

Joshua

by Ross Callaghan

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Author Possibly Joshua himself (except for the postscript in Chapter 24:29-33). Alternatively the book may be a compilation written by several unknown authors.

The Hebrew word *Joshua* (or *Jehoshua*) means *Jehovah is salvation*. It was a common name among the Hebrews. The same name in the Greek language is *Jesous* or *Jesus*.

Joshua was the son of Nun, from the tribe of Ephraim. He was born in Egypt prior to the Exodus, and was Moses' main assistant as he led the Children of Israel through the wilderness to the Promised Land. Joshua led the first battle after leaving Egypt and was victorious over the Amalekites (Exodus 17:8-16); ascended Mount Sinai with Moses when he received the Ten Commandments (Exodus 32:17); was one of the twelve spies who were sent by Moses to explore the land of Canaan (Numbers 13:16,17), and was only one of two (with Caleb) who left Egypt that entered the Promised Land. (Numbers 14:23-24). Later Joshua was appointed by Moses to succeed him as leader of the Israelites and led the Children of Israel into the Promised Land. (Numbers 27:12-23).

Date The events in the book of Joshua take place between the death of Moses (around 1400BC) through to the death of Joshua (around 1375 BC).

Type History.

Purposes

- To describe how the Children of Israel entered, conquered and occupied the promised land of Canaan.
- To record God's requirements for His people as they entered the Promised Land.
- To show God's faithfulness in fulfilling His promises.

Overview Joshua Chapters 1-12

The first part of the book of Joshua describes the conquest of Canaan, the Promised Land. At the Jordan River, the waters parted, as they had for Moses at the Red Sea and Joshua led the battle that resulted in the destruction of Jericho. The Children of Israel then moved on to Ai, a small city to the west. Here, they were defeated and thirty-six Israelite warriors were killed, because Achan took some of the treasures from Jericho. When Achan's sin was exposed, he was judged and God's favour was again restored so Joshua was able to defeat Ai. The Israelites then faced an alliance of Amorite kings from Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon. At Gibeon Joshua asked God to cause the sun and moon to stand still, so that he could finish the battle in daylight. *There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the Lord listened to a man. Surely the Lord was fighting for Israel!* 10:14. After this Joshua led the Israelites to several victories, taking control of much of the land of Canaan.

Joshua Chapters 13-24

In the second part of the book Joshua describes how the Promised Land was to be divided among the tribes of Israel. He exhorted the tribes to stay true to the Lord and not to intermarry with the local peoples because that could lead them to be unfaithful to God. At Shechem he reminded the people of the covenant that God had made with His people and set up a big stone under an oak as a reminder of their covenant. Joshua died soon after this at the age of 110, and was buried in the Promised Land at Timnath Serah.

Key verses

"Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." 1:7-9

So the Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their ancestors, and they took possession of it and settled there. The Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their ancestors. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the Lord gave all their enemies into their hands. Not one of all the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled. 21:43-45

"Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." 24:15

Outline

Chapter 1: God's command to Joshua

After the death of Moses God told Joshua to lead the Children of Israel into the Promised Land. He reiterated the promise made to Moses: *I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.* 1:3. The Lord then commissioned Joshua for this task and gave him many encouragements: *No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."* 1:3-9.

Joshua immediately ordered the people to get ready. The women and children of the Reubenites, Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh were to stay east of the Jordan, but their fighting men were to cross over and help the other Israelites. After that they could go back and occupy their own land.

The people then gave their allegiance to Joshua: *"Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the Lord your God be with you as he was with Moses"*. 1:16,17.

Chapter 2: Spying out the land

Two spies were sent across the Jordan to look over the land, especially Jericho. They stayed at the house of Rahab, a prostitute. The King heard about this and ordered Rahab to bring the spies out but she hid them. She told the spies that the people of Jericho were fearful because they knew what the Lord had done for the Israelites. She asked that she and her family would be spared and they agreed with an oath. She lowered them from a window in her house over the city wall using a rope, and they hid for three days so that their pursuers would not find them. The two spies then returned to Joshua and reported: *The Lord has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us.* 2:24.

Rahab is twice celebrated in the New Testament: as a great believer (Hebrews 11:31) and as one whose faith proved itself by good works (James 2:25).

