

# The Book of Joshua

LESSON  
ONE

## AN INTRODUCTION TO JOSHUA



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# The Book of Joshua

## Lesson One

### An Introduction to Joshua

#### INTRODUCTION

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It's common for people around the world to delight in the grand events that took place when their nations were founded. But when later generations face challenges, loss and disappointment, it's often necessary to remind them of the significance of those events from long ago. In many ways, this common experience is reflected in the Old Testament book of Joshua. Grand events had taken place when the Israelites first entered their homeland in Canaan. But as later generations faced hardships, it became necessary for them to learn afresh how important those events were.

This is the first lesson in our series on *The Book of Joshua*, and we've entitled it, "An Introduction to Joshua." As we'll see, when we learn what the book of Joshua meant for ancient Israel, we'll be better equipped to see how much it has to offer us in our day as well.

Our introduction to the book of Joshua will divide into three parts. First, we'll explore its authorship and date. Second, we'll introduce an overview of its design and purpose. And third, we'll sketch several broad considerations we need to keep in mind as we make Christian applications of our book. Let's begin with the authorship and date of the book of Joshua.

#### AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

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The Holy Spirit inspired the book of Joshua so that it would give us true historical records. But we also have to remember that the Holy Spirit employed the perspectives and purposes of Scripture's human authors to shape their historical records. So, as with every other portion of the Bible, the more we know about the human author and his times, the better we'll understand the book of Joshua.

We'll briefly sketch three perspectives on the authorship and date of Joshua: first, traditional outlooks; second, modern critical outlooks; and, third, some basic evangelical outlooks that will guide us in this lesson. Let's turn first to ancient, traditional outlooks on the authorship and date of our book.

#### TRADITIONAL OUTLOOKS

The book of Joshua is anonymous. Neither the book itself, nor the rest of Scripture tells us who its final compiler or author was. The title, "The Book of Joshua," that appears in most of our modern Bibles, was added to the book long after it was

written. But the tendencies of traditional ancient Jewish and Christian positions on these matters are nicely summarized in the rabbinical perspectives expressed in the *Talmud*. In a series of questions and answers in the part of the *Talmud* known as *Tractate Baba Bathra 15*, we read:

**[You say that] Joshua wrote his book. But is it not written, “And Joshua son of Nun the servant of the Lord died”? — It was completed by Eleazar. But it is also written in it, “And Eleazar the son of Aaron died” — Phinehas finished it.**

As we see here, leading rabbis identified Joshua himself as the author of the vast majority of our book. But they also acknowledged that certain parts of Joshua had to have been written after Joshua died. They attributed the account of Joshua’s death in 24:29, to the high priest Eleazar. And they assigned the account of Eleazar’s death in 24:33, to Eleazar’s son, Phinehas. From this traditional perspective, the book of Joshua came to be written very early, soon after the events of the book.

In reality, there is little to no evidence to support the specific claims of the *Talmud*. But we should not entirely dismiss the possibility that Joshua, Eleazar and Phinehas contributed to this book of the Bible. As early as Exodus 17:14, we learn that Joshua was involved in the preservation of Israel’s early historical records. Also, Joshua supervised the writing of God’s law for ceremonial use in passages like Joshua 8:32 and 24:26. And along these same lines, priests and Levites like Eleazar and his son Phinehas had important roles in handling and teaching the Scriptures.

In a few moments, we’ll note that the author of Joshua relied on a variety of written sources as he composed his book. And it’s possible that Joshua, Eleazar, Phinehas and others like them, at the very least, indirectly contributed to these sources.

**The book of Joshua gives us some clues as to its writing. In chapter 18 it tells of seven tribes that had not received their allotment, and so they talked with Joshua about this and he commissioned men from those tribes to go into the land and to write a report about what the land looked like and they came back with that report. It seems to me that, probably, that served as the description that’s found in chapters 18–20, when they’re talking about these tribes were allotted their land, it describes the cities that they took and the boundaries of the land. And so, that portion of that three chapters is probably an early writing that the men who sent out to reconnoiter the land came back with that description... Chapter 24 tells us that Joshua wrote in the book of the law, and probably that included at least the covenant that he was making with the children of Israel at that time. That this was probably the same book of the law that Moses had written in is suggested because Joshua will set it up before the Lord — he writes it; he puts it before the Lord — in the same way that the material of Moses was placed before the Lord, apparently in the tabernacle as a sacred deposit. And so, this portion of Joshua is also probably explicitly mentioned in the book of Joshua. If it’s true that we have**

**the description of the land, and we have the account of the covenant that's found at the end of Joshua, then it's probably true that the other accounts having to do with the battles, that contained so much detail, are probably also written very early and by Joshua, for all intents and purposes.**

— Dr. Chip McDaniel

With these traditional outlooks on the authorship and date of Joshua in mind, let's consider modern critical outlooks — points of view commonly held by modern scholars who reject the full authority of Scripture.

### CRITICAL OUTLOOKS

Most recent critical scholars on Joshua have been deeply influenced by Martin Noth's work, *The Deuteronomistic History*, written in 1943. In brief, Noth's view was that the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings were written during the Babylonian exile by someone usually deemed, "the Deuteronomist" And from this perspective, the entire Deuteronomistic history, including the book of Deuteronomy, was composed from a variety of earlier written sources during the Babylonian exile. The main purpose of these books was to demonstrate that Israel deserved the judgment of defeat and exile that had befallen the northern and southern kingdoms.

Throughout the decades, the majority of critical interpreters have affirmed many of Noth's central perspectives, especially dating the authorship of the book sometime during the Babylonian exile. Still, many critical scholars have rightly argued that Noth failed to identify the unique theological outlooks of the individual books of this portion of the Old Testament. And they've argued that Noth overlooked the positive, hopeful outlooks that also appear in these books.

Having looked at traditional and critical outlooks on the authorship and date of our book, let's consider some modern evangelical outlooks — perspectives held by scholars who affirm the full authority of Scripture. These perspectives will guide our approach to the book of Joshua throughout these lessons.

