

# Old Testament Studies

## Joshua *(RVS Notes)*

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## Joshua: We Will Serve the Lord

**Introduction**—In the Hebrew canon, Joshua is included in the division of the Old Testament described as "The Prophets". This division includes the historical books (Joshua through 2 Kings, minus Ruth), as well as the writing prophets (Isaiah through Malachi, minus Daniel). Traditional Jewish scholarship distinguishes between the "Former Prophets", the historical books, and the "Latter Prophets", the writing prophets listed above.

The intent of the Former Prophets is to present an interpretative history of God's covenant dealings with the Jewish nation from the time of Moses' death until the Babylonian Captivity in 586 BC. Joshua begins this endeavor. It is a bridge book and a book of continuities, something akin to Acts in the New Testament. Acts bridges the reader from the gospel accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, to the epistles, which deal with the life and faith of the Church. Likewise, Joshua bridges the Pentateuch with the historical and prophetic books; the wilderness wanderings with the conquest and settlement of the land.

**Author and Date**—Joshua was the principal author of the book that bears his name, but the book was probably not put into its final form until early in the period of the united monarchy. What follows are the primary reasons for asserting that Joshua wrote this book:

- Certain parts of the book clearly assert Joshua wrote them (8:32; 24:26) or that what was written was at his command (18:8, 9).
- The author must have been an eyewitness of the events for which he gives such detailed accounts. Note how he describes himself as one of those who crossed the Jordan River (5:1, 6).
- The author was a contemporary of Rahab (6:25).
- The book was written before the time of David for Jerusalem is described as still in the hands of the Jebusites (15:63; 2 Sam 5:6-10).
- The book was written before the Twelfth Century BC since the Philistines, Israel's archenemy in the time of the Judges and in the early Kingdom period.

Three small portions must have been added to the book after Joshua's death:

- Othniel's capture of Kiriath-Sepher (15:13-19; Judges 1:11-15);
- Dan's migration to the north (19:47; Judges 18:1-31); and
- The account of Joshua's own death and burial (24:29-33).

Some scholars speculate that these details were inserted early in the time of the Judges by Eleazar or his son Phinehas (24:33), while others think that Samuel had a hand in the final version of the book.

The higher critical view of the authorship of Joshua is that the book represents the work of several writers. This understanding is encapsulated in what is called the JEPD theory (also known as the Graf-Wellhausen theory and the documentary hypothesis). Each letter stands for a source or period of the book's development. J stands for the Jehovah source, the oldest portions of the law and of the book of Joshua. E stands for the Elohim source; material that primarily used the name *Elohim* for God. P stands for the priestly documents, whose focus was cult ritual. D stands for the compilations of the so-called Deuteronomic school, whose concerns were legal in nature. The two main sources for Joshua are supposedly the J document (allegedly composed

around 850 BC) and the E document (allegedly composed around 750 BC). These documents were supposedly re-edited in the Seventh and Sixth Centuries BC before they took their final form in the middle of the Sixth Century BC.

### ***Historical and Geographical Background***

***Two Major Dating Systems***—Some archaeological data supports a date for Joshua's invasion of Palestine around 1250 BC. This would place the Exodus about 40 years earlier under the famous Pharaoh Rameses II. Other data suggests an earlier date, putting Joshua's invasion around 1400 BC. This would mean that the Exodus (often placed at 1446 BC) took place in the reign of Pharaoh Amenhotep II (1450-1423 BC) shortly after the death of the great conquering Pharaoh Thutmose III (1500-1450 BC), the so-called Napoleon of Egypt. Thutmose III was known to have made extensive use of slave labor (Israelites?) in his building projects.

The earlier date fits the biblical numbers better than the later one. In 1 Kings 6:1, the Exodus is dated 480 years prior to the commencement of the construction of the Temple in the fourth year of Solomon's reign, circa 967-966 BC. Also, in Judges 11:26, Jephthah indicates that Israel had been in control of certain parts of Canaan for 300 years. Since Jephthah lived around 1100 BC, this verse fits the early Exodus chronology quite nicely. However, many scholars think the later date better fits the archaeological findings.

***Egypt***—According to the chronology dictated by the early date for the Exodus (1446 BC), Joseph would have rose to power during the time of the Twelfth Dynasty in the Nineteenth Century BC. The new king that knew not Joseph, described in Exodus 1:8, would have been one of the Hyksos Pharaohs who dominated the Delta region from 1700-1550 BC. After the Hyksos were driven out, Egypt went into a period of unparalleled economic and political expansion under the imperialistic Eighteenth Dynasty. Israel's enslavement continued under this Dynasty and reached its low point under Thutmose III and Amenhotep II until God's great deliverance under Moses. Egypt's sway over Palestine mysteriously weakened in the reigns of Amenhotep III (1410-1372 BC) and Amenhotep IV (1380-1362 BC), better known to history as Akhenaton. Under these pharaohs, commonly known as the Amarna period in Egyptian history, Egypt's foreign policy reverted to its pre-Hyksos live and let live tone, rather than the aggressive, militaristic tone of the previous Pharaohs of the Eighteenth Dynasty. According to the early chronology, it was in this period that Joshua's conquest of Palestine took place.

***Palestine***—Racially, the land of Palestine was populated by a mixed group, which included the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and the Jebusites. Politically, the land was dominated by Egypt from the time of Thutmose III after that Pharaoh's victory at Megiddo in 1479 BC. Egyptian power held sway through the Fifteenth Century BC but waned late in that century, as Egypt mysteriously grew introverted during the "Amarna Age".

Religiously and morally, Palestine was a scene of a thoroughgoing syncretistic idolatry. The pantheon of gods they worshipped included the following:

- El—the supreme deity, a bloody and cruel tyrant of uncontrolled lust.
- Baal—El's son, the god of rain and vegetation, and the dominant deity of Canaanite fertility rites.
- Anath—sister of Baal, one of the female deities of sex and war, and one of the chief goddesses of cult prostitution which also involved child sacrifice.
- Ashtoreth and Asherah—consorts of Baal and the goddesses of sex and war.

- Molech and Milcom—Ammonite fertility gods.
- Chemosh -- Moabite fertility god.

These gods were the chief deities of cult practices of the day that involved sexual excess and violence. These cult practices reflected the vices of the people of the land who made deities in their own image and likeness.

The Late Bronze Age (1500-1200 BC) in Palestine was characterized by the destruction of many cities. This was due to the numerous Egyptian campaigns of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasty Pharaohs and to the campaigns of Joshua.

