

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF

Joshua

What? Sixth book in the Old Testament, between Deuteronomy and Judges, Joshua is named for its leading man.

Who was Joshua? Son of Nun (1:1; 24:29) of the tribe of Ephraim; Moses' personal assistant and successor (Exodus 24:13; Deuteronomy 31:14, 23). Military hero of ancient Israel, Joshua once led twelve spies to search out the Promised Land (Numbers 13). Here, he leads the twelve tribes to conquer and settle that land.

When? After the death of Moses (1:1), perhaps about 1400 B.C.

Contents: The book tells how Israel entered, conquered, and settled the Promised Land. The drama includes

- crossing the Jordan, with preparations (chs. 1 — 5)
- battle of Jericho (ch. 6)
- battle of Ai (chs. 7, 8)
- treaty with Gibeon (ch. 9)
- campaign against kings of west and south (ch. 10)
- campaign against northern kings (ch. 11)
- summary of all campaigns (ch. 12)
- division of land among the tribes (chs. 13 — 22)
- Joshua's final speech; covenant renewal (chs. 23, 24)

Key word: Possess — about 20 times

Military strategy: Joshua commanded about 40,000 troops, using military intelligence, the ambush, and the night march (2:1ff; 4:13; 8; 8:13; 10:9). He dealt with Israel's enemies firmly, yet with integrity. He worshipped, read the law, encouraged his captains, disciplined his troops, humbled himself, and trusted in God (5:13-15; 6:6-9; 7:6, 16-26; 8:30-35; chs. 9 — 11; 10:25).

Joshua's enemies: Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Gergashites, Amorites, and Jebusites who occupied the land God promised to Israel (3:10; 24:11). Because these seven tribes were wholly given to idolatry and sexual perversion, God commanded Joshua to completely exterminate them, thus removing evil from the

land (6:21; 10:28-40; 11:11-14, 20, 21). This seems cruel, but it was the only way Israel could be free in their new land. (Later, Israel would suffer much because of their failure to complete God's instructions — Judges 1, 2.) God warns that unchecked sin can defile a land and vomit out its residents (Leviticus 18:24-30). Removal of sinful societies also marked God's judgment at the Flood; it will again when the wicked are destroyed in the lake of fire. Joshua's military campaigns were a type of God's final and complete victory over evil.

It's not the first mile . . .

Achan was a warrior in a leading tribe (7:1), but he disobeyed the Lord by taking Jericho's forbidden booty. As a sym-

bol of "sin in the camp," Achan was exposed before all the nation. He and his family lost their lives because of his evil choice (7:16-26).

. . . it's the last mile!

Rahab entered the drama as a harlot (2:1). When she heard about God and His people, she believed, hid the spies, and saved herself and her household (2:1ff; 6:17, 22-25). After a bad start, she repented and finished well. She will be rewarded with the faithful (Hebrews 11:31).

Remarkable miracles

- Jordan's river divided, like the Red Sea, for Israel to pass over (ch. 3).
- Jericho's walls collapsed after Israel marched around seven days (ch. 6).
- Hailstones and a delayed sunset won an important battle (ch. 10).

Settling the Promised Land

- Division of the land by lot among Israel's tribes was overseen by Joshua, Eleazer the high priest, and the head of each tribe (14:1, 2; 17:4; 21:1).
- Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh asked and received their parcels east of the Jordan (1:12-18; 13:8-32; 14:3; 18:7; ch. 22).
- Ephraim, half of Manasseh, and Judah — larger and more prominent tribes — received choice parcels (chs. 15-17, esp. 17:14-18).
- Survey of remaining land provided parcels for seven tribes: Benjamin, Simeon, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, Dan (18:1-10 — ch. 19).
- Levi received no separate land, but was assigned 48 cities with pastures among the tribes (13:14, 33; 14:3, 4; ch. 21).
- A few men (Caleb, Joshua, etc.) received personal estates (14:6-14; 15:13-19; 19:49-51).
- The tabernacle of Levitical worship was erected at Shiloh (18:1).
- Six cities of refuge were appointed for the accidental man-slayer (ch. 20).