### EVANGELICAL OUTLOOKS

As we've already noted, the book of Joshua is anonymous. And as a result, evangelicals have held to a number of different outlooks on its authorship and date. Still, it will be helpful to make two observations. First, we'll look at what we may call the compositional development of the book. And second, we'll explore the range of possible dates for its completion. Consider first the compositional development of Joshua.

## Development

When we speak of our book's development, we have in mind that, like many other Old Testament authors, the author of Joshua didn't write his history *de novo*, or entirely from scratch. Rather, he compiled a variety of written sources as he formed his book. As we just saw, both the *Talmud* and critical interpreters maintain that our book reflects some kind of compositional development. And, by and large, evangelicals also acknowledge our author's use of sources.

We know for certain that this is true to some degree because, in 10:13, our author quoted directly from what he called, *the Book* — or scroll — *of Jashar*. We don't know much about this book, but clearly the author and his original audience did. Beyond this, as we'll see throughout this series, time and again our author incorporated portions of the Pentateuch as well as extra-biblical texts of various sorts. We can't reconstruct these unidentified sources without straying into a lot of speculation. But knowing that our author used earlier sources, like *the Book of Jashar*, helps us understand why his book feels repetitious and disjointed at times.

This use of earlier sources also helps us avoid a common mistake when identifying the date of our book's final form. On fifteen occasions, the book of Joshua says that this or that circumstance was true “to this day.” Naturally, it's easy to think that the phrase “to this day” refers to the time of the author. But, as is clearly the case in passages like 1 Kings 8:8, sometimes the phrase “to this day” may actually refer to the days of earlier sources.

Although evangelicals generally agree that there was some kind of compositional development of the book of Joshua, we're still left asking, when did this book reach its completion? When was it brought together as we have it now in the Bible?

## Completion

As with many Old Testament books, we can't identify precisely when our author brought the book of Joshua to its final form. The evidence only allows us to identify a range of possibilities for the earliest and latest likely dates. But, as we'll see in these lessons, when we keep this full range of possibilities in mind, we gain numerous insights into how our author shaped his book to impact his original audience.

We'll look at this range of time for the completion of the book of Joshua in two steps. First, we'll consider the latest possible date of completion. And second, we'll examine the earliest possible date. Let's start with the latest possible time when Joshua could have been written.

One of the best ways to determine the latest possible date of Joshua's final composition is to look outside of the book itself. There's good evidence that our author consciously contributed to what many scholars today call Israel's Primary History — the history that stretches from Genesis through Kings, excluding Ruth. This perspective is important because these books create a timeline, one after the other, like interlocking links.

Think about it this way: The Pentateuch comes from the days of Moses and comprises the first set of five links in this historical “chain.” Genesis begins with creation and ends with Joseph and his brothers in Egypt. Exodus assumes the existence of Genesis because it picks up the chronology with the death of Joseph and ends with Moses and Israel at Mount Sinai. Leviticus takes us further by reporting events that took place at Mount Sinai. Numbers adds a record of the travels of the Israelites from Mount Sinai to the plains of Moab. And Deuteronomy completes the Pentateuch with Moses’ speeches on the plains of Moab and with Moses’ death.

In a similar way, the book of Joshua is the first link of the subsequent Deuteronomistic portion of the Primary History — the portion that depended heavily on the theological outlooks of the book of Deuteronomy. The author of Joshua began with the death of Moses and continued through Joshua’s death. Judges picks up the history of Israel where the book of Joshua ends. Samuel begins with the rise of Samuel as the last judge of Israel and ends with David’s reign. And Kings forms the last stage of the Primary History by beginning with the death of David and ending with the Babylonian exile. In this sense, the book of Kings flows out of *all* the earlier books of the Deuteronomistic history. And this fact tells us something crucial about the latest likely date for the completion of Joshua: It had to have been completed before the book of Kings was written.

This observation is helpful because we know a lot about when the book of Kings was written. The last event reported in Kings appears in 2 Kings 25:27-30. Here we learn that David’s royal descendent, Jehoiachin, was released from prison in Babylon in the year 561 B.C. For this reason, we can be certain that Kings was not completed before this date. And more than this, the book of Kings stops short of reporting Israel’s all-important release from exile in 539 B.C. It’s unimaginable that the writer of Kings wouldn’t have mentioned Israel’s deliverance from exile if it had occurred by the time he wrote Kings. So, in keeping with the order of Israel’s Primary History, the very latest the book of Joshua could have been completed was during the period of the Babylonian exile.

With this latest possible date in mind, we should look in the other direction. What was the earliest possible date for Joshua’s completion? It isn’t difficult to see that the earliest the book of Joshua could have reached its final form was during the period of the judges, a generation or so after the death of Joshua. Consider what our author wrote near the end of his book in 24:31:

**Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had known all the work that the Lord did for Israel (Joshua 24:31).**

Notice that this passage refers to “the elders who outlived Joshua.” And along these lines, we also read that, “Israel served the Lord” throughout the lifetimes of those who “had known all the work that the Lord did for Israel.” This positive evaluation of Israel’s spiritual condition implies something about our author. He must have been aware that the next generation after Joshua’s death did not continue to serve God faithfully — a fact highlighted in the book of Judges. So, this verse indicates that the earliest possible date for the completion of our book was the period of Israel’s judges.



Other passages in Joshua also reference events that took place during the period of the judges. For example, Joshua 19:47 mentions the migration of the Danites to a new territory in the North. This event took place in the period of the judges, according to Judges 18:27-29. So, it's fair to say that this is the earliest possible date for the book's completion.

Now, we also should mention that many interpreters have argued for a date during the period of the monarchy. For a number of reasons, they've concluded that this is actually the earliest possible date of final composition. And we cannot rule out this possibility. The primary evidence for this outlook appears in Joshua 11:21, where we read these words:

**Joshua came at that time and cut off the Anakim ... from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel (Joshua 11:21).**

As we see here, this verse distinguishes "the hill country of Judah," or the southern kingdom, from "the hill country of Israel," or the northern kingdom.

