

Joshua

Blitzkrieg! This German word for the rapid overtaking of enemy territory describes well the narrative pace of Joshua. Once Israel had committed themselves to enter the land there was nothing that could stand in the way of Yahweh's army. God leads His special nation in a swift and decisive possession of the Promised Land (though not complete and permanent as will be seen as the Canon unfolds). However, the conquest was not just a military exercise. It was the reception of Israel's promised inheritance (cf. Deut 4:21). It was also to be a place of worship and testimony. Foundational to all is Yahweh's faithfulness in bringing Israel to the Land promised to them through Abraham hundreds of years earlier.

Authorship

As with most of the historical books the traditional ascription is the name of the main character. The Talmud attributes this book to Joshua except for the notice of his death (*B. Bat. 15a*). However, the recurring phrase "to this day"¹ renders authorship by Joshua problematic. Modern theories of composition either make Joshua part of a "Hexateuch" (completing Genesis—Deuteronomy) or a part of a Deuteronomistic history written in the seventh century in association with the reforms of Josiah. The problem with making Joshua part of a Hexateuch is Moses' obvious authorial association with the first five books, making a decided break at Joshua. However, logically and theologically the Pentateuch is incomplete without the conquest of the land depicted in Joshua. It is best to view Joshua as authored by one human hand, though making allowances for some

¹ 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28–29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 15:63; 16:10.

possible editorial comments later on, though it has obvious markings of divine authorship in the way it completes the ideas introduced in Genesis—Deuteronomy.² Whether this is so structurally, it is certainly true canonically. However, this does not solve the problem of the identity of the author of Joshua. Joshua died at the age of one hundred and ten, probably c. 1366 B.C.³ Since the book bears all the marks of an authoritative eyewitness, and since Joshua is specifically said to have added to Moses' Book of the Law (24:26) it is reasonable to view him as the author.

Date

The extremely late date for the writing of Joshua, that is, as part of a so-called Deuteronomistic historical work of the seventh century B.C., must be discounted on the basis of its contrived rationale for the production of Deuteronomy through 2 Kings. This takes Deuteronomy (as a late production) as basically a condemnation of Israel's continual practice of idolatry and a polemic against the early decentralized worship of Yahweh. The reference to Rahab still being alive (6:25) plus the fact that Joshua wrote at least part of the work (24:26) argues for a time of composition, for the most part, soon after the events described, ca. 1395 B.C. with any other additions being added shortly thereafter, by ca. 1366 B.C.

² A recent literary analysis has argued afresh for the concept of a Hexateuch, at least structurally. Dorsey suggests that a three part chiasm with the Sinaitic covenant at its center, is the only way to resolve all of the strands introduced early on in Genesis and Exodus. His breakdown has a historical introduction to the Sinai treaty (Gen 1:1—Exod 19:2), followed by the Sinai treaty (Exod 19:3—Num 10:10), which is bracketed by a historical conclusion to the Sinai treaty (Num 10:11—Josh 24) (David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 97; see esp. 90-102.

³ Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987, 1996), 147.

Historical Setting

The events described took place over a seven to ten year period immediately following the forty year period of Israel's wandering in the wilderness. Since the Exodus took place in 1446 B.C. the conquest began in 1406 B.C. It ended in 1399 B.C. as calculated by Caleb's statement that he had been forty at the time of the spying out of the land and was eighty-five at the completion of the conquest.⁴ At the time of Israel's entry into Canaan the aggressive power struggles between Egypt and the mighty nations to the north (in this case the Hittites and the Mitannian empire) that were the usual order of the day were all but absent. This meant that Israel was able to concentrate on the conquest of the Canaanites without undue concern over much larger powers.

Original Readers / Occasion

There is no specific statement of the reason for writing. From a consideration of Joshua's contribution to the Canon the book was intended for the generation following the conquest as a testimony to Yahweh's faithfulness to His promise to give Israel the land of Canaan.