Stones, stones

The land flowing with milk and honey also had plenty of rocks. Stones were piled to memorialize the tribes' entry into Canaan. One pile marked the Jordan riverbed where the priests crossed (4:9). The second marked the town of Gilgal where Israel first camped in the new land (4:20).

An altar of uncut stones was built between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim, near Shechem. On them a copy of Moses' law was written, and its blessings and curses were read in annual ceremony (8:30-35; Deuteronomy 27).

A heap of rocks was raised over the remains of Achan and his family, after he sinned by taking the banned items at Jericho (7:25, 26). Other piles indicated the ruins of Ai and its king (8:28, 29).

A later stone altar, erected by the two and one-half tribes returning east of the Jordan, was intended as a token of spiritual unity for the nation divided by a great river — but nearly sparked a civil war (ch. 22).

Typology

The Greek form of Joshua is Jesus; and he is, in one sense, a type of Christ. He led Israel in victory to possess the Promised Land, Canaan. The "rest" in Canaan did not exhaust the meaning of God's promise. Later writers tell of a better rest available for God's people (Psalm 95:7,8; Hebrews 4:8). We know it as the salvation we have in Christ.

In another sense, Joshua provides a historical image of the work of the Holy Spirit. He stands as successor to Moses,

Joshua in a sentence

With the help of God, Joshua, successor to Moses, led Israel across the Jordan River to conquer and possess the land of Canaan for settlement by the twelve tribes.

deliverer of ancient Israel, much as the Holy Spirit stands to Christ, the Deliverer of God's people today. Joshua continued Moses' work to its intended conclusion: Israel's possession of the holy land. Likewise, the Spirit builds on Christ's salvation work to its intended purpose: the believer's possession of holiness in the kingdom of grace.

In this sense, the book of Joshua may be seen as parallel to Acts. Joshua completes the Pentateuch in general (and Deuteronomy in particular) as the book of Acts logically follows and completes the preparation made in the four Gospels. The "Acts" of the Holy Spirit after Pentecost report how the early church "possessed the land" that had been promised by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Great words from God: "[A]rise, go over this Jordan. . . . as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. . . . This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. . . . Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (1:2, 5, 8, 9).

Good words from Joshua: "You have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations because of you, for the LORD your God is He who has fought for you. . . . Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left. . . . [T]ake diligent heed to yourselves, that you love the LORD your God. . . . [I]f it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. . . . But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (23:3, 6, 11; 24:15).

Spiritual warfare

Under Joshua's leadership, national Israel took the Promised Land by military victory over the Canaanite peoples. In like manner, the Holy Spirit leads God's Christian people to possess the promised kingdom of righteousness and peace through victory over the world, the flesh, and the Devil. Joshua's battles, illustrations of our spiritual warfare, teach us that

- although God gives us the land, we must still take possession of it (1:2-4, 11, 15).
- we must follow God's instructions in the struggle against evil (ch. 6).
- one defeat is not necessarily fatal or final, but can indicate the presence of sin (ch. 7).
- more lands and difficult strongholds remain to be conquered (13:1, 13; 15:63; 16:10; 17:12, 13, 18).
- God fights for us (5:13-15; 6:16; 10:10, 14; 11:20; 24:11-13).

The whole book shows that we should be severe against evil in our lives. Resist the Devil!

Grand finale

Joshua's final words take the form of a covenant renewal ceremony (24:25). At this milestone in the nation's history, Israel reviews their relationship with God (24:1-15); agrees to obey His terms (24:23, 24); and records the proceedings for future reference before a solemn witness (24:26a-b, 27). After leading this sacred ritual, Joshua dies at age 110 and is buried in his inheritance (24:29, 30).

Great legacy

Israel served the Lord all Joshua's days, and even beyond his death (24:31).