

## **Joshua**

### **Introduction**

**Joshua continues the theological history from the end of Deuteronomy. After the death of Moses, Joshua is summoned to get ready to cross the Jordan into the land (Josh. 1:1-2).**

**From Caleb's statement (Josh. 14:10) we can roughly figure the major conquest under Joshua to have taken about 7 years (cf. Davis, *Conq and Crisis*, 18, fn. 4; 45 years since the promise; the promise was 38 years before the crossing, Num. 14:24).**

**The book covers more than these seven years and it is more than seven years to the death of Joshua (Josh. 23:1, "a long time,"). Joshua died at 110 years old (Judg. 2:8). Depending on Joshua's age at the time of the spy incident, the book covers some 30-40 years.**

### **1A. Literary Analysis**

#### **1B. Outline**

**Preparation/Introduction, 1-5 (5:13-15 preparation)**

**Conquest, 6-12 (7 chapters of dramatic conquest)**

**Division, 13-22**

**Covenant renewal/Conclusion, 23-24**

#### **2B. Genre**

**There are two ways that the theological history is recorded. First, there is dramatic historical narrative through chapter 12. This accounting "revels in God's power exercised in behalf of the nation" giving "vivid details of battles, success and failure, victory and defeat" (IOT, 113). Then there is "static, administrative prose" followed by covenant renewal (IOT, 113).**

#### **3B. Contents (preparing for a theme statement)**

#### **1C. Josh. 1-5**

**The first five chapters prepare for the conquest in the commission of Joshua and the response of the tribes that will occupy east of the Jordan (1:16, whatever you command, we will do), the spies (2; positive; the Lord has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us, 2:24), crossing the Jordan (3-4, the Jordan stopped flowing from upstream, 3:16; the whole nation crossed, 4:1; 40,000 armed for battle, 4:13; waters of the Jordan returned, 4:18; amazing things, 3:5), causing the hearts of the kings in the land to fear (5:1), observing the rites of circumcision and Passover (5:2-12), and in Joshua's experience of a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword (5:13-15; this war begins with worship; the commander of the army is the Lord).**

**Note the attention on God, on His commission, word, command and encouragement as commander of the army of Israel. God called Joshua, exalted him in the eyes of the people, stopped the waters of the Jordan, continually spoke to Joshua, and appeared as commander of the army to encourage Joshua.**

**What is the basis of godly courage in the face of a wicked and warlike people including great height and strength (Josh. 1:1-9; 6-8 is based on 2-5)? A related question: is Joshua's obedience the basis of the victory or is the victory promise of God the basis of his obedience, courage and strength? [the victory-promise of God is the basis of his obedience, courage, and strength]**

**God is conquering over sin and its effects through Joshua and through Israel according to his promises which give us glimpses of his purposes from the beginning.**

**Thus, Israel is prepared for battle that is a spiritual warfare, a matter of obedience to God above all else (circumcision was covenantal and hardly a usual way to prepare for war leaving the army incapacitated for a period of healing, but the Lord had caused the hearts of the Canaanites to melt so they did not take offensive action).**

#### **2C. Josh. 6-12**

By contrasting the defeat of Jericho with the set back at Ai, we see the fact of a spiritual warfare as central (6:1-8:1).

The Achan incident contrasts with the Gibeonite deception (9). Yet the Gibeonite deception leads to further conquests when 5 kings attack Gibeon (10).

God fights for Israel.

Even the sun stood still to watch Israel conquer (10). God delivered the enemies into Israel's hands (10:8, 14, 42). The Lord hardened their hearts so they might be totally destroyed (11:20)! Then the land had rest from war (11:23) and the kings that were defeated are listed (12).

3C. Josh 13-22

Chapters 13-22 slows the narrative down from battle accounts to the distribution of the land. Joshua is advanced in years and large areas of land are still to be taken (13:1; 23:12,16). Areas are designated for the tribes of Israel, (13-19), to Joshua (19:49-50), for cities of refuge (20).

The land is to be divided as God instructed Moses!

4C. Josh. 23-24

Joshua's farewell is given in chapter 23 and covenant renewal in chapter 24.

After Joshua's death is recorded (24:29-30) a note is given concerning the obedience of the nation, "Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had not experienced everything the Lord had done for Israel" (24:31).

4B. Theme

In general, the theme is the conquest of the land as the gift of God according to his promise (1:2-4). God fulfills his covenant through obedience which is also fundamentally his gift as well.

There is no tension between total conquest (11:23; 21:43,44) and partial conquest (13:1; 23:1,12). Both are comfortably placed together. We have the successful taking control of the land and the subjugation of all opposition on one hand. On the other hand, there are many pockets throughout the land where Canaanites still abided and continual conquest was to go on in a gradual process characterized by obedience (do not be led astray by the gods of the survivors, 23:12).

God kept his word. Everywhere Joshua placed his feet became conquered territory. There was total victory while recognizing the fact of Ai and the fact of much detailed work yet to be done. All the major campaigns had been successful. Now what remained was numerous minor battles still to be fought in obedience to God subject to his approval and sanctioned by his judgment.

5B. The extermination of the Canaanites

How do we connect this extermination with love for our neighbor (one could turn this into love the neighbor and hate the enemy, Matt. 5:43)? How do we square the command to exterminate with the sixth commandment? Can we call for a holy war today?

