

# Joshua

## Introduction

Joshua is a book of *history*, with an explanation of its significance. It picks up where Deuteronomy ends, and shows how God fulfilled the promises he made to Israel, to bring them into the land he would give them. By the end of the book, it can be said, "Yahweh gave to Israel all the land which he swore to give to their fathers" (Joshua 21:43), and "Nothing failed of any good thing which Yahweh had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass" (Joshua 21:45).

Themes stressed throughout the book include: 1) God is in control, directing and winning the battles; it is he who gives Israel the land. As seen in Deuteronomy, God would destroy the nations in the land because of their extreme wickedness. 2) God keeps his promises - something that brings joy and peace to the righteous, and terror and judgment to the wicked. 3) Blessings and victory come with obedience; curses and defeat come with disobedience. (For Israel, the book of Joshua demonstrates the "blessings" part; the book of Judges demonstrates the "curses" part.)

## Interesting Features

Most of the information in this book appears to be from early accounts of the events (perhaps written by Joshua); but the final compiler is unknown (though Samuel has been suggested). Some later information is included, when relevant - such as the account of Joshua's death, and some comments about what individual tribes did at a later time.

Two types of battles are mentioned in this book: 1) national conquest - i.e., the *initial* control of the whole land of Canaan; and 2) tribal occupation - i.e., the *later* conquest of small pockets of resistance. Because of this, ch. 11 can say that the war is over, even though later chapters describe additional battles. God had said he would *not* drive out all the inhabitants at once, in order to prevent ecological chaos (Deuteronomy 7:22), and to teach the people to *trust* him (Judges 3:1-4; they didn't learn, v. 5+).

Trust in (or reliance on) God is vital to the people's success; and their trust would have to be an ongoing attitude. As long as they trusted God and fought *God's* battles, they would be strong enough to win. If they sinned, they would become too weak to defeat even a small city. (In some situations, *one* person's sin could affect an entire *community* - as Achan's sin shows us.) Sadly, that trust diminished as the older generation died off. *Verbally*, the people were willing to express commitment to God (chapter 24). But commitment is not as easy as they expected (as Joshua warned, and as seen in the book of Judges). As Moses had previously warned, commitment must start in the *heart* (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; etc.); and they were weak in this matter.

When Achan stole things devoted to destruction (i.e., to be given irrevocably to God), the curse that was on the devoted items ended up applying to *him* and to all that belonged to him. This meant that he and all he owned (including his family) became devoted to destruction.

Though the main focus of Joshua is *victory*, the book also records some instances of *failure*, caused by the people's failure to rely on God when they made decisions. These include: 1) the defeat at Ai (in conjunction with Achan's sin), and 2) a peace treaty being made with the Gibeonites. Later chapters also make reference to the failures of individual tribes to trust God and to take over the remaining Canaanite peoples. (This occurred at a later date, and becomes a major issue in the book of Judges. It was not *God* who failed; it was the *people* who sinned and failed.)

Joshua and Caleb, the only two spies who told the people to trust God (Numbers 13-14), both receive cities within the areas belonging to their tribes. They were the only survivors of the previous generation, because they did *not* question God's ability to give them the land. (The rest of the people died in the wilderness.)

There are many parallels between what Joshua did for Israel, and what Jesus did for the saved of all time. The book of Hebrews points out some of these parallels (such as the concept of "rest" for God's people - chapter 4). In addition, the Old Testament Hebrew name "Joshua" is equivalent to the New Testament name "Jesus"!

## Outline

### 1. Preparation and entering the land; God is in charge (1:1-5:15).

- 1. Prepare to take the land God is giving you; be courageous; be careful to follow God's Word completely. The 2½ tribes from east of the Jordan River will help.

- 2. Two spies; the Canaanites know God has given Israel the land; spies protected by Rahab; she and her family will be spared from death.
- 3. Prepare to cross the Jordan. A sign that God goes with them: God stops the Jordan; they will cross on dry land.
- 4. Memorial stones to remind them of what God did; the waters begin to flow again; camp at Gilgal.
- 5. Circumcision of the Israelites (and reason why); Passover celebration; food from the land; no more Manna. Joshua bows before the commander of God's army: Israel fights *God's* battles, and not the other way around!