**Guiding Concepts**—The purpose of the book is to provide an authoritative account of God's faithfulness in leading His people into the Promised Land (12:43-45). The book's dominant theme is the enjoyment of God's blessings through obedient faith. Important subordinate themes include:

- The importance of the written Word of God (1:8; 8:32-36; 23:6-16; 24:26-27);
- The utter failure of human effort apart from divine directive (7:1ff; 9:1ff);
- The holiness of God and His judgment of sin.

**Unique Contributions and/or Problems:**

- Rahab's lie (2:1ff)—Though this Canaanite woman is portrayed as both a harlot and a liar, the New Testament judges her actions as works of faith (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25). Did God approve of her actions?
- Jordan crossing (4:1ff)—This miraculous water crossing confirmed Joshua's leadership (3:7), was a sign to Israel that God was dispossessing the peoples of the land and giving the land to Israel (3:10), and was a unique demonstration of the centrality of the Covenant to the success of the chosen people.
- Joshua meets his Commander (5:13-15)—The battle plan for Jericho was utterly ridiculous. But that was precisely the point. Obedient faith, not might of arms, was Israel's source of hope and power for victory.
- Joshua's Campaign of Annihilation (6:1-12:31)—The author makes clear that the extermination of the Canaanites was at the Lord's behest (6:2; 8:1-2; 10:8, 40, 42). This sovereign design is expressed in the divine hardening of the hearts of the Canaanites (11:20). He also points out the resolve of the native population to destroy the invading Israelites (9:1-2; 11:1-5). Many have questioned how this mission of slaughter can be reconciled with God's redemptive purposes? The standard reply to this question is twofold. First, the sins of the Canaanites were such as to demand exemplary punishment. God judges the peoples of the land for their debased religion and degenerate culture. Second, this is God's blessing on Israel because of His covenant promises and the nation's divine commission. What do you think of that reply? How do you feel about it?
- Achan's sin (7:1ff)—Does the severity of this bother you? Does it confirm Yahweh as a vicious, petty Old Testament tyrant? Most assuredly, this lesson was a drastic one, coming, as it did, at the beginning of Israel's conquest and occupation of Canaan. Israel was to remember that the land belonged to the Lord and that they possessed it as His stewards.
- Covenant renewals (8:30-35; 23:6-16; 24:25-28)—Why the big deal?

- The long day of Joshua (10:1 ff)—This is the most unusual of the supernatural interventions in the book. What is the nature of this day?
- Canaan as type—Once the spiritual dimension of the conquest and settlement of Canaan is understood, the symbolic and typological significance of the Promised Land can be easily grasped. In Christian hymnody and devotional literature, Canaan has long typified the rest of heavenly glory. Such typology should be used with caution. The early Church went to extremes in the typological use of the Old Testament. Yet this excess should not prevent us from developing the typological significance of the text when Scripture itself suggests it. The book of Hebrews draws parallels between Joshua and Jesus and between what Joshua accomplished for the nation and what Jesus accomplished for His people (Hebrews 4:8). The common theme is "rest", a rich theological term.
- Sin as corporate and personal—Joshua graphically illustrates the corporate dimension to sin (see the incident with Achan in Joshua 7 and the incident involving the unauthorized construction of an altar by the east bank tribes in Joshua 22). Moderns understand sin as purely a personal matter. Certainly, it is a personal matter. But Scripture presents a corporate dimension and consequence that is very sobering. Few books do that as vividly as Joshua.
- Divine sovereignty and human responsibility—We will see a rich interaction between these two concepts throughout the book of Joshua. God divinely brings about the conquest, yet the people are hardly passive in its execution. The Canaanites are divinely set for extermination, yet they richly deserve this grisly fate. We will puzzle over particular texts in this work precisely at the point of intersection between God's sovereign purposes and human responsibility.

## Summary Outline

Preparing	Spies	Jordan	Pillars of Stone	Circumcision; Commander	Central: Jericho & Ai	South: Gibeon; Summary	Northern Campaign	Kings List	East Bank	West Bank	Cities of Refuge; Levites	Altar of Witness	Charge to Leaders	Shechem Renewal
1	Invasion			5	6	Conquest		12	13 Distribution		21	22 Conditions		24
Preparation					Subjection				Possession			Covenant Charge		

Key Idea: Covenant Faithfulness

Key Verses: 21:43-45; 24:14-15

Key Chapter: 24

## ***Detailed Outline***

### **I. Invasion of the Land (1:1-5:15)**

- A. Commissioning of Joshua and Command to Israel to Prepare to Cross the Jordan River (1:1-18)
- B. Circumspection of the Land: Rahab and the Hebrew Spies (2:1-24)
- C. Crossing the Jordan River (3:1-17)
- D. Commemoration of the Jordan Crossing: Two Pillars of Stone (4:1-24)
- E. Circumcision and Celebration at Gilgal (5:1-12)
- F. Commander of the Lord's Army Appears to Joshua (5:13-15)

### **II. Conquest of the Land (6:1-12:24)**

- A. Central Campaign (6:1-8:35)
  - 1. Jericho's Walls Fall (6:1-27)
  - 2. Ai's Destruction (7:1-8:29)
    - a. Achan's Sin Causes Israel's Initial Defeat (7:1-26)
    - b. Israel's reengagement and the destruction of Ai (8:1-29)
  - 3. Covenant Renewal at Mounts Ebal and Gerizim (8:30-35)
- B. Southern Campaign (9:1-10:43)
  - 1. Gibeonites Deceive Israel into Making a Treaty with Them (9:1-27)
  - 2. Joshua Rescues Gibeon from the Amorite League (10:1-28)
  - 3. Southern Palestinian Cities and Regions Conquered by Joshua (10:29-43)
- C. Northern Campaign (11:1-23)
  - 1. Jabin of Hazor Organizes Northern League (11:1-6)
  - 2. Joshua's Victory at Waters of Merom (11:7-11)
  - 3. Northern Palestine Subdued by Joshua (11:12-23)
- D. Summary: List of Kings Defeated by Israel (12:1-24)
  - 1. Moses' Conquest of the East Bank (12:1-6)
  - 2. Joshua's Conquest of the West Bank (12:7-24)

