



JOSHUA

Survey of the Old Testament: The Torah

Fall 2004

Introduction

Background

- Name:** Joshua, named for the principle leader of Israel as they enter the Promised Land. The Hebrew name for the book, Yehoshua, is the Hebrew name as that of our savior, Jesus.
- Author:** The author is not disclosed within the book. The author was an eyewitness to the events described in the book (Joshua 5:6), and would have written the book shortly after the events (see Date Written below). Most evangelical scholars assume Joshua to be the primary author (24:26), with certain passages added after his death.
- Date Written:** 1400 – 1350 BC. The book was written within the lifetime of Rahab (Joshua 6:25). Since the exodus took place in 1442 BC (see Introduction to Exodus), subtracting 40 years for the desert wanderings, the entrance into the Promised Land would have been around 1400 BC. The date of the writing must have therefore been within a generation of 1400 BC.
- Audience:** The generation of Israelites newly settled in the Promised Land, who were on the verge of forsaking the covenant as they began the time of the Judges.

Structure

Joshua is divided into three primary sections: Entering, conquering and allocating the promised land. Following the allocation, Joshua's farewell address and challenge finish the book, along with the description of his death. The predominance of the book is the allocation of the land, covering over one-third of the book

Entering the Land				Conquering the Land				Allocating the Land				Epilogue	
Joshua Encouraged	Rahab Protects Spies	Crossing the Jordan	Israel Obeys the Covenant	Jericho	Ai	Amorites	Confederation of Kings	Large Tribes	Small Tribes	Levites	Return to the Transjordan	Joshua's Farewell Address	Joshua's Confrontation
1	2	3-4	5	6	7-8	9-10	11-12	13-17	18-19	20-21	22	23	24

Purpose

- To describe the allocation of the land. This is crucial in the laws of Israel, for every Jubilee the land would be returned to the originally allocated owners (Leviticus 25). This necessitated a clear demarcation of the borders (Chapters 13-22)

- To remind the Israelites that the land in which they now lived was given to them by God. The nation did not conquer the land by their own strength, but through the strength of their God (Chapters 6-12).
- To remind Israel that Yahweh had been faithful to his covenant with them, to encourage them to remain faithful on their part of the covenant (Chapter 23), and to remind them of the promise they made to keep the covenant (Chapter 4).
- To call Israel to forsake their worship of other gods and become devoted to Yahweh alone (Chapter 24).

Theme

The faithfulness of God to his covenant by providing the nation of Israel with the Promised Land.

The Apportionment of the Land

Importance of the Allotment

Over forty percent of the book of Joshua deals with the apportionment of the Promised Land to the Israelite tribes, comprising the largest section of the book. The apportionment gives great geographic detail as the boundary line for each tribe is exactly described. In addition, to the tribal apportionment of land, the Levite cities are reserved as are the cities of refuge. The importance of the apportionment is previewed in Number 33:50-56.

Number 33:50-52 begin by speaking of the importance of driving out the current inhabitants of the land, and the destruction of their idols and places of worship. Before the apportionment can take place, the people must conquer the land and destroy all remnants of the idolatrous nations. The apportionment by God does not come because Israel is worthy of such land, but because of the wickedness of those currently in the land (Deut 9:5). In fact, Abraham's descendents had to wait four centuries for God to fulfill His covenant promise for the land because the current inhabitants had not reached the full measure of their potential wickedness (Gen. 15:16).

The apportionment was to be made by lot and according to the size of the tribe (Numbers 33:53-54), demonstrating one of the primary reasons for the second census in Numbers.

The detail of the apportionment was also critical, for once the apportionment had been made, that land was to remain within the tribe. If the land was sold outside the original apportionment, it was to be returned to the original owner every 50 years in the land of Jubilee (Leviticus 25). Having detailed descriptions of the boundary markers was therefore extremely important. These boundaries were so important, that moving it was a violation of the law (Deut. 19:14) and put the offender under a curse (Deut 27:17).

But the apportionment was not automatic. The tribes had to take the land and conquer it (Numbers 33:55-56). Failure to do so would be a source of constant irritation for the people, would lead them away from the worship of Yahweh, and eventually lead them to be removed from the land. The apportionment required that the people obediently conquer the land.

The apportionment is divided into two sections: 1) the apportionment for those tribes who obediently conquered the land, and 2) the apportionment for those tribes who failed to conquer the land.

Apportionment of the Obedient

Give Me the Hill Country! The example of Caleb (Chapter 14)

As the lot was cast for the tribe of Judah, the oldest and most courageous of the tribe asked Joshua for an apportionment in the hill country. Caleb, who is now 85 years old, was the only other spy along with Joshua who believed that God would deliver the land to the people (Numbers 13). Now Caleb is eager to see the Lord fight for him. So he specifically asks for the heavily fortified hill

cities (14:12). Caleb believed in the promise of God and acted upon it boldly. As a result, he and his family received their inheritance.