This distinction between Judah and Israel has suggested to some that our book could not have been written before the kingdom of Israel was divided in approximately 930 B.C. But having said this, it's important to note that the Septuagint — the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament — does not make this distinction. And scholars disagree over whether the Hebrew or Greek version represents the better reading. So, while it's *possible* that Joshua 11:21 acknowledges the division of the kingdom, it isn't *certain*.

If we bring all of this evidence together, the very earliest possible date for Joshua's completion was sometime during the period of the judges. But a later date during the period of the monarchy is also possible. And even a date as late as the period of Babylonian exile isn't out of the question. As we'll see in a moment, recognizing this full range of possibilities helps us grasp more fully the kinds of challenges the book of Joshua was designed to address.

Keeping in mind what we've learned about the authorship and date of the book of Joshua, we should now turn to a second introductory consideration: the book's design and purpose. How did our author design his record of the days of Joshua? And why did he design it in this way?

## DESIGN AND PURPOSE

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Whenever we study a book of biblical history like Joshua, it's always important to remember that the same historical events can be told in many ways without introducing errors. Every biblical book that reports historical events organizes the history it reports in order to accomplish particular purposes and to emphasize certain perspectives for its original audience.

We'll look into these matters in much more detail in later lessons, but at this point we'll sketch the design and purpose of Joshua in two steps. First, we'll introduce its overarching content and structure, the large-scale arrangement of the book. And second, we'll comment on its original meaning, the impact our author hoped to have on his original audience. Consider first the content and structure of Joshua.

## CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

The book of Joshua consists of twenty-four chapters that contain many different types of literature. We find narratives, reports, speeches, as well as lists of people and places that probably came from a variety of sources. Because of this, interpreters have analyzed the structural *details* of Joshua in different ways. But it's not difficult to see how its structure and content work together on a large scale.

**Old Testament scholars have different ways of designating or identifying genre within various books in the Bible, but in general terms, the book of Joshua has three main types of literature within it. It has what we would call narratives or stories, those sorts of things that we would normally understand like the story of the battle of Jericho, those kinds of things. It also has long lists, geographical lists, of places that various tribes inherited that were given to them by God and would list one place after another, after another, after another. And then it also has sections where there is speech, or speeches that are given by a particular person to another group of people. And you can see if you just think about it in those three big categories that those correlate roughly to the first major division and the second major division and a third major division of the book. The first is primarily narrative, the second is primarily geographical lists, and the third is primarily speeches. But the problem comes up in this way, and that is that within those major or umbrella genre designations you also have the other two always sort of seeping in... And so, as we deal with these various sections and these various genres in the book of Joshua, it's very important to keep them in mind and to be able to spot them as you go along. One of the greatest points of confusion that interpreters have, especially new interpreters or new students of the Old Testament, is that they will not recognize these various genres and won't treat them in ways that they need to be treated. And as we approach the book of Joshua, as anyone approaches the book of Joshua, if you don't focus on those various genres and how they're mixed together in different parts of the book, then it will lead to a great deal of confusion.**

— Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

In brief, Joshua has three main divisions. Each division begins with a statement indicating a significant shift in time. The first division, in chapters 1–12, focuses on Israel’s victorious conquest of Canaan — how Joshua led Israel to a decisive victory over the Canaanites. This division begins in 1:1 with the temporal notice that God commissioned Joshua, “After the death of Moses.”

### **Victorious Conquest (1–12)**

These twelve chapters report a number of events that took place during Joshua’s conquest of the land of Canaan. They begin with Israel’s crossing of the Jordan and initial victories at Jericho and Ai. And these victories are followed by a covenant renewal ceremony in the vicinity of Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. The narrative then moves to Joshua’s major campaign against an alliance in the southern regions of the Promised Land. And this record is followed by Joshua’s campaign against an alliance in the northern regions.

### **Tribal Inheritances (13–22)**

The second division of our book, in chapters 13–22, deals with Israel’s tribal inheritances — how the national unity of Israel was maintained as particular inheritances were allotted to the tribes of Israel. This division begins in 13:1 with the temporal statement, “Now Joshua was old and advanced in years.”

This second major division of Joshua first established the extent of territories that God granted to Israel, both in Transjordan — the lands to the east of the Jordan River — and in Cisjordan — the lands to the west of the Jordan River. It goes on to explain in some detail the specific allotments of lands to the tribes who received permission to settle in Transjordan. And it also spells out how God granted large territories west of the Jordan to Judah, Ephraim and Manasseh, as well as lesser territories to the other tribes of Israel. And when conflict arose between the tribes of Cisjordan and Transjordan, we learn how they maintained their national unity as the people of God.

### **Covenant Loyalty (23–24)**

The third major division, in chapters 23, 24, closes our book by giving attention to Israel’s covenant loyalty — how Israel’s loyalty and disloyalty to the terms of God’s covenant would shape their future. It begins in 23:1 with another statement that alerts us to the passage of time. We read, “A long time afterward, when, Joshua was old and well advanced in years.” And this temporal notice is reinforced in verse 14 with Joshua’s words, “I am about to go the way of all the earth.”

These last two chapters of our book focus on two assemblies that Joshua held near the time of his death. The first of these assemblies probably took place in Shiloh, a holy site that played an important role in Joshua’s day and later in the period of the judges.

And it closes with a final assembly at Shechem, the place where Abraham built his first altar in the land of Canaan. All of Israel gathered at these assemblies, and Joshua warned them against flagrant violations of God's covenant. Then the main body of our book closes with Joshua leading the people of Israel in renewing their commitment to be loyal to God alone. They vowed to reject the gods of all other nations and serve the God of their fathers according to the terms of his covenant with them. Following this covenant renewal, the book closes with an afterword that includes Joshua's death and several subsequent events.

We've explored the design and purpose of Joshua by considering the book's content and structure. Now we're in a position to ask how we should summarize the original meaning of Joshua. What was our author's purpose for writing his book?