### **III. Distribution of the Land (13:1-21:45)**

- A. Land Still to be Taken (13:1-7)
- B. Distribution of Land East of the Jordan (13:8-33)
  - 1. Description of the Area to be Assigned (13:8-13)
  - 2. Provision for the Levites (13:14)
  - 3. Reuben's Assignment (13:15-23)
  - 4. Gad's Assignment (13:24-28)
  - 5. Manasseh's East Bank Assignment (13:29-33)
- C. Distribution of Land West of the Jordan (14:1-19:51)
  - 1. Description of the Assignment Process (14:1-5)
  - 2. Caleb's Assignment (14:6-15)
  - 3. Judah's Assignment (15:1-63)
  - 4. Assignments to Joseph's Tribes (16:1-17:18)
  - 5. Assignments to Remaining Tribes (18:1-19:51)
- D. Assignments for Religious and Legal Purposes (20:1-21:45)
  - 1. Cities of Refuge Designated (20:1-9)
  - 2. Cities for the Levites Designated (21:1-45)

3. Summary of the Lord's Faithfulness in Providing for Israel (21:43-45)

#### **IV. Conditions for Staying in the Land (22:1-24:33)**

- A. Controversy Over an Altar of Witness (22:1-34)
  1. Joshua Dismisses and Blesses the East Bank Tribes (22:1-8)
  2. Construction of an Altar at Geliath Brings Threat of Civil War (22:9-12)
  3. Phinehas Mediates the Dispute Between the Tribes (22:13-34)
- B. Joshua's Charge to Israel's Leaders: Obedient Faithfulness (23:1-16)
- C. Covenant Renewal at Shechem (24:1-33)
  1. Joshua's Sermon: We Will Serve the Lord (24:1-24)
  2. Covenant Renewal (24:25-28)
  3. Death and Burial of Leaders in Canaan (24:29-33)

## Joshua Notes: We Will Serve the Lord

### I. Invasion of the Land (1:1-5:15)—

This opening part of the book encompasses the invasion of the land by the Israelites. It includes the commissioning of Joshua and the command to Israel to prepare to cross the Jordan River (1:1-18), the circumspection of the land and the account of Rahab and the Hebrew spies (2:1-24), the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River (3:1-7), the commemoration of the Jordan crossing (4:1-24), the circumcision of the Jewish males and the celebration at Gilgal (5:1-12), and the appearance to Joshua of the commander of the Lord's army (5:13-15).

#### A. Commissioning of Joshua and Command to Israel to Prepare to Cross the Jordan River (1:1-18)—

The Lord directs Joshua to take command upon the death of Moses and instructs him to obey the Word of God and to be strong and courageous (1:1-9). Joshua instructs his subordinates to get the people ready to move out (1:10-11) and then commands the tribes whose inheritance was to be on the east side of the Jordan to honor their agreement to help their brethren occupy their inheritance on the west bank (1:12-18).

**1:2-3**—Joshua had B-I-G shoes to fill. However, God's purposes do not change with changes in human leadership. It was time for Joshua to step up. As much as we should support and honor the Lord's servants who lead us, none of them are indispensable.

To cross the Jordan was a formidable task, as anyone acquainted with the local geography would know. In the topography of the Holy Land, the Jordan has a separating, not a connecting, function. It runs through a deep gorge into the Dead Sea, which lies 1,286 feet below sea level. The river itself runs through a wider trough called the Ghor, within which there is a narrow depression more than one hundred feet deep, which forms the actual river bottom. In addition, the actual descent of the river valley is significantly enhanced at places by mountains on both sides. The slopes are steep and sudden, sometimes forming huge precipices. To top this picture off, Joshua 3:15 informs us that the river was at a swollen condition at the time of the crossing.

**1:6-9**—This passage emphasizes the centrality of God's Word, which Joshua was to obey as he took his place as Moses' successor. It was not ecclesiastical succession which vested Joshua with authority. The Word was authoritative and Joshua's obedience to that was crucial. Joshua was to know, talk about and discuss, mediate upon, and heed the Word of the Lord.

Note too that Joshua is encouraged to be strong and courageous by God (1:6,7, 9) and by the people he was to lead (1:18). Being out in front of the pack can sometimes be a very lonely place to be. We ought to pray for leaders in our day to be strong and courageous as well.

**1:8**—When the text speaks of the book of the law, we tend to think of a bound book with a cover and pages. The term used in the text can refer to any document, from an inscription to a scroll, from papyrus to clay tablets to stone inscriptions.

This text is the theme verse of the book. "Meditate" literally means to "mutter," referring to a custom of muttering while studying or reflecting. When people continually mutter God's Word to themselves, they are constantly thinking about it.

**1:10-18**—Joshua acts decisively to take charge (1:10-11), reminds the tribes having their inheritance on the east bank of their commitment to their west bank brethren (1:12-15; Num. 32:1ff; Deut. 32:12-20), and receives the allegiance of the people and their encouragement to be strong and courageous (1:16-18). Joshua was reluctant at first but stepped up as leader when it became necessary (see Num.). 27:12ff; Deut. 31:1-8 for his commissioning by Moses).

**Segment queries:**

- Have you ever had a mentor? What did he/she mean to you? What was it like to be on your own?
- What do we learn about the state and authority of Scripture at the time of Israel's entry into the Promised Land (1:7-8)?

**B. Circumspection of the Land: Rahab and the Hebrew Spies (2:1-24)**—Joshua sends spies to Jericho (2:1), who are hidden by Rahab (2:2-7) and cut a deal with her to escape capture (2:8-21a), eventually escaping to the Hebrew camp with a positive report of the situation (2:21b-24). Note the upshot. Rahab was a Gentile, an Amorite, and a prostitute, but she was spared (6:25) and became accepted as a full member of the chosen nation. She married Salmon, a man from the tribe of Judah, and bore Boaz, who later married Ruth. Thus, Rahab figures into the line of David, the greatest of Israel's kings (see Ruth 4:18-22). Her salvation was no second-class experience. She was brought into the nation and even into Messiah's lineage. The New Testament commends her for her faith (see Jas. 2:25).

Jericho was a strategic site. It was located by an oasis (now er-Riba) about five miles west of the Jordan River. It guarded the strategic passageway between the Jordan valley and the central hill country. The city was typical of the political situation in Canaan at that time. Canaan was not a united political entity. It was composed of many small city-states, like Jericho. These usually included a fortified city as well as small villages and towns in the surrounding region. Each city state had its own king and army.

**2:1-7**—Joshua sends spies to scope out the situation in Jericho. They hide out in a Rahab's house. Note the coincidence of divine providence and human responsibility. God will deliver the city into their hands, yet Joshua continues to exercise due diligence to scope out the situation.

**2:8-11**—Rahab confirms what the first chapter of Joshua stated repeatedly (1:2-3, 11, 15), that the Lord had given the land to the Israelites and her words echo the truth of Exodus 15:14-16 and 23:27. The Canaanites had lost heart (literally, "been seized with anxiety"). Dread goes before the Lord's people as they march into their possessions (see 5:1).