Chapters 3 and 4: Crossing the Jordan

Joshua told the people *"Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you"*. 3:5. The next day Joshua led the Israelites across the Jordan and into Canaan, the Promised Land. The priests took the Ark of the Covenant into the Jordan and stopped in the middle of the river. The waters of the

Jordan stopped flowing so they were all able to cross on dry ground. As soon as everyone was through, and the priests emerged the Jordan started flowing again. *That day the Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they revered him all the days of his life, just as they had revered Moses.* 4:14.

Twelve men, one from each tribe, took a stone from the middle of the Jordan and placed them at Gilgal as a memorial. It was to remind the Israelites that the Lord opened up the Jordan as He had done for Moses at the Red Sea. *He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful and so that you might always fear the Lord.* 4:24.

Chapter 5: Circumcision at Gilgal

When the Canaanite kings heard how the Lord had dried up the Jordan they were fearful, *and no longer had the courage to face the Israelites.* 5:1.

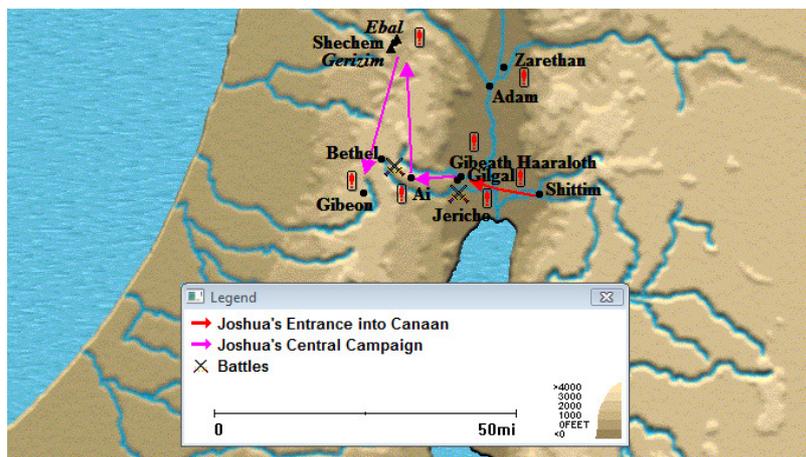
The Lord then told Joshua to circumcise all of the males in the camp. This was needed because all of the males who left Egypt had died in the wilderness (except Joshua and Caleb) and their sons had not been circumcised. This circumcision was important because it put Egypt behind them all. *Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you".* 5:9. This took place at Gilgal (which sounds like the Hebrew word for 'rolled'). The Israelites then celebrated the Passover, using resources from the Promised Land. *The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate the produce of Canaan.* 5:12.

Chapter 6: The fall of Jericho

The commander of the army of the Lord appeared to Joshua and told him to *"Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy".* 5:14,15. The Lord told Joshua that He would deliver Jericho into his hands.

The army was to march around the city each day for 6 days; then 7 times on the seventh day. When the priests blew the trumpets and the people gave a loud shout, the walls of Jericho would fall in. Joshua and the people obeyed the Lord and it happened just as He said! The city was destroyed and only Rahab and her household were spared. Precious articles were taken into the treasury of the Lord's house. A curse was then placed on anyone who would re-build Jericho. *So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land.* 6:27.

By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days. Hebrews 11:30.



Chapter 7: Unfaithfulness to God

The Israelites were unfaithful to God *and the Lord's anger burned against Israel.* 7:1. Joshua sent men to spy out Ai and they reported that only 3000 men would be required to take the city. A small army was sent to Ai but was defeated and 36 men killed. When Joshua came before the Lord about this He said it was because *Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep.* 7:11.

Someone had stolen some of the precious articles and lied about it. God said He would not be with them any more unless they destroyed whoever had done this sin. Joshua got all of the tribes to present themselves before the Lord and discovered that Achan was the one who had stolen the articles. He confessed his sin and the articles were recovered from his tent. Achan was then stoned to death and the place has been called the Valley of Achor (trouble) ever since.

Chapter 8: Victory at Ai

Once the Israelites were back in good relationship with the Lord they were able to overcome Ai easily. They did this by luring the men of Ai away from the town and setting an ambush. Ai was completely destroyed.

Afterwards Joshua built an altar to the Lord, copied the Law of Moses onto new stones, and renewed the covenant with the Lord. Afterwards, *Joshua read all the words of the law - the blessings and the curses - just as it is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children, and the aliens who lived among them.* 8:34,35.

