

Joshua

The Book of Joshua recounted the conquest of the Promised Land by the children of Israel (chapters 1–12), and the division of that land among the tribes (chapters 13–22). These events came to pass according to the promise which the LORD made unto Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Joshua 21:43–45). Therefore, this book is oft called the book of *conquest and fulfilled promises*.

The first five books of the Old Testament declare the preparation for the conquest of the land; but the Book of Joshua speaketh of Israel's actual entrance into Canaan.

- *Genesis* declared the promise of the land.
- *Exodus* speaketh of Israel's deliverance from Egypt for the sake of the promise.
- *Leviticus* provided laws for dwelling in the land.
- *Numbers* recorded the wilderness wandering of the old generation.
- *Deuteronomy* prepared the new generation to enter the land.
- *Joshua* recounted the possession of the Promised Land.

Joshua was well prepared by Moses to take upon him the mantle of leadership. Even in Moses' lifetime, he had committed great responsibility into Joshua's hands. Thus it is fitting that Joshua the son of Nun, of the tribe of Ephraim (Numbers 13:8), is the chief figure of this book. Born in Egypt, he was a young man at the time of the Exodus (Exodus 33:11).

One commentator hath noted that Joshua is unique among Israel's leaders in that his record remained unblemished in Scripture, both politically and militarily.

Upon close reading, Joshua appeared not merely as Moses' successor, but in many respects as his likeness. His first cometh into view during the battle against Amalek (Exodus 17). He ascended Mount Sinai with Moses (Exodus 24:13). He was among the twelve spies sent into the land (Numbers 13).

The relationship between Moses and Joshua mirrored that of Paul and Timothy—a bond of close mentorship and spiritual nurture. During the forty years of wilderness wandering, Joshua was ever by Moses' side, and in this time he was trained in the ways of leadership.

In battle, he gained military training under Moses' command (Exodus 17). On Sinai, he was instructed in the fear of the LORD (Exodus 24). And through continued companionship, he was given experience in the governance and administration of the people.

These three forms of preparation—military, spiritual, and administrative—were vital, for unto Joshua was committed the charge of leading Israel into the land of promise. He standeth as a military leader, a political steward, and a spiritual guide.

Yet though Joshua be the chief human character, we must remember: the Book of Joshua is not chiefly about Joshua—but about God.

Comparison of Moses and Joshua

MOSES

Divinely Chosen
Led Israel out of Egypt
Crossed the Red Sea
Led the people from bondage
Prophesied concerning the inheritance
The old generation perished
Began the process
Gave his farewell address in the plains of Moab
(Deut. 31:30–33:29)

JOSHUA

Divinely Chosen
Led Israel into Canaan
Crossed the Jordan River
Led the people out of the wilderness
Led the people into the inheritance
The new generation entered the land
Brought the process to completion
Gave his farewell address in Shechem
(Josh. 18:23–24:28)

Author of the Book

Though the Book of Joshua does not explicitly name its author, ancient tradition ascribes it to Joshua himself, the servant of Moses. Yet, in the final chapter of the book, there is a record of Joshua's death, from which it is understood that the conclusion was penned not by Joshua, but by one of his contemporaries. According to early Jewish tradition, the high priest Eleazar and his son Phinehas completed the book following Joshua's death.

The internal evidence also suggests that the book was written by an eyewitness. In several places, the pronouns “I” and “we” are used, indicating that someone who walked alongside Joshua—possibly even Joshua himself for the earlier sections—wrote this account.

Date of Writing

The events recorded in the Book of Joshua span a period of approximately 30 to 40 years. It is commonly held that the book was written sometime between 1400 and 1350 B.C., shortly after the conquest and settlement of the land.

Purpose and Message

The divine purpose of the Book of Joshua is to declare how the LORD fulfilled His covenant with Abraham by bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt and settling them in the land of Canaan. Throughout its chapters, the book proclaims the faithfulness of God and recounts His mighty works on behalf of His people.

It is not merely a book about Joshua; it is a book about the God of Joshua. Over and again, the book draws attention to the LORD—His words, His presence, His commands, His victories, and His faithfulness.