**2:14-21a**—It is best to understand 2:15 as proleptic (the representation of a future act as if it is presently accomplished) summary of the ultimate action whereby the spies escaped from the city. The discussion described in the passage (2:16-21a) happened before they managed to escape, rather than while the men were being lowered from the house and descending the wall.

**2:17-20**—Believers have gone over the edge with typology with this text. Some Church fathers considered the red cord that Rahab used as a sign whereby she and her family would be spared from death, to be a type of the blood of Christ and Rahab herself understood as a symbol of the Church. Typological connections between the testaments should be handled with care and be rooted in the Bible's own discussion not in our sanctified, extrapolating imaginations.

**Segment queries:**

- Do you think Rahab's lie was justified under the circumstances? Is this a situation where the Bible is approving of "situation ethics"? Given her occupation and her obvious lie, what in this story builds Rahab's reputation as a woman of faith (see Heb. 11:31; Jas 2:25)?
- How would you react to Rahab if you were a Hebrew at this time? Would you be cynical? Jealous? Suspicious of this precedent? Joyous on her behalf? Inspired by her faith?

**C. Crossing the Jordan River (3:1-17)**—Joshua 3:1-5:12 records three closely related events, the crossing of the Jordan (3:1ff), the erection of the memorial of the crossing (4:1ff), and the renewal of the covenant at Gilgal (5:1ff). Chapter 3 unfolds along the following lines: 3:1-6 deals with the preparation for the miracle of the crossing, and 3:7-17 records the miracle. The section begins with God's command to Joshua followed by an indication of its transmittal to the people and its subsequent execution by the people. In reading this narrative as well as others in Joshua, it is good to keep in mind Hebrew narrative technique. Often the narrator will start with the conclusion of the matter and then resume the matter previously concluded to round out the story.

The Jordan crossing focuses on the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark symbolized God's power and rule, His holiness, justice, and mercy. In graphic detail, the author shows how God went before His people into the land He promised them.

**3:4**—To impress upon the people the sanctity of the moment, they were instructed to keep their distance (2,000 cubits) from the Ark. Thus, in the crossing of the Jordan, the people were still on the outer bank of the river when the feet of the priests touched the water's edge.

**3:13**—The water stood up in a single heap. The language used to describe this miracle is reminiscent of that used to describe the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus 15:8. That is not an accident! The two events were to be closely associated in the minds of the people. God led them out of Egypt under Moses and now was leading them into the Promised Land under Joshua.

**3:14-16a**—The water piled up "at Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan", probably to be identified with Damiyeh, nineteen miles upstream from Jericho. This would have resulted in a very wide stretch of river bottom suitable for a multitude of people to cross.

**3:17**—Compare this account with the one concerning the crossing of the Red Sea (see Exodus 14:21-22, 29).

**Segment queries:**

- Why were the people to wait until they saw the Ark before they moved out and then told to stay so far away from the Ark?
- Why did God have the people cross the Jordan at the river's flood stage? Why not wait for a more convenient time?
- The people had never been in this type of situation before. Are you at a point in your life where you have never been this way before? Do you need a guide? A sign from God? A support group?

**D. Commemoration of the Jordan Crossing: Two Pillars of Stone (4:1-24)**—Joshua 4:1-14 relates the specific details of the crossing and 4:15-24 record the erection of the memorial of the crossing. The purpose of the memorial is threefold:

- the Israelites themselves would need the memorial in times of discouragement;
- subsequent generations would need it through eras of forgetfulness;
- other people would need it as evidence of its testimony to the true God.

**4:12-13**—Joshua 1:14 seems to indicate that all the men of the east bank tribes were to cross over the Jordan with their west bank brethren to assist in the conquest of the land. However, this text indicates that their number was confined to forty thousand, well below the total number of fighting men in those tribes, as recorded in Numbers 26.

The number “forty thousand” is problematic. The word translated “thousand” can sometimes refer to a military division or unit of various size. The estimated population of Jericho at the time was 1,500 to 2,000. It is possible, even probable, that forty divisions or units of Israelite soldiers were less than forty thousand men.

**4:14**—The parallel between this crossing and that of the Red Sea and between Joshua and Moses is explicitly developed. As Moses was deeply revered, so too would Joshua be all the days of his life. Joshua is accepted as God’s accredited leader, just as Moses had been.

**4:19**—The miracle of the crossing occurred on the tenth day of the first month, precisely the time when the Passover was celebrated (see Ex. 12:3). This further links the two crossings in the minds of the people and prepares them for the renewal of the covenant at Gilgal that immediately follows this chapter (see 5:1ff).

**Segment queries:**

- So, what is with the pillars of stone? What spiritual memorials have you constructed for your own life? What experience with God must you tell your family and others about?
- Why do you think the function of the Ark of the Covenant is so dramatized in this narrative?

**4:24**—The author relates the purpose of this miracle of the crossing and the memorials to commemorate it:

- To impress the power of the God of Israel on the people of Canaan; and
- To confirm Israel in its reverence for God.

**E. Circumcision and Celebration at Gilgal (5:1-12)**—Circumcision was the sign of the covenant between Yahweh and His people. Its positioning here in the narrative underlines the message that it is Yahweh who is giving the people the land He promised them and that covenant faithfulness was the ticket to staying in the land and prospering. It also is another occasion to underline the parallel between Joshua and Moses. As Moses was reminded of the need to circumcise one of his sons prior to entering upon his leadership role, so Joshua receives the command to circumcise all those who had not received the rite while wandering the desert.

Note too that the mass circumcision of Israel’s fighting men would have made the people extraordinarily vulnerable to the Canaanites at the very beginning of the invasion. In the pragmatic sense, this was the most impractical way to begin a military campaign. Indeed, this was the first of many “impractical” commands given to the people during the conquest.

**5:1**—The author reiterates this repeatedly. The effect of the crossing (and of all the Lord’s mighty acts on behalf of Israel) was for the Canaanites to be stricken with a loss of heart and a sinking feeling in the pits of their stomachs. The heart in the Old Testament referred to the seat of the intellect, will, and emotion of people. A failure of heart indicates a failure of spirit, a collapse of inner fortitude.

**5:10-12**—Circumcision was a necessary precondition to participate in the Passover feast that the Israelites celebrated while at Gilgal. The desert wanderings are now definitely over. The manna stops and the people begin to eat their food from the Promised Land.