Special Issues

The Ordered Destruction of the Canaanites. God's command to completely annihilate the inhabitants of the land seems to fly in the face of His desire that all people come to salvation. However, it must be recognized that God is the righteous judge who brings kings and nations to account as well as individuals. The people living in this land had been filling up the measure of their sin and were ripe for judgment (cf. Gen 15:16). Hence, when Israel came into the land they were God's instrument of righteous retribu-

⁴ Ibid. For Merrill's arguments in support of the early date of the Exodus see *ibid.*, 66-75.

tion (though it was God who inflicted most of the injury on Israel's enemies). It was, therefore, within the providential timing of God that Israel was brought into the land at the precise time for the judgment of these peoples, who were by any standard exceedingly wicked.⁵

Rahab's Lie. Rahab's obvious prevarication with respect to the presence of the Hebrew spies is often made an issue in situation ethics courses. However, the incident is not included for the purpose of developing a standard of behavior but to reveal the outcome of faith. None of God's servants, apart from His son, have ever been perfect. However, this does not keep Him from using them for His (righteous) purposes, nor from rewarding faith whenever and in whomever He finds it. Rahab must be judged by the standard she had, not by the standard that she did not have, which was Torah.⁶

Joshua's Long Day. Various explanations have been offered for this most unusual event including those centered in language, those revolving around literary intent, and those having to do with natural science.⁷ Since God created and sustains the physical universe, including the planets in their orbits and rotations, there is no a priori reason against His alteration of the length of a day, with or without astronomical confirmation. However, a number of possible translational and hermeneutical solutions have been offered. To accept one of these against one that posits a geophysical event does not necessarily strike at the heart of the integrity of the Scriptures nor does it automatically

⁵ See David M. Howard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1993), 81-82.

⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 82-83.

⁷ For a discussion of the issue and bibliography see *ibid.*, 86-89.

limit God. What the text highlights as remarkable is that “the Lord heeded the voice of a man” (10:14).

Message

Yahweh fulfills His promise to found a special nation by delivering the land into Israel’s possession, for which the nation expresses its appreciation by renewing covenant with their divine Leader.

Outline

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| I. | Preparation for Conquest: Joshua leads Israel across the Jordan and leads in covenant renewal as the prelude to taking possession of the land. | 1:1—5:15 |
| A. | Joshua is commanded to prepare himself to lead Israel. | 1:1–9 |
| B. | Joshua commands and prepares Israel to follow Yahweh. | 1:10–18 |
| | 1. The people are commanded to prepare themselves to possess. | 1:10–11 |
| | 2. Reuben, Gad, and Half-Manasseh are reminded to obey. | 1:12–15 |
| | 3. The people commit themselves to obey Joshua. | 1:16–18 |
| C. | Joshua sends spies to confirm Yahweh’s intentions. | 2:1–24 |
| | 1. Rahab’s response demonstrates Yahweh’s positive intentions for Gentiles who trust in Him. | 2:1–21 |
| | 2. The spies report demonstrates Yahweh’s negative intentions for the nations who do not fear Him. | 2:22–24 |
| D. | Joshua leads Israel across the Jordan river to conclude the original purpose of the Exodus. | 3:1—5:1 |
| | 1. Israel follows the ark of the covenant and crosses over the Jordan on dry ground. | 3:1–17 |
| | 2. Israel sets up memorial stones to mark Yahweh’s power. | 4:1—5:1 |
| E. | Joshua leads Israel in affirming their covenant loyalty. | 5:2–12 |
| | 1. Israel obeys the covenant sign of circumcision. | 5:2–9 |
| | 2. Israel observes the feast of Passover. | 5:10–12 |
| F. | Joshua is assured of Yahweh’s presence for conquest as Commander. | 5:13–15 |
| II. | Process of Conquest: Joshua leads Israel in Holy War by which Yahweh reveals His great power on their behalf. | 6:1—11:23 |
| A. | Conquest in the Center: Israel establishes its conquering presence in the land by virtue of Yahweh’s sovereign power. | 6:1—8:30 |
| | 1. Jericho is destroyed by a direct act of God. | 6:1–27 |
| | 2. Ai is destroyed only after Israel is purified from sin. | 7:1—8:29 |
| | a. Violation of <i>haram</i> (“devoting to destruction”) results in Israel’s initial defeat. | 7:1–9 |