The central message of the book is that the LORD is a covenant-keeping God. Regardless of the magnitude of the obstacles, God is able to fulfil what He has promised. The book resounds with this truth: that the LORD who made covenant with Abraham is both willing and able to perform His word. Moreover, it reveals that He is not only faithful, but mighty in power to accomplish His purposes.

Outline of the Book of Joshua

1. Entrance into the Promised Land (Joshua 1–4)
2. Preparation for the Conquest of the Land (Joshua 5)
3. Conquest of the Promised Land (Joshua 6–12)
4. Division of the Promised Land (Joshua 13:7–22)
5. Joshua's Final Exhortation (Joshua 23–24)

Important Events (14 Key Sections)

1. The LORD commands Joshua to cross the Jordan.
2. Israel crosses the Jordan River.
3. Twelve memorial stones are set up as a testimony.
4. The new generation is circumcised.
5. Joshua encounters the Commander of the LORD's army (a Christophany).
6. Victory at Jericho.
7. The sin of Achan and Israel's defeat at Ai.
8. Israel conquers Ai and renews the covenant.
9. Joshua sends spies to survey the land.
10. The land of Canaan is subdued before Israel.
11. The land of Canaan is divided among the tribes.
12. Cities of refuge are appointed, and the Levites receive their portions.
13. Joshua delivers his final address to the people.
14. Israel makes a covenant to serve the LORD at Shechem.

Jordan River

The Jordan River was the largest river of the land of Canaan. It holds great significance in the biblical narrative. Among all rivers mentioned in the Holy Scriptures, the Jordan is referred to more frequently than any other. The name “Jordan” is believed to mean “the one that descends” or “the downward-flowing one.” Another interpretation suggests it means “the water that judges” or “the river that brings justice.”

When the children of Israel came out of slavery in Egypt, they had to cross the Red Sea. Now, before entering the Promised Land, they had to cross the Jordan.

It is important to note that this crossing occurred in the spring season. During this time, the snow upon the mountains of Palestine would begin to melt. In the month of Nisan (March-April), the Jordan would overflow all its banks due to the abundance of water, making it impossible to cross by natural means. Yet, the children of Israel crossed the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month (Nisan) and entered the Promised Land. They camped at Gilgal. Forty years prior, on this very same day, they had selected lambs for the Feast of Passover in Egypt that they might slay them and apply the blood to their doorposts.

The River Jordan played a significant role throughout biblical history:

1. The river was divided in two, and the children of Israel passed through on dry ground.
2. A dispute between Jephthah and the Gileadites was connected to the fords of the Jordan. (Judges 12)
3. The prophet Elijah found refuge near the Jordan. (1 Kings 17)
4. Elijah and Elisha crossed the Jordan on dry ground. (2 Kings 2)
5. Naaman, the commander of the Aramean army, dipped himself in its waters to be cleansed. (2 Kings 5)

6. The prophet Elisha miraculously caused an iron axe head to float in the Jordan. (2 Kings 6)
7. John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. (Matthew 3)

Canaanite Religion

the children of Israel had lived for centuries in Egypt, where they observed the Egyptians worshipping a multitude of gods and goddesses. Now, as they entered Canaan, they encountered a similar religious landscape. Like the Egyptians, the Canaanites also worshipped many deities. Chief among them was **Baal**, and his consort was **Ashtoreth**. Ashtoreth was considered the greatest goddess among them.

Their temples were centers of immorality. Female temple prostitutes served in their shrines, and men who engaged in unnatural acts—male cult prostitutes—were also part of their religious rituals. These temples were dens of sexual perversion.

Another detestable practice was the ritual of “foundation sacrifices.” When building a house, they would sacrifice a child and bury the body in the foundation of the structure, believing it would bring prosperity and good fortune to the household.

The Canaanites often offered their firstborn children as sacrifices to their gods. Human sacrifice was common, and ritual prostitution was widespread. Archaeological evidence from regions near ancient shrines reveals many instances of child sacrifice.

These abominable practices were among the chief reasons the LORD commanded the Israelites to destroy the inhabitants of Canaan, that the land might be cleansed of such evil.