**Segment queries:**

- Why did the Lord command Joshua to circumcise the Israelites at this time and not before? What is the “reproach of Egypt” that the Lord rolled away from His people (5:9)?
- How do the events of 5:10-12 force Israel to grow up spiritually? Has God had to wean you away from something or someone? How has that helped you to become more responsible?

**F. Commander of the Lord's Army Appears to Joshua (5:13-15)**—This seems to be a theophany, a pre-Bethlehem appearance of the Lord (compare Gen. 18:1ff; 32:24ff; Ex. 3:2ff). Note Joshua’s question and the Lord’s response. Is God on my side? That is decidedly not the question! Am I on His side? That is the point of the matter!

We Christians tend to marshal God for our programs or confessional distinctives rather than simply to follow Him where He leads. And to outsiders, to other stripes of Christians, our God seems to speak in a partisan, prickly, primrose fashion rather than as the exalted Ruler of all. It is not that denominational loyalty and strong beliefs about theology, worship, or church government are irrelevant. It is that our God is so much bigger than that. We should look askance at people who are more enthusiastic about their distinctive beliefs than about whom they believe. God is not about the business of proving us right about our distinctives, but in getting us rightly engaged with His Kingdom concerns.

**Segment query:**

- What effect does the appearance of the Lord have on Joshua? Compare it to the Lord’s appearance to Moses at the burning bush. What similarities do you notice? What differences?

## **II. Conquest of the Land (6:1-12:24)**

**A. Central Campaign (6:1-8:35)**—Palestine is a hilly country and the major passage through it was a connecting road running north and south through the highest portions of the land. Joshua’s strategy was to drive west from the Jordan valley to the high road, thus dividing the opposition and then move against his enemies to the south before destroying his foes to the north. This plan is essentially the outline of Joshua 6-11. Note that the British Field Marshal Allenby used this same plan in his successful liberation of Palestine in World War I.

**1. Jericho's Walls Fall (6:1-27)**—While strategy employed by Joshua in initiating the overall campaign was masterful, the tactics in seizing Jericho would give any military officer pause. March around the city once a day for six days? Then march around the city seven times on the seventh day before delivering your knockout blow—a blast from the rams’ horns? Seriously! You must be kidding!

The settlement of Jericho is one of the oldest in Canaan. Archaeologists have done extensive excavations of the site. Some archaeologists think that what they call “city 4” in the excavations may have been the city overthrown at the time of Joshua. City 4 was surrounded by a stone revetment wall about fifteen feet high, topped by a mudbrick wall of another eight feet. That supported a rampart that sloped up to second wall of mudbrick. All that to say, the walls of Jericho were substantial.

This segment details the plan (6:2-5), its execution (6:6-21), the destruction of the city and the rescue of Rahab (6:22-25), and the pronouncement of a curse on any subsequent rebuilding of Jericho and the enhancement of Joshua’s fame (6:26-27). Obviously, while the Israelites using their heads was not irrelevant in this campaign, as we shall see, faith and obedience had clear priority. So too with us. In demolishing alien strongholds in our lives, we should not be afraid to think and to think creatively. But faith and obedience is key.

The cities of Palestine were not particularly large in Joshua’s day. It is estimated that Jericho may have been covered five or six acres. If this estimate is even close to accurate, the head of the column of Hebrew marchers would have long returned to camp while the others were still marching. In addition, seven times around the city on the seventh day would not have exhausted anyone. The marches on the seventh day were to conclude with a loud shout (*teru’a*), a battle cry raised to intimidate enemies and encourage friendly forces (see Num. 23:21). Did the Lord’s people have their own version of a battle cry? The shout out for the Lord God, if you will.

**6:15-19**—This instruction is key as the story unfolds. “Devoted to the Lord” conveys the idea of a total and irrevocable giving of things and persons to the Lord, usually by destroying them. The objects and people involved are subject to utter destruction (see Deut. 13:15-16).

**6:25**—Rahab's agreement with the spies is honored. She and her family are rescued from the flames.

**6:26-27**—A curse is pronounced on the person who builds (that is, fortifies or renders strong) Jericho again. This curse was not meant for those who merely used the site for habitation (see Josh. 18:21; Jud. 3:13; 2 Sam. 10:5). What was prohibited was the rebuilding of a fortified town (see 1 Ki. 16:34).

**2. Ai's Destruction (7:1-8:29)**—The account of Ai’s destruction unfolds in three parts: the sin that causes Israel’s initial defeat at Ai and the uncovering and punishment of the culprit (7:1-26), the subsequent capture and destruction of the city (8:1-29), and the covenant renewal at Mounts Ebal and Gerizim (8:30-35).

**Achan's Sin Causes Israel's Initial Defeat (7:1-26)**—An offense occurs with respect to the things “devoted to the Lord”. Achan takes a robe from Babylonia and some silver and gold from the booty captured at Jericho and hides them in his tent. This offense causes the defeat of the entire nation. There is a principle of solidarity employed here. Although only one person committed the offense, the whole community is regarded as responsible for the transgression. The individual functions within the context of the larger community and can rob the community of purity and its set apart state that it ought to possess before the Lord. This is sober stuff to think about!

The purpose of this chapter is clear. It is the Lord who gives His people the land and demands that the people remain loyal to the covenant to which the land is linked. Loyalty to the covenant,

not superiority of arms, is the focal point of the conquest. That message will be reiterated in the covenant renewal ceremony on Mounts Ebal and Gerizim in 8:30-35.

**7:2-9**—The defeat at Ai is described. Ai was a minor city, and this defeat could dismiss any ideas of the invincibility of the Hebrew invasion that seems to have paralyzed the native population. The natives could rally and surround the Israelites with a much larger and more sophisticated force and annihilate them. Joshua and the Israelite leaders are quite undone and quite afraid. The same words that Rahab used to describe the demoralized population of Jericho (2:9, 11; cf. 5:1) are used of Israel's reaction to the defeat at Ai (7:5).

**7:10-15**—The Lord is brusque with the fear Joshua displays. He clearly states the cause of the defeat, the nature of the sin involved, and what is to be done about it. Prosperity and success promised to Israel (1:8) was based on covenant loyalty. The rules relating to things “devoted to the Lord” belong to the law of the covenant (see Deut. 20:10-18). The Lord means to prevent contamination of His people with the practices of the Canaanites.

**7:19-21**—The fatherly tone of 7:19 seems incredible considering what follows. Note the temptation-sin cycle described by Achan in 7:21—he saw, coveted, took, and hid. The same three verbs “I saw,” “I coveted,” and “I took” are found in the story of the Fall (Gen. 3:16). Dissatisfaction with not possessing the captured booty gave birth to disobedience rather than devotion. Covetousness rooted in materialism (the gold and the silver) and worldliness (coveting the chic robe from Babylon) drove the theft. Sin's foul progeny, deception and hiding, followed in turn.