The Sons of Joseph (Chapter 16-17)

The tribe of Ephraim received their allotment in chapter 16. However, they failed to completely drive out the Canaanites (16:10). The Ephraimites complained to Joshua that their apportionment was too small for the size of their tribe (17:14). Joshua's response was that they had plenty of land, if only they would finish conquering the land (17:17-18). The Ephraimites, however, feared the people, for they had iron chariots (17:16). They did not believe in the promise of God, and they failed to act on the promise. Therefore, they did not receive their full inheritance.

The tribe from Joseph, Manasseh, however, received ample land. First, half the tribe had been given by Moses part of the land east of the Jordan River. Now, the other half, who are described in 17:1 as "a man of war" received an additional allotment. Their warrior reputation appears to indicate a willingness to obey and take the land, thus receiving an extra allotment.

The Tribes of the Transjordan (Chapter 13, 22)

The other tribes settling east of the Jordan, Gad and Reuben, also demonstrated their willingness to fight. In Numbers 32, these three tribes were allowed to settle in the land recently taken from the defeated Ammonites. The detailed description of this allotment is in Joshua 13.

However, Moses allowed them to settle only on the condition that their men would cross the Jordan and assist the rest of the nation in taking the land. This they faithfully did, so Joshua, in chapter 22, allows them to return to their allotment across the Jordan.

As the armies from these 2½ tribes readied to cross the Jordan, however, they build an altar to God (22:10). This altar concerned the rest of Israel, for they were afraid that the Transjordan tribes were turning away from following Yahweh, for it had been clearly commanded that sacrifices to Him were to only take place in the tabernacle. The other 9½ tribes were ready to battle them over this altar, until they clarified that the altar was not an attempt to set up a place of sacrifice. Instead it was a memorial to remind the rest of the nation that Moses had given them the land across the river, and that they were still entitled to cross back into their territory in order to worship God at the tabernacle.

This incident and the repeated reference to Moses' original allocation seems to indicate the importance the writer has to wanting to keep the nation from being divided by the river. Nonetheless, in the book of Judges, indeed the tribes on the east and west side of the Jordan do end up fighting one another (Judges 12:4-6).

Apportionment of the Disobedient

Most of the tribes, however, failed to take the land. So, in chapter 18, Joshua calls the whole nation together to Shiloh and he rebukes them for failing to complete the task. Only Judah and the sons of Joseph had conquered the land, so they were able to keep what they had won. The rest of the land would be apportioned with the remaining 7 tribes who failed to obey. The description of this apportionment takes chapters 18-19.

After this apportionment, Dan found their inheritance too small. So they moved north and conquered another unallocated territory, thus gaining additional land (19:47).

Each tribe would be allotted land according to their need. Furthermore, God promised that he would fight for them and drive out the inhabitants. However, they had to take the land. To receive the promise, they had to take action.

Such is the nature of faith. James 2:14-26 explains that it is not just enough to believe (James 2:19). One must act on that belief, staking one's very life on it. Abraham believed and was willing to act on it by killing his son (James 2:21-23). In the book of Joshua, Rahab believed and she was willing act on it by betraying her people and protecting the spies (James 2:25). Caleb, Joshua, and the tribe of Manasseh believed God had given them the land, and they were willing to act on it by going to war.

So also it is for us. Faith is not belief. We are not saved by believing that Jesus died on the cross, but by staking our eternal soul on it. We are not sanctified by merely believing in the precepts of scripture, but by acting on our faith that the word of God is true. As the old hymn says, Trust and Obey, for there's no other way!

Furthermore, complete obedience results in complete blessing. However, when we don't follow through and completely obey, we miss out on the complete promises of God. Just as Ephraim ended up with a smaller apportionment because they were afraid, so also our fear can prevent us from realizing the fullness of God's blessing. Obedience needs to be complete.

Yahweh Fights For You

By the end of the book, Israel has mostly conquered the land and the tribes had all received their apportionment. But as Joshua nears his death, he has an important farewell message to give to the nation. So, at the age of 110, he calls for all of Israel to come and hear what he has to say.

He begins by reminding the people that it was Yahweh, their God who had been fighting for them. He is the one who drove out the nations. He sent hornets before them, so they did not even need to use their sword or their bow (24:12). God hamstringed their horses and burned their chariots (11:5). Furthermore, God hardened their heart so that their enemies would not seek peace, but would fight, thus sealing their own fate (11:19-20).