Chapter 9: Deception by the Gibeonites

The Gibeonites recognized the strength of the Israelites and created a deception to protect themselves. They dressed as wanderers who had heard about the Lord, and requested a peace treaty. The Israelites *did not enquire of the Lord*, 9:14 and made a peace treaty with them. When the people found the Gibeonites lived nearby and had deceived them they grumbled against their leaders. Joshua spared the Gibeonites and honoured the peace treaty but placed them under a curse by making them woodcutters and water carriers for the Israelite community.

Chapter 10: Southern kings defeated

The king of Jerusalem joined forces with five other kings to attack Gibeon because it had made a treaty with the Israelites. Joshua heard of this and the Lord told him not to be afraid of them. *I have given them into your hand.* 10:8. The Israelites marched from Gilgal and took the southern kings by surprise. As they fled the Lord sent large hailstones to fall on them and they were completely defeated. That day *Joshua said to the Lord in the presence of Israel: "O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon." So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the Book of Jashar. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the Lord listened to a man. Surely the Lord was fighting for Israel!* 10:12-14. The five kings escaped and hid in a cave. Joshua captured them and made an example of them before moving south and subduing all of the kings there. *All these kings and their lands Joshua conquered in one campaign because the Lord, the God of Israel fought for Israel.* 10:42.

Chapter 11: Northern kings defeated

Kings from the north joined together in a great army to fight against Israel. The Lord assured Joshua that these kings would be defeated and it happened just as the Lord said. *So Joshua took the entire land just as the Lord had directed Moses and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions. Then the land had rest from war.* 11:23.

Chapter 12: List of defeated kings

The Kings that were defeated by the Children of Israel are listed.

- East of the Jordan 12:2-3, and the territory of Og 12:4,5. These Kings were defeated by Moses and the Israelites as they approached the Promised Land. Their land was to be allocated to the tribes of Reuben and Dan, and the half tribe of Manasseh. (The sons of Joseph had become two half tribes: Manasseh and Ephraim).
- West of the Jordan 12:7-24. These Kings were defeated by Joshua and the Israelites after they crossed into the Promised Land.

Chapter 13-19: Division of the land

- The land east of the Jordan was allocated to the half tribe of Manasseh and to the Reubenites and Gadites.
- The tribe of Levi was to get no inheritance as they would receive offerings as their inheritance. *The Lord, the God of Israel, is their inheritance.* 13:33.
- Land west of the Jordan was to go to the remaining 9½ tribes: Judah, Benjamin, Simeon, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, Dan and the half tribe of Ephraim. This land was assigned by lot. The initial allocation was done at Gilgal for Caleb, Judah and Ephraim.
- Caleb (who spied out the land at Kadesh Barnea) reminded Joshua that the Lord had said he was to have the land of Hebron because he *followed the Lord wholeheartedly.* 14:9. As a result Caleb was not included in the drawing of lots
- Occasionally the Israelites were not able to dislodge the local people and fully claim their land. e.g. Judah's allocation included Jerusalem, but they were not able to dislodge the Jebusites that lived there.
- The sons of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh) requested an enlargement of their allocation. Joshua said they could only have their allotted land, but could expand up into the forested hill country areas.
- Seven of the tribes did not immediately take up their allocated areas. At Shiloh Joshua called these tribes together and asked them to map out the remaining land. He then cast lots for the allocations to the seven tribes of Benjamin, Simeon (which was taken from part of Judah's inheritance), Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan.
- When they had finished allotting the land the Israelites gave Joshua a small town: Timnath Serah and he settled down there.



Chapter 20: Cities of refuge

The Lord told Joshua to set aside 'cities of refuge', as he had instructed Moses. (Numbers 35:9-34; Deuteronomy 4:41-43; 19:1-14). These cities were places where someone who had killed someone else accidentally could flee for refuge. *Any of the Israelites or any alien living among them who killed someone accidentally could flee to these designated cities and not be killed by the avenger of blood prior to standing trial before the assembly.* 20:9.

Chapter 21: Towns for the Levites

The tribe of Levi was to get no inheritance in the land because *The Lord, the God of Israel, is their inheritance.* 13:33. The Levites were, however, to have towns they could live in, so towns were set apart for them from the land allocated to the various tribes.

So the Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. The Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the Lord handed all their enemies over to them. Not one of all the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled. 21:43-45.

What an amazing confirmation of the faithfulness of God!

