God's holiness and His judgment of sin. The destruction of the cities of Canaan with their inhabitants was not merely to give Israel military control of the area, but it was, in effect, a judgment of God upon the wickedness of that land.

The book of Joshua begins the story of Israel as a nation. The name Joshua means "the Lord saves." The book of Joshua begins immediately after the death of Moses. The people of Israel mourned thirty days after Moses' death.

When the mourning was over God commanded Joshua to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land.

The book of Joshua closes with the death and burial of Joshua, thus covering the lifespan of God's great captain. This book covers a span of about thirty years. The date of the exodus can be rather firmly established as 1447 B. C. The dates of Joshua would be set between 1407 and 1377 B. C.

The purpose of the book of Joshua is to show how God fulfilled His faithful promise to Abraham. We can hardly read the story of Joshua without realizing how God's people will one day be led into the glories of heaven by their Savior, Jesus Christ.

The book of Joshua is divided into two parts.

1. The conquest of the land.
2. The settlement of the land.

The first twelve chapters describe the battles that Joshua fought in conquering the land. The last twelve chapters describe his efforts to see God's people comfortably settled in their new homes. To find fault with the campaign of Joshua is to find fault with God. Joshua acted under orders given to him by God. (Deuteronomy 20:17)

The conquest of Palestine is informally represented throughout the Scriptures as an act of righteous judgment. God's vengeance did not come without warning. They saw the Israelites approaching, they heard of God's vengeance on Egypt, and still no one repented of sins except Rahab. They saw the Jordan parted, and Jericho fall and only the Gibeonites sought peace.

The God of love is also ultimately a God of justice.

CHAPTER 1 - Conquest of Southern and Central Territory

God never left His people without proper leadership after Moses' death. He appointed Joshua to be their captain. After the days of Joshua, He raised up Judges until the time of the kings.

The kind of encouragement that Joshua needed at this time called for God to speak directly to Him. (Joshua 1: 1-9) It was eight days after sending out the spies before they crossed the Jordan River accompanied by forty thousand men of war from the Eastern tribes.

CHAPTER 2

Joshua sent out two spies secretly to prevent the Canaanites from hearing about it. Jericho was located about an hour's journey to the west of Jordan. It was known for its palm trees. The city of Jericho was about eight hundred feet below sea level. This city controlled the trade routes from the east as well as the road stretching up to the west to Jerusalem.

Rahab is called a harlot (*Zonah*). The spies entering the house of such a person would not create suspicion. Also, her house, being on the wall would facilitate their escape.

Verses 11-14

The men whom Joshua had sent to spy out Canaan were courageous, God-fearing, and appreciative men of war. They knew Rahab had spared their lives and they were willing to make an agreement. The rope by which the spies had escaped out of Rahab's house was made of crimson threads. It was this kind of cord which she was to hang from her window.

CHAPTER 3

The Israelites moved to the banks of the Jordan River staying there three days. Israel was preparing to pass into enemy country. They had an army to prepare along with moving all their possessions.

In verse 4, we see that the ark was carried at a distance before the people not to show them the road but to make a road for them. The ark signified the focal point of God's meeting place with the people of Israel. The miraculous division of the Red Sea showed Moses as one the Israelites could trust, and the miraculous division of the Jordan River showed Joshua as one the Israelites could trust.

In verse 8, when the priests came to the bank of the Jordan River, they stood still forming a wall as it were against the force of water that was miraculously arrested in its course. As the priests stood there while the Israelites crossed the river, they stood as a symbol of God's abiding presence with His people.

Verse 10 refers to God as a "living God." This contrasts the dead gods of the heathen. God was proving Himself to be living and watchful on behalf of his people.

When the Jordan River is flowing naturally, it is a small stream. When the winter rains have raised the headwaters, the Jordan River flows through a wide extent of territory stretching from the hill country of Judea to the hill country of Perea. It actually forms a sea of water through which no group of people could cross without Divine assistance. All Israel went over on dry ground. This could have been easily accomplished in half a day, if the people formed a procession a mile or more wide.

CHAPTER 4

The most significant part of crossing the Jordan River is their taking twelve stones with them from the bed of the river to the opposite side to serve as a memorial. The people were not to erect a memorial to remind them of the greatness of one of their leaders, but they were to be reminded of God's great miraculous blessings upon them.

The memorial served a teaching purpose. It was a visible reminder of God's great guidance of Israel. The Israelite fathers were responsible for the training and education of their children.

The Jordan River flows through a bed known as Ghor. It would be eight miles wide at some points. In verse 19, we learn that the time of their crossing was in the first month of the Jewish calendar, the month of Abib. It was in this month that the Passover occurred.