### ORIGINAL MEANING

In many ways, it's fair to say the author of Joshua wrote with purposes that every biblical author shared. He designed his book to honor God. And he sought to further God's kingdom by applying the principles of God's covenants to the concepts, behaviors and emotions of his original audience. But as we study the book of Joshua, we can also identify the special emphases that our author had for his audience as he wrote his book.

There are many ways to summarize the original meaning of Joshua, but for our purposes, we'll express it along these lines:

**The book of Joshua was written about Israel's victorious conquest, tribal inheritances and covenant loyalty in Joshua's day to address similar challenges facing later generations.**

As we can see, this summary refers to the three main divisions of the book of Joshua: victorious conquest, tribal inheritances and covenant loyalty. But why did our author focus on these matters? As our summary suggests, first, he sought to remind his audience about events in Joshua's day. And second, he wrote to address later generations and the similar challenges they faced. Let's look at both of these purposes, starting with why our author wrote *about* Joshua's day.

Everyone familiar with the book of Joshua knows that it deals most explicitly with events that took place when Joshua led Israel. These include: Israel's victorious conquest of Canaan, Joshua's division of Israel's tribal inheritances and Israel's covenant loyalty to God. So, it's fair to say that one of our author's central purposes was to inform the original audience of what had happened in "that world" — the world of Joshua's time. Many Old Testament passages stress that the Israelites often lost their way because they forgot what God had done for them in the past. Our author hinted that this was a problem for his original audience when, in 24:31, he distinguished himself and his audience from those who "had known all the work that the Lord did for Israel."

The original audience of our book needed to be reminded of what had happened in the days of Joshua, whether they lived in the period of the judges, during the monarchy, or during the Babylonian exile. So, on a basic level, we may say that the

author of Joshua wrote to give his original audience a true record about what had been accomplished in Joshua's day.

In the second place, as our summary suggests, the book of Joshua was also written to address the challenges of later generations. Our author stood, as it were, between two worlds: "that world" — the world of Israel in Joshua's day — and "their world" — the world of the original audience. For this reason, our author didn't simply write a record that was true to historical facts. He also wrote about Israel's victorious conquest, the distribution of tribal inheritances and the call to covenant loyalty to provide meaningful points of contact or connections between "that world" and "their world." Like other biblical authors, he frequently pointed out historical backgrounds that explained the origins of his audience's current privileges and responsibilities. He also presented models for them to emulate or reject. And on a few occasions, he wrote accounts of Joshua's times as foreshadows of his original audience's experiences.

These kinds of connections reveal something about our author that we need to keep in view. On the one side, he wanted his audience to remember what had happened in Joshua's day. But on the other side, he didn't want them to return to doing things precisely as Israel had done in Joshua's day. His original audience lived in a different time. And they needed to apply his historical record to their lives in ways that were appropriate for their own day.

**I believe that the original audience of the book of Joshua were greatly impacted by its message... All of the promises that God made, all of them were fulfilled to Israel concerning their coming into the Promised Land. Not one of them failed. And I think this is, at the core, to teach the people, God is faithful; God has been faithful and will remain faithful. And this is especially important in their moving into the time of the judges, because in the time of the judges we see them described as a people who are doing what's right in their own eyes, but what they've been called to is faithfulness to Yahweh. And so, this is a message to them that they see in the life of Joshua and those who were faithful along with Joshua, in light of where they are now, where this generation is not truly following in the footsteps of Joshua. And it is a call to them to repent, really, and come back to who they were called to be.**

— Dr. T. J. Betts

Now at times, modern interpreters have difficulty grasping how the original audience was meant to apply this historical record to their lives. After all, our author didn't spell out these matters in his book. But we need to remember some viewpoints that our author and his audience would have learned from the Scriptures available in their day — what we know as the Pentateuch. With these perspectives in mind, the implications of our author's record of "that world" for "their world" are not as difficult to discern as it may first appear.

## Victorious Conquest

Consider how the Pentateuch set the stage for understanding the implications of Israel's victorious conquest for the original audience. This division of our book gave a record of Joshua's great victories. But three basic outlooks on warfare, derived from the Pentateuch, helped them see how to apply this part of Joshua.

***Primeval conflict.*** In the first place, both our author and his original audience knew that they were engaged in a war that was rooted in the primeval conflict between God and Satan. Genesis 3:15 indicates that throughout human history, after the fall into sin, God and Satan have been in conflict. This invisible conflict is visible on earth in the struggle between the seed, or descendants, of the serpent — people who serve satanic powers — and the seed, or descendants, of the woman — people who serve God. This is why the book of Joshua doesn't reduce Israel's conflict to just a physical war. Rather, in Joshua 5:14, our author referred to the angelic "commander of the army of the Lord." This passage indicates that Joshua and the army of Israel were participating in a battle involving God and his angelic army. And, as passages like Joshua 23:16 indicate, our author also recognized that the Canaanite's satanic gods stood alongside the Canaanites in opposition to the people of Israel. Joshua's original audience had much to learn from Israel's conquest because, just like the Israelites in Joshua's day, they knew they were engaged in this ongoing conflict between God and Satan and those who served them.

***Israel's special conflict.*** In the second place, the Pentateuch also made it evident that Joshua's conquest was Israel's special conflict. While the original audience could learn a great deal from Israel's conquest, they, and the generations to come, were not to imitate it in every detail. The Pentateuch made it clear that Joshua's day was extraordinary.

In Genesis 15:13-16, God told Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved in Egypt for a time because "the iniquity of the Amorites" — another name for Canaanites — "[was] not yet complete." But by the time of Joshua's conquest, Canaanite sin had grown so offensive that God called for their total destruction, much like he had called for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Abraham.