#### **Achan and sin's cycle:**

- Dissatisfaction—He wanted to improve his situation. The wandering years had to be an irksome gig. Yes, God fed them miraculously and their clothes and shoes did not wear out. But the same diet and the same threads for forty years? Promises. Promises.
- Desire and coveting—A chic robe, gold, and silver. The plunder consisted of five or six pounds of silver and a pound and a quarter of gold. That represents what a typical worker would earn in a lifetime. Achan was thinking—now, we are talking! Just pinch a little coin and my family can live high on the hog.
- Disobedience—The opportunity presented itself. No one will really miss this. Hide the stuff, be unobtrusive, and lie overtly, if necessary.
- Death—Achan suffers sin's results immediately.

James 1:13-15 delineates a similar cycle, a progression from temptation to desire to sin to death:

- Desire (1:14)—Evil desire (*epithumia* = lust) first attracting our attention. This word implies that these are lusts, the “gotta have” kinds of urges. These desires can be our servants or our masters.
- Deception (1:14)—Dragged away (*exelkomenos*) persuades us to approach what is forbidden and then lures us (*deleazomenos*) by means of bait to yield to the temptation. The bait not only attracts us, but it disguises the yielding to the desire that will eventually produce sorrow and punishment. The bait keeps us from seeing the consequences of our sin.
- Disobedience (1:15)—We move from emotions (desire) to the intellect (deception), to the will. Christian living is a matter of will, not feeling.
- Death (1:15)—Sin eventually yields death. It may take a while, but its result is inevitable. Whenever you face temptation, get your eyes off the bait and look to the consequence of

sin.

**Segment queries:**

- Why was God angry with all Israel for the actions of one individual or at most one family? Is that fair? Why is Achan's sin so serious?
- Are you surprised by Joshua's reaction to the defeat at Ai? He does not seem to be "strong and courageous" in this account.
- What happens in our lives when we sin and try to hide it. See Psalm 32:3-5 for David's description of his mental and spiritual state when he attempted to cover up his sin with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah.

**Israel's reengagement and the destruction of Ai (8:1-29)**—The Lord encourages Joshua and gives him a plan that utilizes the first defeat to accomplish the ultimate victory (8:1-9). The plan works to perfection and to the total undoing of the defenders of Ai (8:10-23). The Israelites follow up with the complete destruction of the city (8:24-29).

**8:3-13**—There are two approaches to understanding these verses. The first takes them as a description of Joshua sending an ambush one day ahead of the movement of the main force from Gilgal to the vicinity of Ai. Joshua 8:12-13 is understood as a recapitulation of the activity. The other regards 8:3-9 as a proleptic description (the representation of a future act or development as if it is presently accomplished) of the placing of the ambush, which did not actually happen until the main force moved from Gilgal (8:10-13). Given the considerable number of troops that would have to remain hidden for an entire day, the second approach seems preferable. The ambush was laid west of Ai between Bethel and Ai, a region of large rocks and hilly terrain suitable for hiding. Once again, the numbers listed are problematic for the same reason delineated in the comment on 4:12-13.

**8:14-17**—The reference to Bethel is mystifying. The king of Bethel is named as one of the kings conquered by Joshua (12:16), but there is no reference to Bethel's capture anywhere in the book, unless its capture is implicitly understood here. But if Bethel came to Ai's rescue, the city's troops would have had to go right past where Joshua's men were lying in wait to ambush the city.

**Segment queries:**

- Note how the plan related in 8:3-8 utilizes the previous defeat to garner the victory. Have you recently suffered a setback in your life that God can build on? Have you ever been a winner the second time around? What made the difference?
- Note the attitude of the king of Ai and his soldiers at the beginning of the battle and how this attitude led to their undoing.

**3. Covenant Renewal at Mounts Ebal and Gerizim (8:30-35)**—This remarkable ceremony emphasizes the importance of remaining faithful to the covenant. Mounts Ebal and Gerizim and the land between them form a natural amphitheater. The acoustic qualities of the site are excellent. In unambiguous language and symbolism, the people are told that their right to possess the land hinged on God's covenant claims on them and their fidelity to those claims. Everything has been carried out as instructed in Deuteronomy 27. There are blessings for obedience and curses for neglect or willful disobedience. It must have been a memorable service!

**Segment query:**

- Read Deuteronomy 27:1-26 to put Joshua 8:30-35 in its context. In this passage, Israel is taking time to renew and regain their perspective concerning God's will for them. Do you take time occasionally to either maintain or regain your perspective on God's will for your life? What has been most helpful to you in this regard?

**B. Southern Campaign (9:1-10:43)**—This segment records how the Gibeonites deceived Israel into making a treaty with them (9:1-27), how Israel rescued the Gibeonites from the Ammonite league (10:1-28), and summarizes the southern Palestinian cities and regions conquered by Joshua at this time (10:29-43).

**1. Gibeonites Deceive Israel into Making a Treaty with Them (9:1-27)**—The Gibeonites use a ruse to lure the Israelites into a treaty. Their appeal was to Israel's pride, humanity's ever-present Achilles heel. Israel was moving out for the Lord, and everybody knew about it. The appeal was so very subtle and entrapping. The Hebrews acted independently, making the treaty without not consulting the Lord.

**9:1-2**—The need for unity in resisting the Hebrew onslaught finally takes root among the Canaanite kings. While these verses speak of a grand coalition, in truth that alliance never came into being. Chapters 10 and 11 make it clear that the southern kings and the northern kings never combined their forces as one might expect from the enumeration of geographical areas in 9:1.

**9:3-6**—In contrast with the other Canaanite people, the Gibeonites seek a treaty. Scholars are still debating the precise location of Gibeon. Some identify it with modern ej-Jib, a site approximately eight miles northwest of Jerusalem. Others follow the ancient list of Palestinian cities compiled by the church historian, Eusebius, which placed Gibeon four miles west of Bethel.

**9:7-15**—Joshua and the Israelites fail to make a thorough inquiry into the Gibeonite request, they fail to consult the Lord, and they are lulled into making an ill-advised treaty. Their error was to walk by their own sight and counsel, assuming that reality consists in what one can immediately and materially sense. The story is a rebuke to believers operating independently of the Lord and His counsel.

**9:16ff**—It took Israel just three days to discover their error and a lifetime to live with it. Some mistakes are shoulder-shruggers. Oh well, I will not buy that cereal again. Other choices affect us to the end of our days. How important it is to walk with the Lord through all the choices of our lives.