CHAPTER 5

The generation of Israelites who crossed over into Canaan had not been circumcised. This was done at the camp, and the place was named Gilgal signifying the rolling away of the reproach of Egypt from them.

It was necessary for the circumcision because they were to celebrate the Passover four days later. They could not eat the Passover feast unless they were circumcised. (Exodus 12:48)

Verse 6 refers to "a land flowing with milk and honey." The food was produced where grass and flowers abound. These provided nectar for the bees. It was well watered and good for grazing cattle, sheep, and goats. This expression is a way of saying that it was a highly productive land.

In verse 9, there is a reference to "the reproach of Egypt." The reproach probably was the sentence that rested on Israel as the nation was condemned to wander aimlessly about and die in the wilderness.

At the conclusion of the Passover feast they "ate some of the produce of the land" and the manna ceased.

In verses 13 through 15 a special manifestation of God appears to Joshua and he falls down and worshiped God. God was telling Joshua that He had a heavenly army to make war upon the Canaanites and to assist Joshua and his people.

CHAPTER 6

Jericho was shut up tightly because of the fear of the Israelites. These pagan people knew God blessed the Israelites. Directions were given as to how to capture Jericho. They were to march around Jericho once a day for six days following the ark. On the seventh day they were to march around Jericho seven times and the priests were to blow the trumpets. At this point the people were to raise a great cry and the walls of the town would fall down.

The Israelites were not to depend upon themselves at all for the conquest of the city until God had completed His mighty act of deliverance. The sound of the trumpets and the cry would encourage Israel's soldiers to rise and fight. It would also throw terror into the hearts of the enemies.

Jericho was about a quarter of a mile long and about an eighth of a mile wide. The circumference of Jericho was about three quarters of a mile. In verse 17, God said, "The city shall be under the ban." The spoils were not to be taken by the Israelites but consecrated to God. Why, because the first fruits belong to God, the first born, the first crops, etc.

Jericho's destruction was a sacrifice to God. It was treated as the tithe of the land that belonged completely to God. Rahab was accepted from this ban along with all who belonged to her, because she had hidden the spies. All the inhabitants of Jericho were put to death along with their cattle. All the property in the town was to be burned. The only exception was the gold and silver and the vessels of brass and iron. They were brought into the treasury of the Lord in the tabernacle.

After Rahab's sparing, she and her household were left outside the camp of Israel since she was not yet integrated into the community as a member of a particular tribe. They would need to accept the laws of God before they could be taken into some tribe. Matthew 1:5 states, she was accepted into the tribe of Judah.

Joshua pronounced a curse upon Jericho saying it would not be rebuilt without the death of the builders' first born and his youngest son. (I Kings 16:34) Hiel, the Bethlite, attempted to rebuild Jericho but lost all his sons as a result of Joshua's curse. This was about 400 years after Jericho's destruction.

CHAPTER 7

Achan, a man of the tribe of Judah, took some material that was placed under the ban and the anger of the Lord was kindled against His people.

When the Israelites went up to fight against Ai, they were defeated. This was a severe blow to the morale of the Israelites. They had crossed the Jordan in high spirits and had overthrown Jericho. Any feeling of strength was drained from them as they were driven from Ai. Achan's name became synonymous with covetousness and sin.

In Joshua's distress God told him that the defeat had come because there was sin in the camp. Joshua was told to remove the things under the ban from their midst.

Achan confessed that he had coveted the beautiful mantle, shekels of silver and a bar of gold. He had hidden them in the earth inside his tent. The Israelites took Achan and stoned him to death along with his family and possessions. Afterwards they burned them with fire.

A great heap of stones was raised over them. The spot was called the Valley of Achan, meaning the valley of trouble.

CHAPTER 8

God again encourages Joshua and Joshua laid plans for attacking Ai a second time. An ambush was set for the men of Ai. The main fighting force retired from the city and the men of Ai came out to chase them. The men in ambush then went in and captured the city setting it on fire.

The sight of the city burning left the men of Ai without strength. They were so surprised and shocked that they were thrown into confusion. The victory was complete for the Israelites. The king of Ai was taken as a prisoner of war and brought to Joshua who had him killed by hanging.

At sunset Joshua had his body taken down and thrown at the entrance of the town gate. A heap of stones was piled upon him. Twelve thousand men and women were killed at Ai. The cup of iniquity of the Canaanites was full, and God's vengeance fell upon them. (Genesis 15:16) (Joshua 24:11)

In verse 31, we learn that Moses had instructed Joshua, after crossing the Jordan River, to build an altar upon Mount Ebal for establishing the covenant. The law was written on the altar as directed by Moses in Deuteronomy 27:4-8.

Joshua arranged "half of them in front of Mount Gerazim" and "half of them in front of Mount Ebal." As Joshua read the words of the Law, the people had a visual presentation of the way in which some of them

would keep the commandments of God and be blessed while others would disobey God's laws and be cursed.