When the Children of Israel Were About to Enter the Land of Canaan

When the children of Israel were about to enter the land of Canaan, the LORD God forbade them from adopting not only the abominations mentioned earlier, but also certain peculiar customs of the heathen. For instance, God commanded:

“Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother’s milk.” (Exodus 23:19)

Likewise, the LORD gave another commandment, saying:

“The woman shall not wear that which pertained unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God.” (Deuteronomy 22:5)

The Canaanite religion posed a continual threat to the spiritual life of Israel. At the time when the Israelites were about to conquer the land, there were many false gods being worshipped throughout the Promised Land. Therefore, the LORD commanded that the inhabitants be destroyed.

(2) The Command to Utterly Destroy the Canaanites Was a Manifestation of God’s Wrath

(b) this command was given to preserve Israel from the idolatry, immorality, and shameful practices that were rampant among the Canaanites.

(c) It was also given to cleanse the land from heathen worship and the pollution of false gods.

Rahab the Harlot

When Joshua sent forth spies into Jericho, they came unto a woman named Rahab. When the people of Jericho came to know of the spies' presence, they sought to apprehend them. But Rahab hid them and delivered them from danger. When Israel conquered Jericho, Rahab was spared.

According to Jewish tradition, Rahab became a devout convert. Some rabbis say she was one of the four most beautiful women who ever lived and that she became an ancestress to about eight prophets. Regarding her identity, there are varied interpretations:

- Some commentators believe she was affiliated with temple prostitution.
- Others say she was the keeper of an inn.
- Still others view her as a common harlot.

The early Church accepted her as a harlot indeed. It is said that she had sexual relations with men of high rank and power, and thus had knowledge of the affairs of the surrounding region. Perhaps for this very reason the spies came to her—to gather accurate intelligence.

In the Gospel according to Matthew, Rahab is named as the wife of Salmon. Their son Boaz married Ruth, who bore Obed—the father of Jesse, the grandfather of David. Thus, a Canaanite harlot was grafted into the lineage of King David, from whom Christ came.

Themes: Covenant and the Land

(a) As a covenant people, to the Jews the Promised Land was more than just territory. God had promised Abraham a land—not one that belonged to his kindred, but a land that belonged to others. The LORD, by His mighty arm, gave this land unto Israel.

The land itself became a sign of God's faithfulness. Whenever Israel sinned, they were cast into exile; yet the hope remained that one day they would return and be restored to their inheritance.

Just as the Hebrew people did not escape bondage in Egypt by their own strength, so too they did not obtain the land by their own might. The land was a gift of God's grace.

(b)

Prohibitions:

One of the central themes of the Book of Joshua is the divine instruction regarding how Israel was to deal with the inhabitants of the land of Canaan upon their entry. The Israelites were commanded to utterly destroy the nations dwelling therein.

The pressing question arises: *Why did God command the destruction of those who lived there?*

Does this not contradict the loving nature of God, as declared in John 3:16—*"For God so loved the world..."*?

How can a God of love also command such devastation?

The answer lies in this: the destruction of the Canaanites was not arbitrary but was the just consequence of their iniquities. As written, *"It is not for thy righteousness... but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD thy God doth drive them out"* (Deuteronomy 9:5).

Their sins were many—most grievously, they offered their own children as sacrifices, and they resisted the work and purposes of God (see Joshua chapters 9, 10, 11).

(c) The Divine Warrior:

Though the title “*The LORD of Hosts*” (i.e., the LORD of armies) becomes prominent in the days of Samuel, in the Book of Joshua as well, God is portrayed as the One who stands with His people in battle. He goes before them as their Captain, their Deliverer, and their Strength.

(d) Corporate Solidarity:

The sin of one brings judgment upon the many.

Because of the transgression of Achan, the entire nation suffered defeat before Ai. The unity of God’s covenant people meant that the actions of a single member could affect the whole.

How do we see Jesus Christ in the Book of Joshua?

Joshua is a type and foreshadowing of Jesus Christ.

Just as Joshua (Hebrew: Yehoshua) led the people of God into the Promised Land and brought them rest, so Jesus (Greek: Iēsous, same root name) leads His people into the eternal inheritance and rest of God.

Joshua prefigures the greater Joshua—Jesus Christ—who conquers not merely earthly kingdoms but the powers of sin, death, and hell, leading His people into the heavenly Canaan.