	d.	The rest of the tribes receive their allotment.	18:1—19:51
		1) Joshua commissions a survey to determine the boundaries of the last seven parts of land.	18:1–10
		2) Benjamin is allotted its land.	18:11–28
		3) Simeon is allotted its land.	19:1–9
		4) Zebulum is allotted its land.	19:10–16
		5) Issachar is allotted its land.	19:17–23
		6) Asher is allotted its land.	19:24–31
		7) Naphtali is allotted its land.	19:32–39
		8) Dan is allotted its land.	19:40–48
	e.	Joshua is given the city of his choosing.	19:49–51
	4.	The cities of refuge are designated.	20:1–9
	5.	The cities of the Levites are designated.	21:1–42
	6.	A summary statement of the land's possession is given.	21:43–45
	C.	Continued Unity Necessary: Israel's unity is threatened by a misunderstanding over the eastern tribe's memorial altar.	22:1–34
IV.		Persevering in the Conquest: Joshua warns Israel about unfaithfulness and leads them in renewal of the covenant.	23:1—24:28
	A.	Joshua reviews Yahweh's faithfulness and reminds them of the outcome of obedience and disobedience.	23:1–16
	B.	Joshua renews Yahweh's covenant with the people.	24:1–28
		1. He reviews the history of Yahweh's performance of His promises.	24:1–13
		2. He requires a decision to serve and obey Yahweh.	24:14–25
		3. He records the decision and erects a memorial witness.	24:26–28
V.		Postscript: The immediate purpose of the Exodus has been accomplished.	24:29–33

Argument

I. Preparation for Conquest: Joshua leads Israel across the Jordan and leads in covenant renewal as the prelude to taking possession of the land (1:1—5:15).

While the last forty years had been preparation for Israel in one sense, there is a final preparatory strategy designed to encourage the people so that Kadesh Barnea would not be repeated. First, Joshua is confirmed as Moses successor and commanded to make sure that he maintained his spiritual perspective and readiness (1:1–9). It is only as he operated according to Torah that he would be guaranteed success (1:8). This followed the pattern set down for Israel's kings (Deut 17:18–20) and sets an example for success-

ful military leadership for the monarchy when it would arise. The people must also be ready to obey, which they indicated was the case (1:10–18). Reminiscent of Moses' action thirty eight years earlier, Joshua sends spies into the land as a prelude to attack. This time Israel does not turn back. Rahab's positive response to the reconnaissance mission displays God's gracious intention for the nations of the earth, namely, that they would recognize His sovereignty and submit to His holy rule (2:1–21). The rest of the inhabitants could only fear the Lord's judgment (2:9–11; 24).

Joshua leads Israel across the Jordan river in an act designed (by Yahweh) to signify that the purpose of the Exodus from Egypt was now going to be realized, namely, Israel's constitution as a full-fledged nation (3:1—4:24). Moses has been replaced not by Joshua in this regard, but by Yahweh who is represented by the ark of the covenant. The second generation has become assured of the Lord's presence with them through their wilderness wanderings (cf. Deut 8). The final activities of preparation are the circumcision of the sons of Israel (which had been neglected in the wilderness) and the observance of the Passover. Circumcision signified agreement with and belief in Yahweh's covenant with Abraham, which had promised a nation from the patriarch's descendents. The Passover celebrated their redemption from Egypt to become that nation and brought to mind the whole of the Mosaic covenant by which they had become formally related to Yahweh as his servant-nation. Finally, Joshua himself is assured that Yahweh was present with them as the Commander of His armies (5:13–15). All was ready for the conquest.

II. Process of Conquest: Joshua leads Israel in Holy War by which Yahweh reveals His great power on their behalf (6:1—11:23).