CHAPTER 9

Joshua had successfully fought against the king of Jericho and the king of Ai and Bethel. But the rest of the kings who were west of the Jordan gathered themselves together to fight against Joshua and Israel.

The Gibeonites knew their only hope of survival was to make peace with Joshua. Although these men deceived Joshua, they are commended inasmuch as they realized the futility of opposing the wrath of God. Joshua acted without asking God's will in this matter.

Instead of breaking the covenant, Israel honored the agreement. They did not put the Gibeonites to death but made them serve in a very humble capacity as "hewers of wood and drawers of water."

The Gibeonites were made slaves of the sanctuary. As temple slaves, they made no effort to get the Israelites to join in idolatrous worship. God made a promise in Genesis 9:25, to Noah saying that Canaan (Ham) would be a servant of servants to his brothers. No word of God is void of power. The Gibeonites knew of God's promise to Abraham's family to give them Canaan through Moses.

CHAPTER 10

Five kings of the Amorites banded themselves together to punish the inhabitants of Gibeon because they had made peace with the Israelites. Adoni-zedek means "lord of righteousness." This name may have been a title of the Jebusite king.

The Israelites were honor bound to assist the Gibeonites because of their agreement.

With the Israelites' and God's help these kings were utterly defeated. God not only caused the sun to stand still but also threw large hailstones upon them as they fled. (Joshua 10:11) (Joshua 10:24) This action symbolized the fact that the kings were utterly beaten.

The kings had been incarcerated in caves until the battle was over but when it was over, they were brought out and executed. Their bodies were thrown back into the caves and great stones were rolled across the doors making rock-hewn tombs for those beaten enemies of the armies of God.

CHAPTER 11. Conquest of Northern Territory

Jabin was the king of Hazor. He formed an alliance with the kings in his area and they attempted to hold the northern part of Canaan against the on-rushing Israelites. Joshua attacked them near the waters of Merom and completely routed them. Chinneroth is another name for the Sea of Galilee. In New Testament times it was called the Sea of Tiberius Caesar.

Verse 4 mentions that the Northern Canaanites came to fight with horses and chariots against Israel's bows and arrows, spears, swords, and javelins.

In verse 6, God tells Joshua that he would be victorious and that he was to "hamstring" their horses. This is a procedure where they cut the tendons in the lower legs so they could not run fast. They were still capable of pulling plows and doing other domestic work but were of no use in military action.

Joshua burned their capital city, Hazor. This symbolized complete defeat that the northern Canaanites had suffered. Other cities were spared because Joshua did not have time in his campaign to completely destroy all of the cities. This was to be the task of the Israelites who settled the land.

Joshua also destroyed the inhabitants so that there would be no remaining cesspool of sin in the land. The conquest of Canaan probably took ten to fifteen years to accomplish.

Verse 19, says, except for the Gibeonites no one else made peace with Israel because their hearts were hardened. (Verse 20) It was God's will that these people be destroyed. They had sinned exceedingly and were totally wicked. Their freedom of will was not destroyed but God brought them to a point where they must choose for or against Him.

They had received numerous occasions or opportunities to make such decisions and each time they chose to turn their backs on God. The Anakim of verse 21 may have been large in stature or great in reputation and ability. These people had to be dealt with and so Joshua went against them without hesitation and utterly destroyed them.

Joshua saw that the land was settled before he died and the entire southern section of the land was given to Judah. All the rest of the tribes of Israel settled north of Judah and east of the Jordan River.

CHAPTER 12

Chapter 12 is a summary of Moses' conquest and Joshua's conquered territory. It also includes a list of the kings defeated by Joshua. The children of Israel under the leadership of Joshua defeated thirty-one kings.

CHAPTER 13

Chapters 1-12 tell of the conquest of Canaan while chapters 13-24 tell of the process of dividing the land among the tribes.

Reuben, Gad and part of the tribe of Manasseh received an inheritance east of the Jordan River so only nine and a half tribes received land west of the Jordan River.

All of Simeon's territory lay within the boundaries of the land given to Judah. The Simeonites are not counted as a separate tribe. (Genesis 49:5-7)

The descendants of Levi were given the responsibility of teaching the Law to the people of God, so they received no land. They were given forty-eight cities in which to live.

CHAPTER 14

Verse 2 refers to "lots." How Joshua took the lot we do not know. The Jewish rabbis conjecture that there were two urns, one contained the tribes name and the other the territory of land to be occupied.

In verses 10-12, Caleb asked for the hill country saying he was not afraid of the Anakim.

