

INTRO TO JOSHUA

The Prophet-Leader

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The Plan of the Major Old Testament book studies

These notes are not intended to be textual commentaries of the Old Testament books. They serve as a proposed *outline guide* for the student or teacher in *preparing personal studies, or for teaching and study notes*. The notes are from the Bible Dictionaries and Bible Encyclopedia referenced below in the Bibliography as research references for further study. Much of the information in this lesson is edited from the *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* and my own lecture notes.

Bibliography

Tyndale Bible Dictionary.

Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible.

Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary.

Preface to Joshua

The book of Joshua is considered by most Christians as one of the historical books of the Old Testament because it follows Moses' leading the Israelites out of Egypt toward Canaan, the Promised Land. Because of Moses' breach of faith at the provision of water out of a rock at Meribah he was not permitted to enter Canaan, Israel's future national home¹. Joshua, along with Caleb, was chosen by God to lead Israel into Canaan, the Promised Land, hence Christians consider Joshua to be a historical book. Being God's spokesperson to the nation, Joshua was more than an important leader of the nation, he was like Moses also God's mouthpiece to Israel.

Thus, in the Jewish *Tanakh*, Old Testament, Joshua was placed among the *Prophets*, or *Navi'im*, *God's oracle to the nation*.

Joshua, The Man

The Tyndale Bible Dictionary

“JOSHUA (Person). The son of Nun, Moses' assistant and successor, and the military leader whom God chose to lead the Israelites in the conquest of Canaan (Nm 13:16, kjv “Jehoshua”; also spelled “*Jehoshuah*” in 1 Chr 7:27 and “*Jeshua*” in Neh 8:17).

¹ Deuteronomy 32:51–52. God explained the reason for Moses not being permitted to enter the Promised Land: “*This is because . you broke faith with me in the presence of the Israelites at the waters of Meribah Kadesh in the Desert of Zin and because you did not uphold my holiness among the Israelites. Therefore, you will see the land only from a distance; you will not enter the land I am giving to the people of Israel.*” God was true to His promise. He showed Moses the Promised Land, but did not let him enter in. The punishment may seem harsh to us, but, when we look closely at Moses' actions, we see several mistakes. Most obviously, Moses disobeyed a direct command from God. God had commanded Moses to speak to the rock. Instead, Moses struck the rock with his staff. Earlier, when God had brought water from a rock, He instructed Moses to strike it with a staff (Ex 17). But God's instructions were different here. God wanted Moses to trust Him, especially after they had been in such close relationship for so many years. Moses didn't need to use force; he simply needed to obey God and know that God would be true to His promise.

Early in the exodus, Joshua was sent by Moses to fight against the Amalekites (Ex 17:8–15). Joshua defeated Amalek, and Moses wrote of the event and built an altar that he called “The Lord Is My Banner” (v 15).

When Moses sent 12 men from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land of Canaan, Joshua represented the tribe of Ephraim (Nm 13:8). At that time *Joshua* was called *Hoshea*, but Moses changed his name to *Joshua* (vv 8, 16). Joshua and Caleb were the only two spies to bring back an affirmative report concerning an Israelite invasion of the land (14:6–9). Consequently, of all the adult Israelite males to leave Egypt in the exodus, only these two crossed the Jordan River and entered the Promised Land (v 30).

When the Lord announced to Moses his impending death, Moses asked about his successor, and *the Lord appointed Joshua to that position* (Nm 27:12–23). After the death of Moses on Mt Nebo, Joshua’s leadership was confirmed (34:17), and *the Lord told Joshua to go over the Jordan and take the land* (Jos 1:1–2).

From the Transjordan (east side of the Jordan River), Joshua sent two men across the river to reconnoiter Jericho (ch 2). In Jericho they were concealed by *Rahab* and later safely made their way back to Joshua to report that the people of the land were fainthearted because of the Israelites (vv 23–24).