The Gibeonites proved to be loyal servants after their deception. They attended to the altar of the Lord in their service. Note that years later, God's wrath would fall on Israel when King Saul violated this treaty with the Gibeonites (see 2 Sam. 21:1-9).

It is an interesting and informative exercise to write a short history of the Gibeonites in the Old Testament utilizing the following texts: Joshua 9-10; 2 Samuel 2:12-16; 20:8; 21:10-14; 1 Kings 3:4-15; 1 Chronicles 16:39-42; 2 Chronicles 1:3-13; Nehemiah 3:7.

**9:26**—Indeed, they were deliberately deceived, but Israel stood by their word. Joshua prevents the Israelites from killing the Gibeonites for their deception. The Gibeonites served as forced labor (woodcutters and water carriers) at Israel's cultic center. The sacrificial fires had to be

maintained, and the purifying waters constantly replenished. The menial labor of the work they were assigned gave them a permanent lower status in the servitude they had chosen.

### Segment queries:

- What was the ruse the Gibeonites used to trick Israel? Why do you suppose it worked? Have you ever made an important decision without consulting the Lord?
- If you were a Gibeonite, would you have fought for your freedom or submitted to slavery to save your life?

**2. Joshua Rescues Gibeon from the Amorite League (10:1-28)**—A league of Amorite kings march on Gibeon to teach them a lesson for submitting voluntarily to Israel. Gibeon appeals to the Israelites (10:1-6). Joshua responds immediately, marching all night from Gilgal, and surprises the Amorites (10:7-11). Israel wins a smashing victory aided by an exceptionally long day allowing the Israelites to pursue their fleeing enemies (10:12-16). The Amorite kings are captured and executed, and Joshua uses the incident to encourage the Israelites to believe in the Lord and continue with the conquest (10:17-28).

**10:1-6**—Will Israel stand by its treaty obligations when the treaty was deceitfully obtained? It is one thing not to take your revenge (9:26). However, to come to the rescue of your deceiver due to a deal arrived at in such an underhanded manner seems a little much. But that is exactly what Israel does. This alliance of significant cities and the onslaught on Gibeon is the first serious attempt at combined resistance by the Canaanites. The ensuing battle is a crucial test of the Lord's faithfulness to His people in terms of His promises in 1:3, 5.

**10:7-11**—Joshua responds resolutely and swiftly. An all-night march (covering over twenty miles) wins for Israel the element of surprise. The Lord adds to the confusion and panic of the enemy and slows their flight from the battle with a hailstorm. The occurrence of hailstorms as divine punishment in conquest accounts was common. This account stresses both resolute human activity and God's supernatural intervention. A proper view of God's sovereignty permits neither our passive resignation from our responsibilities nor an extensive sense of our own burden. Divine intervention slew more of the enemy than Israel did (10:11), but the martial vigor and courage of Joshua and Israel is in no way belittled.

So, what is with the sun stopping in the middle of the sky? This is the third and last great miracle in the book of Joshua (the crossing of the Jordan and the walls of Jericho falling are the other two) and perhaps the most bewildering. What Joshua bids the sun to do is to "stand still" or "be still." Different explanations have been proposed:

- The words are poetical. God refreshed Joshua's men enabling them to do a day's fighting in much less than a day.
- A miracle of refraction of the sun's rays made it seem as if the sun stood still.
- Joshua did not really ask the sun to "stand still," but to "be still." He was not asking for a longer day, but for release from the great heat of the day.
- The sun appeared to stop. An omnipotent God can do what He wants, regardless of whether we can explain it or not. What we have here is the author's phenomenological description of God's divine intervention allowing Israel to follow up its victory with significant effect. The sun seemed to stop in the middle of the sky until Israel cleaned up on her enemies. This is not a scientific explanation of what happened. However, it is an accurate description of what appeared to the human eye on this most unusual day.

**10:18-19**—Joshua traps the Amorite kings in a cave, securing the site from escape. He wanted to prevent the kings from reaching their cities where they could rally a defense, but in a way as not to interrupt the Israelite pursuit of the routed armies of the southern coalition. Disorganized, fleeing enemy forces presented a strategic military opportunity.

**10:25-27**—Joshua uses the execution of the Amorite kings to encourage Israel to be strong and courageous, the same words spoken to Joshua himself at the beginning of the book (1:6-7, 9, 18). A grisly occasion for a heavenly word!

### Segment queries:

- Imagine yourself as a reporter covering the battle recorded in chapter 10. What would your headline be? Would that give your reader the true upshot of what occurred?
- Are you doing something now that you wish God would give you more time to accomplish? If more time is not available, would more workers help? How can you motivate others to share your vision?

**3. Southern Palestinian Cities and Regions Conquered by Joshua (10:29-43)**—The rest of the southern campaign is summarized. This account reads like an afterthought, but the campaign must have taken a good deal of time. Note too that the use of hyperbole in describing the total nature of the destruction was common in conquest accounts. Subsequent campaigns and problems delineated in the book of Judges underline this reality.

**10:40-42**—This is a sketchy summary of an extensive campaign. To go and capture Makkedah, Libnah, Lachish, Eglon, Hebron, and Debir is not a lunch-time errand. Indeed, the hill country, the Negev, and the western foothills and mountain slopes were all taken at this time (10:40). The hill country is the central mountain range principally in the territory of Judah and Ephraim. The Negev is the desert in southern Palestine. The western foothills are the area between the hill country of Judah and the coastal plain. The mountain slopes refer to the steep descent to the Jordan valley. The author states the reason for Israel's success. The God of Israel had fought for them.

**C. Northern Campaign (11:1-23)**—Joshua 9 opens with a reference to the determination of Canaan's kings to offer a united resistance to Israel. Chapter 10 presents Joshua's victory over the coalition of southern kings. Chapter 11 depicts Israel's exploits in the north (11:1-15) before concluding with a more general summary of the conquest (11:16-23).

There is a close parallel between Joshua 10 and 11. In each chapter, a coalition of native rulers seeks to thwart the Israelite invasion. Both chapters speak of divine intervention on behalf of Israel, albeit the account in Joshua 10 is far more spectacular. Each chapter details an initial decisive battle followed by further campaigns to establish a more permanent foothold in the respective regions. Finally, each account speaks of a primary instigator of the opposition coalition—the king of Jerusalem in chapter 10 and the king of Hazor in chapter 11.