This is why our author drew from the vocabulary of the Pentateuch and described Canaan's destruction using the Hebrew verb *charam* (חָרַם) and the noun *cherem* (חֵרֶם). As Joshua 6:17, 19 and 21 illustrate, in the context of Joshua's conquest, these terms didn't mean simply "to destroy." Rather, they meant "to devote wholly to the Lord" or "to destroy in devotion to the Lord." So, when the Israelites made war in Canaan, it was an acknowledgment of God's just judgment against flagrant Canaanite sin. And they destroyed and dedicated everything they conquered as an act of honoring God in worship.

We know that this command for utter destruction and devotion to the Lord in Joshua's day was extraordinary for a number of reasons. For one, in Deuteronomy 20:10-20, Moses directed total destruction for the Canaanites, but he commanded Israel to offer peace treaties to peoples outside the land of Canaan. Joshua himself acknowledged this distinction in Joshua 9 when he made a treaty with the Gibeonites, believing they had come from outside of Canaan.

In addition to this, the extraordinary character of Joshua's conquest becomes evident when we recall how the ongoing conflict between God and Satan took different forms, both before and after Joshua. To mention just a few examples, *before* Joshua, in Genesis 11:1-9, God and his heavenly army went to war against rebellious human beings at the Tower of Babel. But they did this without a human army and simply scattered the people. In Genesis 14:1-24, Abraham fought with God's help, but God didn't order the total destruction of Abraham's enemies. In Exodus 12:12, we learn that God went to war against the Egyptians and their gods during the plagues on Egypt. But Israel was passive, and God didn't kill *every* Egyptian. In Exodus 14, at the Red Sea, Israel followed God obediently in battle formation, but it was God who destroyed Egypt's army.

Similar variety also appears *after* the days of Joshua. As the book of Samuel explains, David fought many of Israel's enemies with God's supernatural help. But God didn't devote *all* of his enemies to utter destruction. The book of Kings indicates that the same was true of many generations of David's royal descendants. And Israel's prophets predicted that the end of Israel's exile would unfold in connection with war through unrivaled, miraculous divine intervention.

As we can see, God's ongoing conflict with evil unfolded in a variety of ways in the Pentateuch and throughout the Old Testament. This alerts us to the fact that Joshua's conquest wasn't the norm for all battles. Of course, the original audience could learn many lessons about warfare in their day from Joshua. But the conquest itself was a time of extraordinary judgment. Unlike many other battles, God determined at that time that the Canaanites — with rare exceptions like Rahab — fully deserved utter destruction.

**The sin of the Canaanites gradually grew over time to be particularly heinous. In the book of Genesis there is an allusion, Genesis 15, I believe, to the sin of the Amorites reaching its full measure. It's not until then that God's people will take possession of the land. So, there is this notion in the Scriptures that God is watching the Canaanite nation as it declines and understands that when their decline reaches a certain point that his justice will be poured out. The instrument of his justice is the nation of Israel, but not because the Israelite nation had great moral rectitude or anything of that sort. They're a very small nation. They're given to great sin, as we've seen even in the generation prior to Joshua coming into that, and even in their conquest there is sin. But the fact of the matter is God, in his grace, has called that nation to himself and is using that nation to exterminate and remove another nation that, if allowed to live there, is going to corrupt them. And that's another reason that God allowed the Israelite nation to go into Canaan, and they were to destroy everyone living there. God didn't want his people to be corrupted by the religious practices, their idolatry, the sin of the people living there, and he didn't want his nation to become patterned after the nations around them. He wanted them to follow him, with him as their king. And so, the Israelite nation went in and, of course, did not complete that task entrusted to them. And so, even within the book of Joshua, we see rumblings of it, what we see in fuller expression in the book**

after — the book of Judges — where the Israelite nation is increasingly corrupt and becomes more and more involved in a spiral of sin and decline, less characteristic of those that are in covenant relationship with God and more like the nations around them, all something that God sought to avoid by commanding the Israelites to go in and remove those living there.

— Rev. Kevin Labby

*Future victory of Israel's king.* In the third place, our author also knew from the Pentateuch that Joshua's conquest was but one step toward the future victory of Israel's king — the anticipated king who would reign over the whole world forever. Early on, the patriarch Jacob announced, in Genesis 49:10, that the royal family of Judah would receive "the obedience of the peoples." In the period of the judges, this hope in Judah's royal line was acknowledged in the leading role given to the tribe of Judah in Judges 1:1, 2. During the monarchy, the fulfillment of this expectation was identified specifically with the house of David in passages like Psalm 72. And in many passages, Israel's prophets predicted that the exile would end with the victory of David's great son over all nations.

So, like the Israelites in Joshua's day, the original audience knew they were part of something much greater than themselves. And for this reason, they were never simply to go back to what Joshua did. They had to apply what happened in the conquest of Canaan to their own day as God continued to move history toward the future worldwide victory of Israel's king.

## Tribal Inheritances

Our author expected his audience to have similar theological outlooks on the second division of his book concerning Israel's tribal inheritances.

*Primeval human dominion.* In the first place, he understood from the books of Moses that Israel's possession of Canaan was rooted in God's primeval call for human dominion over the earth. God had ordained from primeval times that the earth would be turned into his kingdom as his faithful images filled and subdued it. This call was first reported in Genesis 1:26-30, and later confirmed in Genesis 9:1-3. So, the record of Israel's tribal inheritances in the book of Joshua was clearly relevant for the original audience. Like the Israelites of Joshua's day, the original audience was also called to participate in God's commission to humanity to have dominion over the earth.

*Israel's special inheritance.* In the second place, our author rightly understood from the Pentateuch that God had established Israel's special inheritance. And the distribution of lands to Israel in Joshua's day represented the initial fulfillment of this inheritance. For instance, in Genesis 15:18-21, God promised Abraham an inheritance for his descendants that extended from the border of Egypt to the river Euphrates. So, drawing from the



vocabulary of the Pentateuch, the book of Joshua frequently refers to Israel's possession of their land with the Hebrew verb *nachal* (נָחַל) — meaning “to inherit” — and the noun *nachalah* (נַחְלָה)— meaning “inheritance.” This terminology indicates that Israel's land was an enduring possession from God.

