

## **Book of Joshua Explained**

### **Title:**

This is the first of the 12 historical books, and it gained its name from the exploits of Joshua, the under-study 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 New Testament 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).

### **Authorship:**

Although the author is not named, the most probable candidate is Joshua, who was the key eyewitness to the events recorded (compare 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 Joshua 6:25 was penned.

The book was completed before David’s reign (15:63; compare 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 (Exodus 17:10; 24:13; 33:11; Num. 11:28);
- (2) Soldiering (Exodus 17:9-13);
- (3) Scouting (Num. chapters 13 and 14);
- (4) Supplication by Moses (Num. 27:15-17);
- (5) The sovereignty of God (Num. 27:18);
- (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).

The traditional view that Joshua is the author of almost the entire book is supported by several factors.

- (1) Certain portions bear the mark of an eyewitness to the events described, such as the remark that “the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan from before the children of Israel, until we were passed over” (5:1).
- (2) The use of the ancient names of Canaanite cities points to an early date (e.g., 15:9, 13, 49, 54).
- (3) The list of boundaries drawn for the various tribes (Chapters 13-19), accurately reflects the known situation of Canaan before the Jewish monarch, as do the facts that Jerusalem was still a Jebusite city (15:63), Gezer was still a Canaanite city (16:10), and the Gibeonites were Israel’s vassals (compare 9:18-27 with 2 Sam. 21:1-9).
- (4) The failure to mention the Phoenician city of Tyre, while mentioning Sidon, reflects earlier times before Tyre became the more important port city and strategic stronghold of the Phoenicians.
- (5) The author cites the ancient Book of Jasher as source material for his writing (10:13).
- (6) The rehearsal of the wickedness of the Canaanites, for which God commanded their execution, is shown to be accurate in the well-known Ras Shamra Tablets, written in Joshua’s time.
- (7) The farewell speeches of Joshua (chapters 23 and 24), bear the marks of the author’s own affirmation (24:26-27).

All of these facts argue for an early date of the book at a time when Joshua actually lived.

No one else is the logical author of the book that bears his name.

Although certain portions must have been added by a later hand, such as the account of Joshua’s death (24:29-30), the conditions after his day (24:31), and certain historical events that took place in the time of the Judges (compare 15:13-17 with Judges 1:9-13; compare 19:47 with Judges 18:27-29).

As well as the inclusion of the later names of the earlier cities mentioned above, nevertheless nearly all the material recorded in the book was likely written by Joshua himself.

Liberal attempts to suggest that Joshua was composed by a later author as part of a Hexateuch (or six books), associated with Moses have failed to achieve scholarly consensus.

Moreover, it falls against the evidence of the Samaritan Bible, which, in adopting only Mosaic material, includes only the five books of the Pentateuch.

The Book of Joshua is a record of God’s faithfulness to His covenant people.

It underscores the need of the believer to be obedient if he would appropriate all that God has designed for him.

It is throughout a testimony to the might and grace of a sovereign and holy God.

### **Background – Setting:**

When Moses passed the baton of leadership on to Joshua before he died (Deut. Chapter 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, east 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 people 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 (compare 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 Setting:**

The events of the Book of Joshua span some 40 years (ca. 1407 – 1367 B.C.).

This dating reflects the facts drawn from the chronological anchor point of (1 Kings 6:1).

According to that text, Solomon's fourth year of rule was also the 480<sup>th</sup> year since the children of Israel had left Egypt (or 1447 B.C.).

Israel's 40 years of wandering in the wilderness before reaching the Jordan would therefore take the details of the Book of Joshua to the date adopted here.

Accordingly, the Book of Joshua is set in a changing international scene.

The virtual domination of Syro-Palestine and the area of the eastern shores of the Mediterranean sea by the Egyptians was to be relaxed due to the rising power of the Hittites to the north under the great king Suppiluliumas (Ca. 1380 – 1346 B.C.).

To the south, Egypt's great Pharaoh, Amenhotep III (ca. 1410 – 1372 B.C.), who was replaced by his son Akhenaton (ca. 1372 – 1355 B.C.), under whom the Egyptian fortunes in Syro-Palestine greatly deteriorated, as reflected in the famous Tell El-Amarna Tablets.

