

Joshua

Scripture: Joshua

Code: MSB06

Title

This is the first of the 12 historical books, and it gained its name from the exploits of Joshua, the understudy whom Moses prayed for and commissioned as a leader in Israel (Num. 27:12–23). “Joshua” means “Jehovah saves,” or “the LORD is salvation,” and corresponds to the NT name “Jesus.” God delivered Israel in Joshua’s day when He was personally present as the saving Commander who fought on Israel’s behalf (5:14–6:2; 10:42; 23:3, 5; Acts 7:45).

Author and Date

Although the author is not named, the most probable candidate is Joshua, who was the key eyewitness to the events recorded (cf. 18:9; 24:26). An assistant whom Joshua groomed could have finished the book by attaching such comments as those concerning Joshua’s death (24:29–33). Some have even suggested that this section was written by the High-Priest Eleazar, or his son, Phinehas. Rahab was still living at the time Josh. 6:25 was penned. The book was completed before David’s reign (15:63; cf. 2 Sam. 5:5–9). The most likely writing period is ca. 1405–1385 B.C.

Joshua was born in Egyptian slavery, trained under Moses, and by God’s choice rose to his key position of leading Israel into Canaan. distinguishing features of his life include: 1) service (Ex. 17:10; 24:13; 33:11; Num. 11:28); 2) soldiering (Ex. 17:9–13); 3) scouting (Num. 13, 14); 4) supplication by Moses (Num. 27:15–17); 5) the sovereignty of God (Num 27:18ff.); 6) the Spirit’s presence (Num. 27:18; Deut. 34:9); 7) separation by Moses (Num. 27:18–23; Deut. 31:7, 8, 13–15); and 8) selflessness in wholly following the Lord (Num. 32:12).

Background and Setting

When Moses passed the baton of leadership on to Joshua before he died (Deut. 34), Israel was at the end of its 40 year wilderness wandering period ca. 1405 B.C. Joshua was approaching 90 years of age when he became Israel’s leader. He later died at the age of 110 (24:29), having led Israel to drive out most of the Canaanites and having divided the Land among the 12 tribes. Poised on the plains of Moab, E of the Jordan River and the Land which God had promised (Gen. 12:7; 15:18–21), the Israelites awaited God’s direction to conquer the Land. They faced peoples on the western side of the Jordan who had become so steeped in iniquity that God would cause the Land, so to speak, to spew out these inhabitants (Lev.18:24, 25). He would give Israel the Land by conquest, primarily to fulfill the covenant He had pledged to Abraham and his descendants, but also to pass just judgment on the sinful inhabitants (cf. Gen. 15:16). Long possession of different parts of the Land by various peoples had pre-dated even Abraham’s day (Gen. 10:15–19; 12:6; 13:7). Its inhabitants had continued on a moral decline in the worship of many gods up to Joshua’s time.

Historical and Theological Themes

A keynote feature is God's faithfulness to fulfill His promise of giving the Land to Abraham's descendants (Gen. 12:7; 15:18–21; 17:8). By His leading (cf. 5:14–6:2), they inhabited the territories E and W of the Jordan, and so the word "possess" appears nearly 20 times.

Related to this theme is Israel's failure to press their conquest to every part of the Land (13:1). Judges 1–2 later describes the tragic results from this sin. Key verses focus on: 1) God's promise of possession of the Land (1:3, 6); 2) meditation on God's law, which was strategic for His people (1:8); and 3) Israel's actual possession of the Land in part (11:23; 21:45; 22:4).

Specific allotment of distinct portions in the Land was Joshua's task, as recorded in chaps. 13–22. Levites were placed strategically in 48 towns so that God's spiritual services through them would be reasonably within reach of the Israelites, wherever they lived.

God wanted His people to possess the Land: 1) to keep His promise (Gen. 12:7); 2) to set the stage for later developments in His kingdom plan (cf. Gen. 17:8; 49:8–12), e.g., positioning Israel for events in the periods of the kings and prophets; 3) to punish peoples that were an affront to Him because of extreme sinfulness (Lev. 18:25); and 4) to be a testimony to other peoples (Josh. 2:9–11), as God's covenant heart reached out to all nations (Gen. 12:1–3).

Interpretive Challenges

Miracles always challenge readers either to believe that the God who created heaven and earth (Gen. 1:1) can do other mighty works, too, or to explain them away. As in Moses' day, miracles in this book were a part of God's purpose, such as: 1) His holding back the Jordan's waters (Josh. 3:7–17); 2) the fall of Jericho's walls (Josh. 6:1–27); 3) the hailstones (Josh. 10:1–11); and 4) the long day (Josh. 10:12–15).

Other challenges include: 1) How did God's blessing on the harlot Rahab, who responded to Him in faith, relate to her telling a lie (Josh. 2)? 2) Why were Achan's family members executed with him (Josh. 7)? 3) Why was Ai, with fewer men than Israel, hard to conquer (Josh. 7–8)? 4) What does God's "sending the hornet" before Israel mean (Josh. 24:12)? These questions will be addressed in the notes.

Outline

I. Entering the Promised Land (1:1–5:15)

II. Conquering the Promised Land (6:1–12:24)

A. The Central Campaign (6:1–8:35)

B. The Southern Campaign (9:1–10:43)

C. The Northern Campaign (11:1–15)

D. The Summary of Conquests (11:16–12:24)

III. Distributing Portions in the Promised Land (13:1–22:34)

A. Summary of Instructions (13:1–33)

B. West of the Jordan (14:1–19:51)

C. Cities of Refuge (20:1–9)

D. Cities of the Levites (21:1–45)

E. East of the Jordan (22:1–34)

IV. Retaining the Promised Land (23:1–24:28)

A. The First Speech by Joshua (23:1–16)

B. The Second Speech by Joshua (24:1–28)

V. Postscript (24:29–33)

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