For this reason, the original audience had much to learn from what Joshua had done in distributing their tribal inheritances. In the period of the judges, disharmony among the tribes of Israel and troubles from other peoples disrupted Joshua's successes. During the monarchy, Israel's kings expanded Israel's lands, but they also experienced setbacks and losses. And of course, during the Babylonian exile, only a small remnant of God's people remained in the land. And they remained there only under the tyranny of other nations. So, Joshua's distribution of Israel's tribal inheritances offered the original audience great insight as they sought to live in service to God in their own day.

***Future inheritance of Israel's king.*** In the third place, our author also knew that Israel's inheritance of Canaan was but one step toward the future inheritance of Israel's king. At the appointed time, Israel's great and righteous king would possess every land and nation as he fulfilled humanity's original call to have dominion over the entire earth. As we've mentioned, Genesis 49:10 declares that one day a royal son of Judah will reign until he receives “the obedience of the peoples.” In addition, in Genesis 17:4, God promised Abraham, “You shall be the father of a multitude of nations.” This is why in Psalm 2:8, God said specifically to the house of David, “I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.” Israel's prophets announced many times that the land of David's great son would extend from one end of the earth to the other. And Paul summarized these Old Testament outlooks in Romans 4:13 when he wrote, “The promise to Abraham and his offspring [was] that he would be heir of the world.” The implications for our author's original audience were clear. They were to apply what they read in the book of Joshua to the ways God was leading his people in their times toward the goal of this worldwide inheritance.

**We see in Romans 4 that the apostle Paul interprets the promise of inheritance for Abraham and his offspring to include the whole world. And that may surprise us at first. We think of the Promised Land as only a strip of real estate along the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea. But this is really of a piece of the way Paul understands the Abrahamic covenant to be global, to be worldwide. So often he will talk about the seed, the children of Abraham, including not just his biological descendants, but really those who follow in the footsteps of Abraham, that is, the footsteps of faith, who trust in the promises of God. In fact, Paul emphasizes that not only Jew but also Gentile who believe in Christ are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to God's promise — end of Galatians 3. So when Paul says in Romans 4 that the promises that Abraham's children, by faith, will inherit the whole world, he's really just extending that same understanding.**

— Dr. Dennis E. Johnson

## Covenant Loyalty

Just as with the first and second divisions of our book, the author of Joshua expected his original audience to keep certain theological outlooks from the Pentateuch in view as they applied the third division — Israel’s call to covenant loyalty.

***Primeval human loyalty.*** In the first place, our author understood from the Pentateuch that covenant loyalty was rooted in the primeval requirement of human loyalty to God. Simply being images of God binds us to God by covenant, and this bond requires loyal service to him. God’s covenant with all of humanity in Adam required obedience, as indicated in Genesis 1–3 and Hosea 6:7. And God’s covenant in Noah, in Genesis 6, 9, revealed that all human beings are required to serve God by covenant. Because this is true of all people in all times, the original audience could learn much from Joshua’s call for covenant loyalty in his day. They, like all other human beings, were obligated to God’s loyal service.

***Israel’s special covenant loyalty.*** In the second place, the original audience also had to be aware of Israel’s special covenant loyalty. Our author was careful to note that, in the time of the conquest, Joshua exhorted the people to remain faithful to God’s covenant. And the people vowed to do so.

The original audience would have known of God’s covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17. Here God required circumcision as a commitment to being blameless before him. And the covenant God made in Moses — in Exodus 19–24, and renewed in the book of Deuteronomy — made it clear that Israel was to obey the law of Moses. Now, in the third division of our book, Joshua focused on the trials that would come to Israel if they didn’t fulfill these requirements, especially the requirement of rejecting false gods. And he set before them the possibilities of troubles, defeat and exile from the Promised Land if they were unfaithful.

By the time of the book’s original audience, these trials had already begun to unfold. In the period of the judges, Israel had entered into cycles of troubles. During the monarchy, more judgments came on Israel because of the repeated idolatry of the people and their kings. And during the Babylonian exile, the threat of losing the Promised Land had become a horrific reality. So, the original audience had to consider Joshua’s warnings to Israel in light of God’s judgments that they were facing in their own day.

***Future covenant with Israel’s king.*** In the third place, what happened in Joshua’s day also anticipated that God would make a future covenant with Israel’s king. We know that Genesis 49:10 indicates that God had ordained for a king of Judah to reign. And Genesis 17:6 also indicates that Israel would have a king. Although Israel had no legitimate king during the period of the judges, passages like Judges 21:25 and the end of Hannah’s song in 1 Samuel 2:10 indicate that even during this period, the faithful looked for deliverance through Israel’s royal family.

Now, if the book of Joshua was written during Israel’s monarchy or during the Babylonian exile, the original audience had to relate Joshua’s call to covenant loyalty to God’s dynastic covenant with David. In passages like 2 Samuel 7 and Psalms 89, 132, we

see how God’s covenant with David focused on the necessity of loyalty. David’s royal line had to be loyal to God because they represented the people of Israel before God.

In addition, according to the prophecy of Isaiah 53:11, eternal forgiveness would come in the future because of the substitutionary death of “the righteous one, [the Lord’s] servant,” Israel’s perfectly righteous king. And this great king is none other than Jesus, the Christ who brought the new covenant predicted in Jeremiah 31. This covenant will come in its fullness when Christ returns and makes all things new. As the original audience applied Joshua’s call to covenant loyalty to their own times, they had to do so in the light of where they stood in these developments of the covenants God had made with his people.

So, as we seek to understand the original meaning of the book of Joshua, we always have to keep in view that our author wanted his audience to learn what had happened in Joshua’s day. But, he also wanted them to apply his record of the victorious conquest, tribal inheritances and the call to covenant loyalty in ways that were appropriate for their own times and circumstances.

So far in our introduction to the book of Joshua we’ve looked into its authorship and date, as well as its design and original purpose. Now we’re in a position to introduce the third main topic of this lesson: Christian application. How should the book of Joshua impact our lives as we follow Christ?