Yahweh had driven out the nations, and no one was able to stand before them (23:8-10).

Be Strong & Courage

That phrase would have probably reminded Joshua of the first time the Lord spoke to him. Just after Moses appointed Joshua as his successor, and just after the death of his mentor, God spoke to Joshua. He assures Joshua that "no man will be able to stand before you." (1:5). By the end of his life, this had been fulfilled (23:8-10). Because of this, the Lord encouraged Joshua to be strong and courageous (1:6). Joshua had no reason to fear, for no one would be able to stand before him.

Replacing Moses as Israel's leader would have been some very large shoes to fill. There would be no other prophet like him, for the Lord spoke to him face to face (Deut. 34:10). But now, Joshua is told by God that He will talk with Joshua just as he had taken to Moses (1:3).

Even so, the task before Joshua was going to be difficult. He was leading this people into battle. The people affirmed their willingness to follow Joshua (1:16-18). But this was the same fickle people who grumbled against Moses in the wilderness. How well will they follow when faced with war?

But God assures Joshua (1:9) that he has nothing to worry about, for He would be there wherever he goes, and that God would fulfill his promise to give the land to His people (1:6).

The Contrast of Jericho & Ai

Are you for us or our adversaries?

The battle, then was about to begin. Israel was camped in the plains of Jericho, when Joshua looked up and there was a swordsman before Him. He asked Him whose side He was on (5:13). He replied that He was on neither side, but was the captain of Yahweh's army (5:14). Joshua was told to remove his sandals, for he was on holy ground (5:15). This was Joshua's burning bush encounter.

The Lord had told Joshua that He would be with him, and that He would drive out the people. But as He is about to enter His first battle, this encounter teaches Him that the battle truly belongs to the Lord. The Lord was not on His side, but rather, He needed to be on the Lord's side. Abraham Lincoln, in the midst of the American Civil War, said, "Let us pray not that God is on our side but that we are on God's side." Israel would soon discover the truth of this, for whenever Israel battled on God's side, they found success. But whenever they did not follow God's lead, they failed.

The battle for Jericho

In chapter 6, God instructs Joshua on how to take the city. The strategy must have seemed foolish to Israel, to Joshua, and to the citizens of Jericho. They would not win this battle with swords and arrows. Instead, the army would march around the city, blowing trumpets and shouting for seven days. Leading the march, however were the priests carrying the ark of Yahweh, signifying that the Lord was with them in their campaign.

On the seventh day, they marched around the city seven times. Then, with a blast of the trumpet and a shout from the people, the walls fell. God had delivered Jericho into their hand, and not a single Israelite raised to fight or lost their life in battle. This unique strategy was to demonstrate to Israel how He would be the one to win the battles.

The battle for Ai

In contrast, the battle for Ai would represent a demonstration of what happened when the battled without the Lord. Because Jericho was the first city to be conquered, the first fruits of battle belonged to him. They were not to take any of the plunder from Jericho, but to give all the gold and silver for the Lord's treasury. But one man, Achan, failed to do so, keeping some of the silver and the gold for himself. This would prove disastrous for Israel, for Achan's disobedience would bring failure in their next battle.

In chapter 7, Israel sets out to take their next city, Ai. The Lord's help would not be needed with this battle, for Ai was a small city, and there would be no need to take the entire Israelite army. Only an army of about 3,000 would be needed to take this city. But Israel is soundly defeated.

But Joshua felt that this task was small enough that he didn't need God. The failure to take Ai was due to the sin of Achan. But the failure could have been avoided if Joshua would have asked for the Lord's help.

Interestingly, Joshua is utterly dismayed, for 36 Israelites had died in this engagement. This was about a 1% casualty rate, which is amazingly low. But Joshua is devastated. But, as Baylis points out, no where else in the book of Joshua do we see any other battle casualties at all!

In chapter 8, the nation is able to take Ai. This time Joshua chooses ten times the number of men. Furthermore, he determines a brilliant strategy. But it is not the additional men, nor Joshua's strategy that win the day. Rather, it is the Lord's promise that He would deliver Ai into their hand.

Remembering the Victory

While Israel had to take action to receive the promised land, there was to be no mistake. It was the Lord who had won the battle. As Joshua continues his farewell address in chapter 24, he reiterates this point by taking the people through their history. From Abraham, to the Exodus, to the battle against the Moabites and the Ammorties, the Lord had led them. As they entered the promised land, they had defeated all these nations, not through their sword or bow, but through the Lord.

Joshua reminded them that they had not earned the land they now lived in. Now the danger was that they would forget how they had received all this from God and would become complacent, forgetting Yahweh and turning to other Gods (Deut 6:12). But Joshua does not want them to forget.