When Israel had crossed the river, *the Lord instructed Joshua to set up a circle of 12 stones at Gilgal to commemorate this passage* (Jos 4:1–7). *The Lord then commanded all of the males who had been born during the exodus to be circumcised* (5:2–9).

While camped at Gilgal, near Jericho, *Joshua was confronted by a man with a drawn sword*. When Joshua challenged the man, **he learned that it was the Lord**, who told him *to remove his shoes, for the ground was holy* (Jos 5:13–15). The Lord gave Joshua directions for the destruction of Jericho; these were followed explicitly and the city fell (ch 6). The attack on Ai ended in temporary defeat, until the matter of Achan’s sin was discovered and judged (7:10–26). Then Ai was taken and destroyed.

Joshua built an altar on Mt Ebal (Jos 8:30–32), and **the blessings and curses were read**, as commanded by God through Moses (Jos 8:33–35; cf. Dt 27–28).

Because the Israelites failed to ask direction from the Lord (Jos 9:14), Joshua was tricked into making a covenant of peace with the Hivites of Gibeon. Joshua then reduced them to doing menial tasks in Israel (vv 21–27).

The kings of the various Canaanite cities allied themselves against the Israelite threat (Jos 9:1–2) and *a league of five Amorite cities (Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon)* attacked Gibeon (10:1–5). The Gibeonites appealed to Joshua for help; he responded quickly against this Amorite confederation and *routed the Amorite forces*. It was on this occasion that Joshua commanded the sun and the moon to stand still so that Israel could have more time to defeat these adversaries (vv 12–14). This victory was followed by a series of successful attacks on enemy towns (vv 28–43).

A northern alliance headed by *Jabin, king of Hazor*, was the next opposition (Jos 11:1–5). The Lord assured Joshua of success, and the city of Hazor was taken and destroyed by fire (vv 6–15). Joshua 11:23 summarizes the conquest of the land, and chapter 12 enumerates the kings who were conquered.

Joshua was now old, and the Lord told him that much land remained to be possessed. These territories are listed, but the Lord directed Joshua to proceed with the division of the land among the nine and a half tribes (Jos 13:7; cf. 13:8–18:28). Joshua himself was given the city he asked for, *Timnath-serah*, in the hill country of Ephraim, which he rebuilt and settled (19:49–50).

The Lord told Joshua to appoint cities of refuge to which a person guilty of manslaughter could flee to escape the avenger of blood (Jos 20). Then the Levites came to Eleazar the priest and Joshua to request that they be given their cities, as the Lord had commanded through Moses (21:1–42).

Joshua's Final Days. *Joshua gave his final speech at Shechem, then went to his hometown, Timnath-serah, where he died.*

In his advanced years Joshua summoned all Israel and solemnly charged them to continue in faithfulness to the Lord (Jos 23). Finally, he called all Israel to Shechem, where he gave them his farewell message. He summed up the Lord's dealings with them from the time of Abraham and again challenged them to serve the Lord, putting before them the well-known choice and decision: "Choose today whom you will serve.... As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord" (24:15).

*Joshua died at the age of 110 years and was buried in the land of his inheritance at Timnath-serah (Jos 24:29–30; the parallel account in Jgs 2:8–9 reads "Timnath-heres," mg). Israel served the Lord during all the days of Joshua and the elders who outlived him (Jos 24:31; Jgs 2:7)."*²

Joshua, The Book

Tyndale Bible Dictionary

The following extract from Tyndale is long, but helpful.

“JOSHUA, BOOK OF First of the historical books in the English Bible and the first of the Former Prophets (including Judges, the books of Samuel, and the books of Kings) in the Hebrew Bible. It begins with the Lord's commission of Joshua (Jos 1:1–9) and concludes with the burial of Joshua, Eleazar, and the bones of Joseph (24:29–33). The purpose of the book is to show how Joshua continued in the footsteps of Moses, how the Lord gave the land to Israel, and how Israel might prosper in the land.