## CHRISTIAN APPLICATION

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In Hebrew, the name “Jesus” is “Joshua.” This simple fact reminds us that, from a Christian perspective, Jesus fulfills, or completes, what began in Joshua’s day. And in many respects, applying the book of Joshua to our lives flows out of this fulfillment in Christ. The more we grasp this connection between the book of Joshua and Jesus, the more we can understand the impact this book should have on us as followers of Christ. As we’ve seen, the author of our book wrote about Israel’s victorious conquest, tribal inheritances, and covenant loyalty under Joshua’s leadership to guide later generations of Israel. But our author also understood that sometime in the future, a great king of Israel would come, and he would accomplish all of the goals pointed to in the book of Joshua.

**When Joshua was leading the victorious battles, he was leading the nation to conquer the Promised Land. He advocated on behalf of the nation when they failed and sinned. He interceded for the nation and then led the promised nation into the Promised Land. This is all a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ led God’s people into their promised inheritance, as it is written in Hebrews 4. He advocates on behalf of God’s nation, prays for the nation, and intercedes for the nation, and does the work of the high priest for the New Testament nation, which is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. All of this is a picture meant for the time of the New Testament.**

— Rev. Henryk Turkanik, translation

Broadly speaking, as Israel's Messiah, Jesus fulfills these goals in two main ways. First, when we compare Jesus with the good things Israel accomplished under Joshua — the conquest of Canaan, the initial inheritance of the Promised Land, and Israel's loyal covenant service to God — we can see how Jesus expands and ultimately fulfills each goal. And second, when we contrast Jesus' accomplishments with Israel's failures — their inability to destroy all the Canaanites as commanded, their bickering and arguing over their tribal inheritances, and their failure to remain loyal to God's covenant — we can see that Jesus actually *reverses* all of Israel's failures. And by these means, Jesus wages victorious conquest over the entire earth, he inherits all things, and he establishes covenant loyalty everywhere in the world.

But to understand how to make Christian applications of the book of Joshua today, we need to remember something: God determined that the messianic fulfillment of these goals would unfold *over time*.

On the basis of Old Testament prophecy, many Jews in first century Palestine rightly believed that the Messiah would win a global conquest, inherit the world, and spread covenant loyalty everywhere. But these Jews also believed that he would do this quickly and catastrophically. In contrast, Jesus and the authors of the New Testament explained time and again that the kingdom Jesus established would unfold gradually in three interconnected phases.

We'll gain an orientation toward the Christian application of Joshua by looking at each phase of the kingdom separately.

## INAUGURATION

First, we'll consider how Christ fulfilled the expectations established in the book of Joshua by examining what Jesus accomplished in the inauguration of his kingdom. Second, we'll investigate how he fulfills the book of Joshua during the continuation of the kingdom. And third, we'll explore what Jesus will accomplish during the consummation of the kingdom at his glorious return. Consider first the inauguration of Christ's kingdom.

### Victorious Conquest

The New Testament teaches in many places that Jesus' inauguration of God's kingdom was the initial phase of his glorious worldwide victorious conquest. But when we compare Israel's victorious conquest in the book of Joshua with Jesus' first advent, we see a distinct difference. Rather than taking up a physical sword as Joshua did, Jesus followed a twofold strategy: He began the ultimate defeat of Satan and his demons. And he also proclaimed the gospel, or "good news" of the kingdom, to human beings by warning them of judgment to come and offering them God's mercy.

In John 12:31, 32, Jesus described this twofold strategy when he said: "The ruler of this world [will] be cast out. And I ... will draw all people to myself." This is why, in

Colossians 2:15, the apostle Paul described Jesus' death as the time when, "He disarmed the rulers and authorities ... by triumphing over them." And it's why Paul also said, in Ephesians 4:8, that "when [Christ] ascended on high he led a host of captives," from among people who served the kingdom of Satan, "and he gave [them as] gifts to men."

## **Tribal Inheritances**

The New Testament also emphasizes two perspectives on how the inauguration of Christ's kingdom fulfilled the hope of a worldwide inheritance for God's people. On the one side, Hebrews 1:2 explains that "[God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things." In Matthew 28:18, Jesus told his disciples that he had received this inheritance when he said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

On the other side, the New Testament also stresses that Jesus distributed a foretaste of his worldwide inheritance when he poured out the Holy Spirit on his church. As prophecies like Isaiah 44:3, 4 indicate, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit will one day renew the entire creation. So, in Ephesians 1:14, Paul spoke of the Holy Spirit poured out on the church as "the guarantee of our inheritance." And, as he put it in 2 Corinthians 1:22 and 5:5, the Spirit is "a guarantee" of what is to come — our future inheritance in the new heaven and new earth.

## **Covenant Loyalty**

In addition, the New Testament announces that Christ's inauguration of the kingdom emphasized covenant loyalty when he ushered in the new covenant age. Alluding to the prophecy of a new covenant in Jeremiah 31, Jesus told his disciples in Luke 22:20, "This cup ... is the new covenant in my blood." And New Testament authors made it clear that Jesus bore the eternal judgment of God on the cross as the final atonement for true believers.

But we must remember that Jesus did not bring the fullness of the new covenant to the earth in his first advent. So, he and his apostles and prophets still instructed even true believers to be faithful to God because we are not fully sanctified. And more than this, there are "false brothers" among us, as Paul called them in 2 Corinthians 11:26 and Galatians 2:4. The call to covenant loyalty still goes forth because we wait for the new covenant to be completely fulfilled.

## **CONTINUATION**

In many respects, our Christian applications of the book of Joshua in regard to the inauguration parallel what the New Testament also teaches about the continuation of Christ's kingdom.

## Victorious Conquest

The New Testament describes the continuation of Jesus' kingdom as a time in which his victorious conquest expands across the globe through his Spirit at work in the church. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:25, "[Christ] must reign [in heaven] until he has put all his enemies under his feet." But in our mission as the church, we don't take up physical arms any more than Jesus and his apostles and prophets did. Instead, we continue with the twofold strategy that Jesus established in his first advent.