The first action of conquest strikes into the very heart of the land. Jericho is taken in a unique manner in order to demonstrate that it was almighty God who fought for His people (6:1–27). Rahab and her family were spared because of their faith, but everything else was destroyed with the result that Joshua’s fame spread throughout the country (6:27). The next site, Ai, initially repelled the Israelites due to one man’s violation of Yahweh’s command that everything in Jericho was to have been “devoted to destruction” as an offering to Himself (7:1–9). When this disobedience is revealed and purged from the community (7:10–26) Yahweh is again free to fight on behalf of His people (8:1–29). As with Jericho, the inhabitants are killed and the city is burned, though here the people were permitted to take other things like livestock and possessions (8:26–28).⁸ The final act of the first stage of conquest was a formal renewal of the covenant on Mounts Ebal and Gerizim as had been commanded by Moses (8:30–35; cf. Deut 27). Covenant renewal stands at the beginning and the conclusion of the conquest (cf. 24:1–28). Though Israel had been granted this land by grace, they would only enjoy it through obedience to Torah. By covenant Yahweh had guaranteed His presence to help them.

The southern campaign begins with Israel falling victim to a deceptive scheme on the part of the Gibeonites who are able to secure a treaty of protection contrary to the Lord’s prohibition of this with any inhabitants of the land (9:1–27). However, this will

⁸ The explicit instructions to burn Jericho and Ai (along with Hazor) are noteworthy against the complete absence of such destruction for virtually all the rest of the conquered sites. This argues powerfully against equating wide spread archaeological destruction data with Israel’s conquest of Canaan, thus supporting an early Exodus date. For a complete discussion of this see Merrill, *Kingdom*, 108-21. See also idem., “Palestinian Archaeology and the Date of the Conquest: Do Tells Tell Tales?” *Grace Theological Journal* 3:1 (Spring 1982):107-21 and Bruce K. Waltke, “Palestinian Artifactual Evidence Supporting the Early Date of the Exodus,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129:513 (January-March 1972):33-47.

not be able to thwart Yahweh's purposes for Israel. In fact he uses the treaty as an occasion against a southern coalition of kings bent on punishing Gibeon (10:1–27). This begins a thrust deep into the south whereby the pattern of the destruction of inhabitants but the preservation of the cities is continued (10:28–43).

The northern campaign begins with a complete destruction of Hazor, including the burning of the city, followed by a population only destruction as in the south (11:1–15). This strategy is an obvious fulfillment of the Lord's prediction that Israel would inflict a wholesale takeover of crops and structures of the land. The conquest is summarized by reminding Israel that behind their victory was Yahweh's holy judgment against a wicked people (11:16–20); it was not by merit that they were possessing the land. The incident regarding the Anakim is probably to contrast the nation's present success with the failure of their parents who had been frightened by reports about the giants of the land (11:21–23; cf. Num 13:22, 28, 32–33).

III. Prospect of the Conquest: Israel is challenged to inhabit their full land inheritance as selected by lot through Joshua (12:1—22:34).

The concluding verse of the previous section asserts that the whole land had been taken and was at rest from war, which meant that it could now be parceled out among the tribes (11:23). From the subsequent narrative it is clear that this is not to be understood as meaning that every single pocket of Canaanite population had been destroyed (13:1–2). It must be understood as referring to the end of the major, whole-nation, military assault required to break the Canaanites' grip on the land. The remaining action

of conquest could be undertaken by the individual tribes, which the tribal allotments are designed to motivate.⁹

After summarizing the Israelite conquest on both sides of the Jordan by naming the defeated kings (12:1–24), the narrative reports the Lord’s word to Joshua regarding the territory remaining to be occupied (13:1–6). He promises to remain available to drive these people out, instructing Joshua to apportion the land to the remaining nine and one-half tribes, implying that it would be each tribe’s responsibility to finish the conquest (13:6–7). What follows is a tribe by tribe apportionment of the land beginning with the allotment to the three and one-half tribes east of the Jordan on the basis of Moses’ previous determination (13:8–33). The method of apportionment by lot for the western tribes is specified (14:1–5) followed by the report of Caleb’s inheritance (14:6–15). He and Joshua (cf. 19:49–50) are the only individuals who have land allotted to them by official action. This forms a bracket to the tribal allotment of two examples of the possibilities of faith and obedience, a key motivational technique of the narrative (and Caleb even requests the area where the Anakim dwell!). Judah’s allotment is then specified, Caleb being a member of that tribe (15:1–19). The extensive listing of cities belonging to Judah serves as a reminder of Yahweh’s power and faithfulness in fulfilling (and in being present to continue fulfilling) His promise to give Israel the land (15:20–63). In the midst of the tribal apportionments the nation moves the tabernacle from Gilgal to Shiloh,