## 2. God gives them the land.

### a. Beginning with Jericho and Ai (the center of Canaan); reaffirming the covenant (6:1-8:35).

- 6. The fall of Jericho: marching around the city; God gives it to them. Rahab's family spared; the city destroyed; everything is to be devoted to God (i.e., destroyed as in a sacrifice). A curse on anyone who rebuilds it.
- 7. Achan keeps items that were devoted to God; the whole nation suffers. Israel fails to consult God; defeat at Ai. All that Achan has becomes devoted to God and must be destroyed.
- 8. God directs the attack and they defeat Ai; this time, Israel can keep the plunder. The covenant is reaffirmed (as instructed in Deuteronomy 11:26-30 and 27:1-8).

### b. The rest of the land - north and south (9:1-13:7).

- 9. All the nations except the Gibeonites prepare for war against Israel. The Gibeonites trick Israel into making a binding peace treaty (Israel failed to consult God about it). Once the ruse is discovered, they become permanent servants of Israel.
- 10. The southern kings are defeated: Five Amorite kings attack Gibeon; Israel attacks the Amorites (under God's direction); God attacks with hail; the sun stands still; 5 kings killed; the southern cities are all conquered because God fought for Israel.
- 11. The northern kings are defeated: God delivers them into the hands of Israel. Summary: God hardened their hearts to accomplish this (v. 20); the war for controlling Canaan is over (though individual groups would still need to be fought).
- 12. Review of the victories (i.e., what God did for Israel). List of defeated kings: (a) by Moses - kings (and lands) east of the Jordan, for the 2½ tribes; (b) by Joshua - kings (and lands) west of the Jordan, for the other tribes.
- 13. (13:1-7) Land still to be taken (small groups of people).

## 3. Dividing the land among the tribes (13:8-21:42).

- 13. (13:8-33) Description of the lands *east* of the Jordan (given to 2½ tribes). Levi's tribal inheritance: not land, but offerings made by fire. Description of the lands given to Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh.
- 14. Description of the lands *west* of the Jordan (given to 9½ tribes). Levites get towns (and some fields), but no land allotment; Caleb gets Hebron (because of his faithfulness when the spies explored the land - Numbers 13-14).
- 15. Allotment for Judah; Caleb takes over the land given him; cities in Judah.
- 16. Land given to Joseph: The area for Ephraim.
- 17. (Joseph's land continued.) The area given to the half tribe of Manasseh (including Zelophehad's daughters - Numbers 27:1-11; 36:1-12). Joshua tells the people to trust God and take over more of their territory (areas still occupied by the Canaanites) - does this suggest that the people are beginning to waver in their trust?
- 18. Land given to the seven other tribes: The land is surveyed and divided. Land for Benjamin.
- 19. Land for Simeon (inside Judah), Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali and Dan; Joshua given land inside Ephraim (because of his faithfulness, when the spies explored the land - Numbers 13-14).
- 20. Cities of refuge (for those who accidentally kill someone).
- 21. (21:1-42) Towns for the Levites (and neighboring pasture lands) - a summary, followed by details.

## 4. Rest in the land; final events in Joshua's life; the covenant again affirmed by the people (21:43-24:33).

- 21. (21:43-45) The land is theirs; the conquest is over. All of God's promises were fulfilled (as promised in ch. 1). [Pockets of resistance remain for individual tribes to deal with, when they need additional land.]
- 22. The eastern tribes are blessed and return home. They build an altar as a memorial; it is misunderstood, then explained.
- 23. Joshua's farewell address. A warning: Be faithful, and God will bless and fight for you and drive out those who remain; intermingle with the nations, and you will perish. All of God's promises (regarding their receiving the land) have been fulfilled.
- 24. A review of their history; they need to choose whether to serve God or not. The people reaffirm their allegiance to God. Death of Joshua and the other leaders of his generation. Burial of Joseph's bones (Genesis 50:25).