Author and Date.

According to the *Talmud*, Joshua wrote the book. This ancient tradition is possibly based on the brief statement that Joshua “recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God” (24:26, nlt). However, this applies only to the renewal of the covenant (ch 24). The issue of authorship is tied up with the dating of the book. Since the book has no unambiguous markers on date and authorship, neither critics nor conservative scholars have been able to come to any agreement on these issues. According to a conservative analysis of Joshua, the book was written between 1375 bc and 1045 bc (premonarchic). The argument is based on the references to the migration of Dan (19:47; cf. Jgs 18:27–31), to Jerusalem as a Jebusite city (Jos 15:8, 63; 18:16, 28), to Sidon rather than Tyre as the prominent Phoenician city (11:8; 13:4–6; 19:28), and also on the eyewitness style (5:1, 6—in the MT). But critical scholars have raised issues that they considered could best be resolved by positing a seventh-century bc or even an exilic date.

Problems of Interpretation

Several issues or events are recorded in Joshua that give contemporary critics interpretive difficulty. The tendency is to judge ancient cultures by contemporary western standards, and in a shoer memory of their own national histories.

Australian, Spoth African, American, both USA and Canadians, as recent as the 17th evil of enforced chattel slavery, have tended to forget their own *manifold destiny political and ethnic* cruelty in subduing the original inhabitants of their land. *Manifold destiny in our own cultural history*, or whatever excuse is preferred, *is as equally shocking as was the real manifold destiny of Israel conquering Canaan!*

Several wars, *civil* and *world*, have failed to purge ethnic cruelty, and self-centered *manifest destiny* excuses from the 21st century world!

² *Joshua the Man*, Tyndale Bible Dictionary, pp. 738–739, 2001.

A major problem is the failure of contemporary critiques to interpret Joshua and Old Testament events, including the Pentateuch and Prophets, *within their own cultural contexts* in which “pagan” people have no, or very little respect, for God’s creative order. The Old Testament, and continuing world history, are a record of human failure and moral standards established by God in the beginning to bring about kingdom peace.

Note Paul’s scathing rebuke of the cultural decay of his own generation, ca. 60 CE.

Rom 1:18-32, “*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth.* ¹⁹ *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.* ²⁰ *Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse;* ²¹ *for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened.* ²² *Claiming to be wise, they became fools,* ²³ *and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.*

²⁴ *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,* ²⁵ *because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.*

²⁶ *For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural,* ²⁷ *and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error.*

²⁸ *And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct.* ²⁹ *They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips,* ³⁰ *slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,* ³¹ *foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.* ³² *Though they know God’s decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them.”*

The divine sovereign election by God of a people who would serve mankind as a whole is the heart of all Scripture that must frame our personal standards and attitude toward God and the divine activity revealed in Scripture. As Paul explained so explicitly in Rom 1:18-32, the issue lies in human nature elevating itself above all other powers, to forget that there is a God who has been revealing himself throughout history, and following their own corrupt evil desires

It is into this narrative that one must insert the events of Joshua in order to appreciate what God, through Israel and Joshua, was doing.

A failure of faith in the divine, in God, creates a deeper morass,³ one without redemption, than the narrative of Joshua’s holy wars!

“**Holy War** The morality of the Conquest may be explained by the concept of holy war. The holy war motif would explain why Israel was to destroy the indigenous population (Dt 7:16; 20:16–18; Jos 6:21; 8:24–26; 10:10, 28–30, 35–42; 11:11). The justification may lie in the concept that Israel was God’s instrument of judgment on the Canaanite nations. This argument is related to the mention of the wickedness of the Canaanites (Gen 15:16; Dt 7:2–5, 25–26; 12:30–31; Jos 23:7; Jgs 2:11). However, the canonical narrative of the progression of the Conquest puts the responsibility on the Canaanites. They marched and fought against Israel (Nm 21:21–35; Jos 7:4–5; 8:5, 16–17; 9:1–2; 10:1–6; 11:1–5; 24:11). Therefore, it could be argued that in the process of war a sincere invitation to make peace was given to the kings (cf. Nm 21:21–22; Dt 20:10–11) but was refused. Instead, the kings took the initiative in battle.