How does extermination comport with justice, especially when there is total destruction? This question already came up in Exodus and numbers (the Lord went to war with Amalek, Ex. 17:16; some enemies were put under a vow of destruction, Num 21:2-3, the kingdom of Og had no survivors, Num 21:35, "utter destruction" included leaving no survivors, Num 24:19-20, and all the inhabitants of the land are to be driven out, Num 33:51, 55). However, there are cases where captives are taken when the Lord's vengeance is executed, Num 31:1-3. Thus, *we can define holy war as the calling of Israel by God to be the Lord's army to execute His vengeance in driving out all the inhabitants of the land He promised to their forefathers. It included putting people "under the ban" or devoting them all to destruction* (men and women, young and old, Josh. 6:21; 11:16-23; even Israelite cities, Deut 13:14-15). By direct command, the Lord was executing justice against a sinful people,

but are they more sinful than Israel? No, they are not (Deut. 9:4-5), but it is a matter of sin and *justice sovereignly executed* as indicated by Gen. 15:16 with the language of “executing the Lord’s vengeance in the context of election (Deut. 9.4-5) and reprobation (Josh. 11.20, “it was the Lord’s doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be devoted to destruction and should receive no mercy”).

If we look at the narrative in purely human terms, we may see only murderous aggression on the part of Israel against the Canaanites. If we view it in terms of distorted OT religion, we have the origin in principle of Islam, which began about 750 AD. After the coming of Christ, the following things apply: a) There is now no direct revelation from the Lord telling His people what to do and where to go (not since the foundation for the church was laid down by the apostles and prophets, Eph. 2.20. b) If the Lord actually tells His people to exterminate a people, then His people must obey, but that no longer applies because not only do we have His word only in the 66 books and no word there to do such today (on the authority and promise of Christ), but judgment is delayed until the harvest at the end of the age. c) Instead of the sword of steel, the coming of Christ brings gospel to the nations (with the power of the sword put into the hands of the state and taken from the hands of the church). This is a new wineskin form of OT laws and sanctions. The sanction of death was predominate in the OT in anticipation of the death of Christ.

What does Rahab show us as to how we as sinful find deliverance from the wrath of God (from being devoted to utter destruction)? (cf. 2:8-13; Heb.11:31; James 2:25).

## 2A. Message for us

The message for us in NT times can be summarized in the notion of conquest translated into accomplishment. By conquest in stages in history, God is accomplishing his purposes.

### 1B. God is at work in us

God is working in us to will and do of his good pleasure. He is accomplishing his purposes in his people today through obedience. We must obey and endure and we will by his grace. Our duty and his sure purposes converge.

What kind of condition is the necessity of obedience for success; that is, could the Israelites have totally failed by failing to obey God's commands? (cf. 7:1; 10-12; note God's discipline and self-revelation, God spoke defeated Israel at Ai, 7:1, God spoke to Joshua, God identified Achan, God commanded the successful assault on Ai; also compare Gen. 18:19; the covenant will be fulfilled through obedience to which God chooses Abraham).

Ultimately, it is certain that we will win the major campaign; we will win the war by the grace of God undergirding our faith and obedience through our Joshua whom God has exalted in our eyes (3:7; 4:14; Heb. 12:1-4).

When we are disobedient we will have set backs and failures of detail in the battles. We will sometimes be defeated and we will be chastened of our Father, sometimes very painfully.

Our faith will smolder and sputter to go out. But our Joshua, commissioned by the God of the covenant, will pour in the oil of the Spirit and our faith will be again inflamed as we continue our pilgrimage. So, look unto Joshua (translates the Hebrew, which in Greek is Jesus) the author and finisher of our faith!

### 2B. God is accomplishing his purposes in stages

Joshua only gave Israel, God's people, a temporary rest. Rest in the land was provisional. The land was a type of the city of God toward which Abraham moved in his pilgrimage.

Thus, the writer of Hebrews reasons that "if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day" (Heb. 4:8). That other day was the promise of rest expressed through David in Psalm 95:7-8.

Rest is still out in front of the people of God in the NT since God is pleased to work out his purposes for men and women, his image bearers, in history. He works out his purposes in stages, day by day, moving ever so deliberately forward toward consummate fulfillment.

Thus, we still have a Sabbath rest to keep (Heb. 4:9) in continuity with the promise and sign of the seventh day (Heb.4:4) that still looks ahead to the day when we will rest from all our work on earth.

For the time being, therefore, we are to "make every effort to enter that rest" (Heb. 4:11). Likewise Hebrews 4 tells us to "be careful" (1), "to hold firmly to the faith we profess" (14) and to "approach the throne of grace with confidence" (16).

3B. God is accomplishing his purposes through warnings

Many stern warnings are given in the book of Hebrews to those who profess faith (Heb. 4:14; 10:23, 26-31).

We must persevere (10:36) in faith (10:38). This is the warning to those who claim to be the NT people of God. If we do not we will perish!

And those who belong to Christ will persevere by his grace; they will hear his call to follow and they will obey (Heb. 10:39; 12:1-4; John 10:3,4).

The good shepherd that lays down his life for his sheep is the great priest over the house of God (Heb. 10:19-21) our mediator who secured eternal redemption by his own blood (Heb. 9:15, 12). He secured the accomplishment of God's covenant (Heb. 6:16-20).

So, in our spiritual battles in our personal histories on this earth on pilgrimage to the heavenly city, we are greatly encouraged (Heb. 6:18). Knowing we will succeed through our Joshua does not make us lax. Instead, it spurs us on in our work with a spring in our step in great assurance and hope that one day we will enter finally into eternal Sabbath rest with God.

### Discussion Qs

1. What is the genre and theme of Joshua?
2. What is the basis of godly courage in the face of a wicked and warlike people of great strength (Josh. 1:1-9)?
3. How does Joshua 1-5 prepare, encourage, and pave the way for the conquest?
4. What lesson do we learn from Joshua 11:20?
5. The account of Joshua's encounter with the man standing with a drawn sword teaches what about spiritual warfare?
7. Explain the point that there is no tension between total conquest and partial conquest in the book of Joshua.
8. What does Joshua teach us about our victory even though we are often disobedient and our faith sputters?