Whom Will You Serve?

Keep the Law of Moses

Because the Lord had delivered the land to Israel, they now needed to give their full allegiance to Him, clinging to Him (23:8) and loving Him (23:11). Joshua reminds them in 23:6 to firmly keep the law, never turning to the right or the left.

This harkens back to the command God had given Joshua in the beginning of the book. Joshua's strength and courage would be dependent upon his faithfulness to the law of Moses. He was to not turn to the right or the left (1:7), and then he would find success.

Moses' book of the law was to become a center piece of Joshua's life. He was to mediate on, keeping it on the tip of his tongue. He was to lead from it and do all that it says (1:8). If he kept the law, he would find success.

Circumcision and Passover

Joshua led the nation in obedience of the law. This was done in a large scale fashion in chapter 5. Just after entering the Promised Land, and before battling Jericho, Joshua requires that the nation follow on two of the most important ceremonies of the Law: circumcision and Passover.

Here we find a fascinating fact: for forty years in the wilderness, Israel had not circumcised their sons (5:5). Why had they neglected such a fundamental sign of the Abrahamic covenant? We know from Exodus 4:24-26 that Moses had failed to circumcise his own son. Perhaps this is evidence that Moses failed to enforce this important covenantal sign with the people during their desert wanderings.

Moses, while the greatest leader in the history of Israel, had his own weak points which then would be translated to the nation. This is a truth of leadership. The weaknesses and failures of the leader will translate down to the followers. As Joshua assumes leadership he must rectify this, and make up for the deficiency of Moses. So also, any new leader must assess the failures of the past administrations and often correct those deficiencies as the first order of business.

With the circumcision complete, the people were ready to celebrate the Passover, and were also now ready to take possession of the Promised Land.

Choose This Day

But now that the Promised Land had been conquered, the need for diligent obedience to the law would be less obvious. As they rested in the land, their complacency would tempt them to abandon Yahweh and chase after other gods. As he is about to die, Joshua's biggest fear is that they would forsake the God who provided them the land, and begin serving other gods (23:7). This fear stems from their failure to completely drive out the nations. This remnant has left a great temptation. If Israel associate and intermarry with the people whom they failed to destroy according to the Lord's command, they will begin serving other gods, and then they will lose the land that they have just possessed (23:15-16).

So Joshua has an intervention with the nation. He confront them in chapter 24 and draws a line in the sand:

"Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. "If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." (Joshua 24:14-15)

The gauntlet has been laid down. Now Israel must choose sides. There is no middle ground. Joshua knows on which side he and his family is going to be. But each family must also decide and state their commitment.

The people respond: "far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord." He is the one who gave us this land. Of course we will serve the Lord (24:16-18). But Joshua knows better. They will fail God (24:19-20). He has predicted as much in 23:15-16. And when that happens they will be destroyed.

But the people insist. No, that won't happen. We will serve the Lord (24:21). So Joshua accepts their choice and tells them that to prove this, they must follow through. It appears that the Israelites have idols among them, even now. They are making this commitment at the same time they are holding onto their idols! So he demands of them: put away your idols (24:23).

Memorializing the Choice

So Joshua accepts their commitment, but then states that their bold commitment will serve as a witness against them (24:22). When they fall back into idolatry, the commitment they make on this day will serve to condemn them.

To remind them of this choice Joshua memorializes this commitment. Joshua has been good about memorials. In chapter 4, he took stones out of the Jordan River and erected memorials to God's miracle of crossing the Jordan. In chapter 8, in obedience to Moses in Deuteronomy 27, he erects the memorials to the law on Mt. Ebal.

Now Joshua erects a statue, and writes down their commitment in the book of the law of God. He puts a large stone and puts it under the oak tree outside the tabernacle in Shechem (24:26). This memorial is not just to remind them of their commitment, but to serve as a condemning witness against them when they fail (24:27).

Looking forward to the book of Judges, Israel indeed does fail. The book of Joshua would serve as a call to the generation entering the period of the Judges to stop heading down the path of destruction, and to look back at the stone under the oak. This book is a call to the people to look up at Mt. Ebal, to look at the memorials by the Jordan, to look at the altar erected by the tribes across the Jordan. They had made a commitment to Yahweh. The book of Joshua is call to forsake your idols and come back.

And so the choice remains for all of us. We must choose this day who are you going to serve. If we want to serve God, then it is not enough to just say that we will. We must give up your idols. We must quit holding onto those things which weigh us down. And when we make those choices, erect a memorial, stake out your commitment, and be strong and courageous, for the Lord will be with you wherever we go.

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