³ *Morass*, from the French meaning *a messy swamp*, implying a decaying culture or world.

The responsibility for the destruction of the native population thus lay with the leadership. Yet all this was evidence of God’s working in human affairs, which the Bible simply states, “For it was the Lord himself who hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel, so that he might destroy them totally, exterminating them without mercy, as the Lord had commanded Moses” (Jos 11:20, niv). Even as Pharaoh, whose heart the Lord hardened, was responsible for the plagues in Egypt, so the Canaanite rulers were responsible for the extermination of their populations. *The biblical account of the Conquest affirms the mystery of human responsibility and divine sovereignty without explaining it.*

Nature of the Conquest Various explanations of the nature of the Conquest have been given. The traditional view of a blitzkrieg type of conquest, which resulted in a complete occupation of the whole land (cf. Jos 10:40; 11:1–3, 16–19), *does not fit within the whole picture of the book.* The book presents a realistic description of the areas that still had to be conquered (13:1–7) and of the military strength of the indigenous population (cf. 13:13; 15:63; 16:10; 17:12–18; 19:47). Moreover, Joshua promised that the Lord would continue to help Israel to occupy the land, as its population and needs developed (23:5). *The occupation of Canaan was in two stages: conquest and gradual occupation* (cf. Ex 23:29–30; Dt 7:22).

The Purpose of Joshua

The role of the final (canonical) form of the book is to present Joshua’s obedience to the law of Moses. Victory and defeat are illustrations of obedience and disobedience. Of course, there is tension in this because the descriptions of the Conquest are complete and yet incomplete. The tension is a dynamic device to show that the Conquest and enjoyment of the land depend wholly on obedience. The period of Joshua is viewed as a paradigm of obedient Israel. Thus, a holistic reading of the book presents an appeal to covenant loyalty directed to future generations.”⁴

Section Contents

The Conquest of Canaan. 1:1-12:24

Joshua commissioned, the army mobilized, the spies sent into Jericho, the Jordan crossed, twelve stones erected as a memorial. Israel is circumcised, the Passover celebrated, the unseen Captain, a divine figure – God, is present with Israel. Jericho captured. The fall of Ai. The monument erected on Mt Ebal. The deception of the Gibeonites. Victory over the alliance of five kings. The conquest over Southern and Northern Canaan. List of conquered kings.

The Partition of the Promised Land. 13:1-21:45

The command to divide the land. East Canaan given to Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh. West Canaan partitioned, Caleb’s portion, Judah’s portion, Ephraim’s and Manasseh’s portions. The erection of the tabernacle at Shiloh. The division of the remaining land among the tribes of Benjamin, Simeon, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan. Six cities of refuge, forty-eight cities apportioned to the Priests and Levites.

The Farewell Address of Joshua. 22:1-24:33

Joshua’s last words to the two and a half tribes of East Canaan. The altar at Jordan, the protest of the other tribes, the apology of the two and a half tribes for erecting the altar. Joshua’s last words to the tribes of West Canaan. A rehearsal of the benefits, the promised blessings, warnings, Joshua’s message to the twelve tribes. Joshua’s own covenant, “for me and my house, we will serve the Lord: 24:15. The

⁴ *Joshua, the Book*, Tyndale Bible Dictionary, pp. 739–741.

death and burial of Joshua. The burial of Joseph's bones (Joseph had died in Egypt but the Jews kept his remains at his request for later burial, Ex 13:19), the death and burial of Eleazar, the High Priest, the son of Aaron, the High Priest.