On the one side, we further the defeat of Satan and evil spirits in more and more parts of the world. As Ephesians 6:12 tells us, "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against ... the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." And on the other side, we represent Christ in the world today by proclaiming the good news that warns human beings of God's coming judgment and offers them the mercy of forgiveness and eternal life. In the words of 2 Corinthians 5:20, "We are ambassadors for Christ... We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

## Tribal Inheritances

We also see that our anticipation of a worldwide inheritance for God's people is furthered throughout the continuation of his kingdom in church history. The fact that Jesus is God's appointed heir of all things has become more and more evident as people everywhere embrace him as Lord. And Christ continues to distribute the down payment of the Holy Spirit to more and more people throughout the world. As passages like Galatians 3:29 tell us, "If you are Christ's, then you are ... heirs according to promise." In the words of Romans 8:16, 17, "We are ... heirs — heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ."

## Covenant Loyalty

In many ways, we can also see how Joshua's emphasis on covenant loyalty remains true during the continuation of Christ's kingdom. As the church spreads throughout the world, the full atonement of the blood of the new covenant still covers the sins of all who have saving faith. Those who are in Christ are destined to be entirely free from eternal judgment. But it's still important for the church throughout the ages to be called to covenant loyalty.

On the one side, true believers still need to grow in their devotion to God. They need to take to heart the warnings of passages like Hebrews 12:14 where it says, "Strive for peace ... and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord." And on the other side, false brothers still among us need to be warned so that they will repent and be saved. As Hebrews 10:26, 27 puts it, "If we go on sinning deliberately ... there no longer

remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume [God's] adversaries.”

**The theme of covenant loyalty and renewal is one of the important topics in the book of Joshua. After almost every war where Joshua led the people in the book of Joshua, we see that there is a ceremony for renewing the covenant and loyalty to the Lord within the context of the covenant... This theme is very important to us as Christians because we too are in a covenant with the Lord — the new covenant that Christ made with us by his blood. The theme of covenant loyalty is related to something the Lord did, to the benevolence of the Lord and the Lord's grace. So, as the Lord showed kindness to Israel and fulfilled his promises to them, it was important for Joshua to remind the people of the importance of being loyal and faithful to the Lord within the covenant. The same exact thing is applicable to us too. The Lord showed us kindness in Christ, and we receive salvation through the work of his grace. As a result, we are to be faithful to the Lord, and this should be shown in our obedience, that is, in obeying the Lord's commands and statutes. When we live the life of obedience, faithfulness and loyalty, we express our thankfulness to what the Lord has done for us from the beginning. The Lord is the one who takes the initiative in the covenant by giving blessings and benevolences to us, and we respond to these blessings and benevolences by our obedience and loyalty within the context of the covenant.**

— Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation

## **CONSUMMATION**

Having seen how Christian application of the book of Joshua appears in the inauguration and continuation of the unfolding kingdom of Christ, we should turn briefly to the consummation of the kingdom. How should we apply our hope in Christ's future and final fulfillment in light of the book of Joshua?

### **Victorious Conquest**

Without question, the New Testament indicates that the consummation of Christ's kingdom will be the grand finale of his worldwide victorious conquest. He will complete the defeat of Satan and evil spirits. And when Jesus returns in glory, the time of God's mercy toward unbelievers will end. At that time, God's judgment against Canaan in Joshua's day will seem small compared to the judgment that Jesus will bring against every human enemy of God. As we read in Revelation 19:14, 15, “The armies of heaven

... [will follow] him... From his mouth [will come] a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations.”

## **Tribal Inheritances**

Of course, when Christ returns at the consummation of his kingdom, his worldwide inheritance — his right as heir of all things — will be fully realized. As we read in Revelation 11:15, “The kingdom of the world [will] become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.” And this worldwide kingdom will be distributed to all who follow Christ. According to Matthew 25:34, on the day of final judgment, “the King will say to those [who believe in Christ], ‘Come ... inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”

## **Covenant Loyalty**

And only in the consummation of Christ’s kingdom will the warnings calling God’s people to covenant loyalty end. When Christ returns, those who haven’t come to him in saving faith will come under God’s eternal judgment. And all who are true believers will enter the new creation where the blessings of the new covenant will be received in their fullness. As Revelation 22:3 tells us, at that time, “No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in [the city], and his servants will worship him.”

In effect, the New Testament calls us to remember how Christ fulfills the themes of Joshua in the inauguration, continuation and consummation of his kingdom. When we do, Israel’s conquest, inheritance and covenant loyalty in Joshua’s day enrich our awareness of the wonder of what Christ established in his first advent. They teach us how we are to live in service to God every day of our lives. And they point us toward the grand finale of history when the conquest will be completed, the inheritance of the new creation will be ours, and we will be vindicated as God’s loyal covenant people in Christ.

## **CONCLUSION**

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In our “Introduction to Joshua,” we presented three crucial issues. First, we touched on the authorship and date of the book, including the traditional, critical and evangelical outlooks on these matters. Second, we examined the design and purpose of Joshua by considering the content and structure of the book, as well as its original meaning. And third, we explored some Christian applications that can be drawn from the book by looking at how Christ, in the inauguration, continuation and consummation of God’s glorious kingdom, fulfills the expectations established in Joshua.

The book of Joshua reminded ancient Israelites of what God had accomplished for them through the life of Joshua as they faced challenges in their day. And in many ways,



we face similar challenges in our lives today. But as we'll see in this series, the book of Joshua offered Israel opportunities to renew their zeal for what God was doing in their day. And it offers you and me opportunities for renewal as well. As we learn more about this book, we'll not only grow in our awareness of what God did through Joshua in the Old Testament, but we'll also grow in our awareness of all that God has accomplished, is accomplishing and will accomplish through our greater Joshua, Jesus our Savior.

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