Chapter 22: Eastern tribes return home

Joshua summoned the tribes with an inheritance east of the Jordan (the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh). He commended them for their faithfulness to the Lord, blessed them, and gave them part of the plunder taken from the conquered nations. He then sent them home saying: *"You have done all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded, and you have obeyed me in everything I commanded. For a long time now -to this very day - you have not deserted your brothers but have carried out the mission the Lord your God gave you. Now that the Lord your God has given your brothers rest as he promised, return to your homes in the land that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side of the Jordan. But be very careful to keep the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you: to love the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to obey his commands, to hold fast to him and to serve him with all your heart and all your soul."* 22:2-5.

On their way they built an altar at the Jordan. When the rest of the Israelites heard this they sent a delegation saying *"The whole assembly of the Lord says: 'How could you break faith with the God of Israel like this? How could you turn away from the Lord and build yourselves an altar in rebellion against him now?' 22:16.* The eastern tribes explained that they didn't build the altar to rebel against the Lord; rather it was a witness to ensure future generations would recognize that they belonged to the Lord. The delegation was pleased with this explanation and reported it back to the tribes in Canaan. *The Reubenites and the Gadites gave the altar this name: A Witness Between Us that the Lord is God. 22:34.*

Chapter 23: Farewell to the leaders

Some years later when Joshua was old he gathered the leaders of Israel together and reminded them that it was the Lord who fought for them in taking the land of Canaan. *"The Lord has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. One of you routs a thousand, because the Lord your God fights for you, just as he promised. So be very careful to love the Lord your God. 23:10,11.* They were not to ally themselves, intermarry or associate with the surrounding nations. *If they do so then you may be sure that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the Lord your God has given you. 23:13.*

The later history of Israel showed that they did intermarry and associate with the surrounding nations, and the warning that God gave here was fulfilled. Israel was driven out of the land. How much better if she had stayed faithful to the Lord!

Joshua then reminded them of God's faithfulness and of their responsibilities. *"Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed. But just as every good promise of the Lord your God has come true, so the Lord will bring on you all the evil he has threatened, until he has destroyed you from this good land he has given you. If you violate the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the Lord's anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land he has given you."* 23:14-16

Chapter 24: Renewal of the covenant

Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He reminded them of how God had helped them come into the Promised Land and challenged them about continuing to follow the Lord. *"Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."*

Then the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods! It was the Lord our God himself who brought us and our fathers up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled. And the Lord drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God."

Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you." But the people said to Joshua, "No! We will serve the Lord." Then Joshua said, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the Lord." "Yes, we are witnesses," they replied. "Now then," said Joshua, "throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel." And the people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God and obey him." 24:14-24.

The challenge that Joshua made to the Israelites is relevant for us today. We need to choose who we will serve and follow. Hopefully our response is the same as Joshua's! "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Joshua then made a covenant for the people, recorded it in the Book of the Law of God, and set up a stone of remembrance.

Joshua died at the age of 110 and was buried at Timnath Serah. The Israelites served the Lord throughout his lifetime and that of the elders who served with him.

Discussion questions

The name Joshua in Hebrew is the same as the name Jesus in Greek. In what ways was Joshua like Jesus? In what ways was Jesus like Joshua?

A continuing theme in the Book of Joshua is the Israelite's faithfulness and unfaithfulness to the Lord. Trace this theme through the book. What motivated Israel to be faithful to the Lord? What motivated her to be unfaithful to the Lord? How did Joshua deal with this unfaithfulness? What lessons do you learn from this about faithfulness and unfaithfulness and how to deal with it?

How was the land east and west of the Jordan allocated to the tribes of Israel? On what basis was this allocation made? Was this a fair way of allocating the land? Should fairness be a consideration when acting in obedience to the Lord?

What do you learn about leadership from Joshua? What were his most admirable character traits, and leadership skills? How was he wise in exercising his leadership? How does this inform your own leadership or that of others in your Church?

What is a covenant? What covenants were made, confirmed or broken in the events described in the Book of Joshua? What covenants do we make today? Do these covenants have as much authority as the ones described in Joshua? How do covenants relate to social norms and societies standards? What covenants should be in place in our churches and communities?

Christians sometimes talk about a "Promised Land", equivalent to the one taken by the Israelites. What is our "Promised Land"?

What have you learned from your study of the Book of Joshua? How will you apply this in your life?