In the Amarna Period, Canaan itself became politically divided into several small states that were often at war with one another and which at times reported to the Egyptian Pharaoh that, because of the hostilities, they faced possible extermination at the hands of a strong enemy.

God had arranged the details of history in such a way that human conditions would be just right for the Israelites' conquest of Canaan!

Abraham was called by God to live in the land of Canaan, but Joshua was called to Possess the land.

It was a charge that Joshua took seriously.

Indeed, his obedience was so exemplary that, at the end of his life, he was granted the title "servant of the LORD" (24:29), an honor accorded only to a few in the history of Israel.

What's more, his lifetime of leadership produced a legacy that lived on in the elders who followed him (24:31).

Such fortitude and obedience in the faith was surely shaped by the events of the Exodus and Joshua's firsthand view of its leading man, Moses.

Joshua, born and raised in Egypt, was perhaps in his twenties when God mightily delivered the Hebrew people from slavery.

During this formative period in his life, he witnessed the hand of God moving through Moses to subdue Israel's enemies.

Joshua then got a foretaste of what was to come in Canaan when Moses appointed him as general of the Hebrew army to battle the Amalekites (Exodus 17:8-16).

Knowing a ragtag "army" of slaves would be defeated on an even battlefield, Moses ascended a hill to pray for Joshua during the battle, with Aaron and Hur holding up Moses' hands (Exodus 17:8-13), until victory was sure.

Then the LORD told Moses: write down the account of this battle and make sure it is written on Joshua's heart (Exodus 17:14).

Joshua would need the lesson of dependence on the LORD for victory in the years ahead.

At some point in Joshua's adulthood, Moses changed Joshua's name from Hoshea ("Salvation") to Joshua, "Yahweh Saves" (Num. 13:16).

It was a prophetic change, for Joshua had not only come to know the power of Yahweh, the promise-keeping God of his fathers, but he had learned that the children of Israel could not save themselves; only God Himself could save them.

At a time when the Holy Spirit did not yet constantly indwell the faithful, God identified Joshua as "a man in whom is the Spirit" (Num. 27:18).

That is how evident God was in Joshua's life.

Once Moses laid hands on Joshua before Eleazar the priest and the people, his commissioning was official: he would be the one to take the children of Israel into the Promised Land.

Beyond the similarity of their names ("Jesus" is the Greek form of ("Joshua")), it is easy to see Joshua as a "type" of Jesus.

The primary parallel is that they were both called to announce and establish the kingdom of God through warfare.

Joshua, a physical, geographical kingdom on earth, and Jesus, a spiritual kingdom without boundaries.

Also, both were dependent on God for strategy, wisdom and power.

Israel's invasion of a spiritually dark land under Joshua's leadership parallels Jesus sending His disciples into spiritual darkness to bring forth the light.

Joshua's task was to drive out the inhabitants of Canaan and divide the land between the 12 tribes of Israel.

His book tells that story: entering the land (Chapters 1-5), conquering the land (Chapters 6-12), dividing the land (Chapters 13-21), and beginning life as a nation under God in the land (Chapters 22-24).

This is the first of the 12 historical books, and it gained its name from the exploits of Joshua, the under-study whom Moses prayed for and commissioned as a leader in Israel (Num. 27:12-23).

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).

The Book of Joshua stands at the beginning of the Jewish scriptural collection known as the Former Prophets.

It is named after its most important character, Moses' personal aide and military commander.

Joshua's name means "The LORD Is Salvation", or "Jehovah saves".

In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, his name takes the form *Iesous*, the same name borne by our Lord, Jesus.

The Book of Joshua is considered the first of the Historical Books of the English Bible, because it traces the record of the children of Israel from the shores of the Jordan River to the conquest and division of the land of Canaan.

It closes with an account of the aged Joshua's farewell speeches.

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 (compare 5:14 – 6:2), they inhabited the territories east and west 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 (chapters 1 and 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);
- (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 (see the chapters 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 (compare 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 (Joshua 2:9-11), as God's covenant heart reached out to all nations (Gen. 12:1-3).

**Each of the chapters are done individually. Some due to length, have been shortened into “continued” sections. Each section contains a questionnaire which follows the section which has been done to aid in the learning process.**