CHAPTER 15

In verse 15, Kirjath-Sepher is a name meaning "a book city." This city may have been a location of book storage. This city was the prize that Caleb offered to the courageous man who would conquer the town. Othniel performed this feat and received the city as a prize for his valor. Othniel is also known as Israel's first judge.

CHAPTER 16

In verse 4 we see that Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph, were given a single portion of land that was divided between them.

Verse 10 says the Ephraimites did not drive out the Canaanites as God had directed. In fact, many of the tribes failed to comply completely with God's demand. As a result the Canaanites lived among them and caused them to commit idolatry and other abominable practices. (Numbers 33:55)

CHAPTER 17

This chapter discusses Ephraim's and Manasseh's land territories and Ephraim thought he should have two lots like Manasseh had one east of the Jordan River and one west of the Jordan River, but Joshua told him to make full use of what he had.

CHAPTER 18

Now there are seven portions of land to be assigned. Shiloh, in verse 1, is a city located in the territory assigned to the tribe of Ephraim. Here the house of God was established and remained for the three-hundred year period of the judges. Shiloh was the center of Israel's worship even into the reign of David when preparations were made for the building of the temple.

After surveying the land and preparing its division, Benjamin drew the first lot.

CHAPTER 19

The second lot fell to Simeon who received land within the boundaries of the territory of Judah. The third lot fell to the tribe of Zebulun, while the fourth lot fell to the tribe of Issachar.

The fifth lot fell to the tribe of Asher. The people of Asher were so far north that they engaged in commerce with the Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon and were not very active in the affairs of Israel. Anna, the prophetess who was in the temple at the time of Jesus' presentation, was of this tribe. (Luke 2:36)

The sixth lot fell to the tribe of Naphtali. The seventh lot fell to the tribe of Dan. Dan's territory was the smallest of all, but it was known as the garden spot of southern Palestine. In verses 49-51 we read that the Israelites gave Joshua an inheritance in the midst of them. It was only fitting and proper for these people to give a place for their leader to live.

CHAPTER 20

This chapter tells of the cities of refuge. Six of the forty-eight cities inherited by the Levites were to be cities of refuge. Roads to these cities were kept in repair and were to be at least thirty-two cubits wide. Nothing was to hinder the fugitive's flight. No hill was left ungraded and no river without a bridge. Signs were erected everywhere bearing the word "refuge" to guide the unhappy man in flight. When settled in such a city, the manslayer was given a suitable place to live and taught a trade by which he could support himself.

(Genesis 9:5) The brother of a man slain would set out to punish the man who killed his brother. If no brother, the nearest relative then became the "avenger of blood."

CHAPTER 21

This chapter is a list of the cities of the Levites given as cities of refuge.

CHAPTER 22

The war of conquest had been finished so Joshua sent the Reubenites, Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh home from Shiloh.

When the three eastern tribes reached the Jordan River they stopped and erected an altar. Their motive in building this altar was misunderstood for a time and nearly caused a civil war in Israel. The eastern tribes had not built the altar in order to have their own place of worship.

The western tribes believed that God had only ordained one place of worship and that the eastern tribes were violating God's commandment. Therefore, this sin should not go unpunished.

Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the high priest along with the ten chiefs were sent to warn the eastern tribes of their punishment. The eastern tribes said it was not their purpose to offer strange sacrifices to a heathen god. They had erected the altar as a reminder to their brethren on the west that Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh were a part of Israel.

All the leaders of Israel must have heaved a great sigh of relief when they heard the explanation. (Joshua 22:34)

CHAPTER 23

This chapter is a digest of Joshua's address to the elders and officers of the children of Israel.

Because of his impending death he felt a need to remind the people once more of what God had done for them and to warn them against falling away. (Joshua 23:11-13)

Joshua urged them to "guard carefully" their souls. He foresaw the day when the Israelites would intermarry with those among whom they dwelt and that they would no longer remain a separate and peculiar people devoted completely to God.

CHAPTER 24

In Joshua's final farewell address, he called Israel to Shechem where Jacob had purified his house by burying all idols under the oak. Joshua's exhortation to be faithful to the Lord and to purify oneself from all idolatry could not fail but to make a deep impression. Joshua first recalls all proofs of God's mercy from Abraham to that day. Then he calls upon the people to renounce all idolatry and to serve God.

The reference in verse 12 to the "hornet" is a figure of speech by which God referred to the way in which He would lead and guide the people of Israel.

In verse 15 Joshua uses the phrase, "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord." Joshua is hoping they would follow his good example and make similar decisions. The people replied that they too would serve the Lord. (Joshua 24:19)

Joshua knew his people; he knew they were stiff-necked and hardhearted. He knew their love of sin and so he challenged them to a more wholehearted devotion.

Joshua died at the age of one hundred ten years. Verse 32 says they kept their promise to Joseph and buried him in the Promised Land.