⁹ The following comment summarizes the situation: “The taking of the whole land does not imply that all the towns and villages to the very last had been conquered, or that all the Canaanites were rooted out from every corner of the land, but simply that the conquest was of such a character that the power of the Canaanites was broken, their dominion overthrown, and their whole land so thoroughly given into the hands of the Israelites, that those who still remained here and there were crushed into powerless fugitives, who could neither offer any further opposition to the Israelites, nor dispute the possession of the land with them, if they would only strive to fulfill the commandments of their God and persevere in the gradual extermination of the scattered remnants” (C. F. Keil and Franz, Delitzsch, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, translated by James Martin, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., n.d.).

where the ark remained until captured by the Philistines. Since Shiloh was in the center of the land its selection as the place for the tabernacle symbolized Yahweh's presence as the intended focal point of for the nation. Once again it is mentioned that "the land was subdued before them" (18:1). Apparently these seven remaining tribes were hesitant to pursue their inheritance (18:2–3). As a means of stimulating them to do so a surveying team composed of members from each tribe was commissioned to determine the final seven parcels of land, which were then assigned by lot (18:4–10). God is creatively patient in bring His people into conformity with His will.

Following very specific allotment of the land the Lord commands the selection of cities of refuge, as had been directed earlier in the Law received by Moses (20:1–9). In addition the cities of the Levites were specified, since they were not to have their own inheritance as a separate tribe (21:1–42). By this means Israel's worship would not only have a central, controlling sanctuary, but also local representation through the presence of the Levites. Another summary of the Lord's faithfulness in delivering Israel into the land (21:43–45) is followed by the incident of the eastern tribes' construction of an memorial altar that nearly provokes civil war (22:1–34). This will serve as a reminder of the fragile nature of Israel's unity and of the key to national solidarity, namely, worship of Yahweh.

IV. Persevering in the Conquest: Joshua warns Israel about unfaithfulness and leads them in renewal of the covenant (23:1—24:28).

Before Joshua dies, he calls Israel together and does what he can to insure Israel's continued obedience. At the heart of his address is the reminder that Yahweh had been faithful to His promise to bring the nation into the land (23:3–5). On that basis Israel

should remain faithful to Him, being careful to avoid spiritual pollution through contact with the remnant of Canaanites still in the land (23:6–8). If they do this they will continue to experience the Lord’s powerful, victorious presence; if they disobey they can be assured of His hand of discipline (23:9–16). They had been brought into the land by unmerited favor. However, they must maintain spiritual vigilance to continue to enjoy its benefit.

Joshua conducts a renewal ceremony in order to call the nation to a commitment to the principles of the covenant (24:1–28). He follows the practice of ancient treaties in rehearsing Yahweh’s past goodness on their behalf (24:2–13) before calling on the people to make a public decision to serve the Lord (24:14–25). As an official record of their positive affirmation Joshua records the “proceedings” and sets up a stone of witness, memorializing Israel’s intention to serve Yahweh in the land. This covenant renewal ceremony was undoubtedly intended as an example for each succeeding generation. The nation would always be in need of such recommitments as Yahweh’s covenant people.

V. Postscript: The immediate purpose of the Exodus has been accomplished (24:29–33).

The single factor that ties these last verses together, other than the fact that they all involve the death of the person or persons mentioned, is that each of those mentioned had some sort of connection with the Exodus. Though the elders mentioned in verse thirty one were members of the second generation they were presumably born in Egypt since they “had known all the works of the Lord which He had done for Israel.” The intention of these death notices is to communicate the fact that what the Lord had begun during the time of the patriarchs, namely the creation and planting of a nation, had

now come to pass. The next generation would be responsible for seeing that Yahweh's purposes for that nation would be realized.

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