**1. Jabin of Hazor Organizes Northern League (11:1-6)**—Since the story of the battle by Barak and Deborah in Judges 4 also refers to Jabin of Hazor, some Bible students have attempted to identify Judges 4 and Joshua 11 as two accounts of the same battle. They think that the only battle fought in the north occurred in Deborah's day, but over the course of time the victory won under her leadership was ascribed to Joshua because of his prominence in the conquest of the land.

However, the two battle accounts are not that similar and the Scripture clearly presents them as two different events, separated by a considerable number of years. The name Jabin may have been a hereditary title adopted by successive kings of Hazor. In addition, Joshua's destruction of the city presents no real impediment to a second battle at the site since Hazor's strategic location would have prompted a rebuilding of the city.

**11:4-6**—This is a vivid description of a powerful threat posed to Israel by the Canaanite forces. They had an enormous number of troops along with numerous horses and chariots. Chariots were the tanks of the ancient battlefield. From approximately 1500 B.C. and following, chariotry became the essential, often the principal, arm of military might in the ancient Near East.

**11:6**—The Israelites were to hamstring the horses and burn the captured chariots. They were to eliminate or negate as much as possible the Canaanite technological advantage in weaponry. The horses could not be mercifully killed, and Israel certainly did not want their enemies to have continued use of them.

#### Segment query:

- How did the northern kings respond when they heard of Joshua's victories in the south? Why do you think Joshua was afraid (11:6) even after his earlier victories?

**2. Joshua's Victory at Waters of Merom (11:7-11)**—Again, as in the south, Joshua employs speed and surprise. I suspect that Joshua moved quickly to choose the ground to fight on and negate the overwhelming advantage the Canaanites had with their chariots. Perhaps the site of the battle, designated the Waters of Merom, made chariot maneuvering difficult or impossible. The Lord's favor was indeed the reason for Israel's victory, but the Israelites fought skillfully and smart. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility join hands.

**3. Northern Palestine Subdued by Joshua (11:12-23)**—After the decisive initial battle, the northern region was subdued by Israel. While the brevity of the account creates the impression of a lightning quick campaign, this conquest took a long time (11:18).

**11:12-20**—Joshua 11:12-15 parallels 10:29-39 and 11:16-20 parallels 10:40-42. The text at 11:20 has bothered Bible students, myself included. The destruction of the Canaanites was due to God's hardening of them, but this in no way exonerates the Canaanites. Other ways were open to them as exhibited by the Gibeonites. Furthermore, the vileness and coarseness of their culture must not be overlooked or soft-pedaled. Ultimately, the entire course of events serves to carry out the Lord's command to Moses that Israel was to show no mercy to their Canaanite foes (see Deut. 20:16). It was a severe mercy to safeguard the nation from Canaanite idolatry (see Deut. 7:2-4; 12:1-4).

**11:21-22**—These verses speak of Joshua wiping out the Anakim. However, Joshua 14:13-15 and 15:13-19 mention the Anakim later and 15:14 credits Caleb with driving out three sons of Anak from Hebron.

#### Segment query:

- What explanation is provided for why the northern cities were entirely destroyed (11:12-15)? How would you defend this to a skeptic?

**D. Summary: List of Kings Defeated by Israel (12:1-24)**—This segment summarizes the conquests of Moses on the East Bank (12:1-6) and those of Joshua on the West Bank (12:7-24).

**1. Moses' Conquest of the East Bank (12:1-6)**—The structure of Joshua 12 parallels Moses' exploits with Joshua's achievements. These parallels are developed throughout the book, presenting Joshua as a worthy successor to the great lawgiver.

**2. Joshua's Conquest of the West Bank (12:7-24)**—Not all these kings make the storyline of Joshua 6-11. The Lord had enabled the people of Israel to do what they could not have imagined doing several years earlier. These lists function as another monument, a memorial to God's gracious dealings with His people in bringing them into their inheritance.

These lists are also an archaeological playground. Enormous effort has been expended in locating these cities and identifying them with various archaeological sites. In our time, archaeology has been a fruitful field of study and has contributed much, confirming the essential historical and geographical accuracy of the biblical account.

#### Segment queries:

- What is the purpose of the king list of Joshua 12? Is Joshua just bragging, as was common among ancient rulers, or was there another purpose for making this list?
- If you were to compose your own victory list, what would it look like? What spiritual strongholds have you taken with the Lord's enablement?

**Observation: Qualities of Leadership**—This is a good place to pause and consider Joshua's military victories and note the qualities of leadership that he displayed.

- *Joshua did not let short-term gains deter him from long-term objectives*—A good illustration of this occurs in Joshua 10:16ff. The five Amorite kings that led the southern coalition were discovered hiding in a cave. The immediate execution and elimination of the coalition leadership would have been an advantage. But the chief task was to finish the battle, defeat the southern coalition army, and secure strategic military sites. Joshua has the cave sealed and after the victory is complete, returns to deal with the kings. Often we are confronted with good, short-term opportunities that turn us aside from our chief tasks.
- *Joshua understood the people's need for encouragement*—He takes occasions to exhort the people to be strong and courageous on victorious occasions (10:25), just as they had exhorted him when he first took the reins of leadership (1:18). We all need regular and dramatic encouragement to persevere in our chief tasks.
- *Joshua pursued the campaign in a step-by-step progression, avoiding shortcuts*—You can see this in his follow-up to decisive victories in the southern campaign (10:29ff) and the northern campaign (11:21ff). Those activities took time, possibly as long as seven years.
- *Joshua did not allow his mistakes to unsettle or defeat him*—There were serious missteps early on. Joshua attacks Ai with a smaller force on the advice of his spies without consulting the Lord. Israel suffered an ignominious defeat. He was deceived by the ruse of the Gibeonites, making a decision based on his immediate observations without consulting the Lord. Could the tempter have accused him of failure and ruin and how useless he was to the Lord? Joshua did not wallow in discouragement, but confessed and put the setbacks behind him and did the next thing. "Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14).

- *Joshua believed God implicitly and obeyed God completely*—Joshua firmly expected God to do exactly what He promised. Note a statement about Joshua in 11:15: “As the Lord commended Moses, so Moses commanded Joshua, and Joshua did it; he left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses.”

**III. Distribution of the Land (13:1-21:45)**—This segment of the text delineates the land still to be taken (3:1-7), describes the distribution of the land east of the Jordan (13:8-33), and then sets forth the distribution of the land west of the Jordan (14:1-19:51). The segment concludes by designating the cities of refuge (20:1-9), the cities throughout the land given to the Levites (21:1-45), before summarizing the Lord’s faithfulness in providing for Israel (21:43-45).

**A. Land Still to be Taken (13:1-7)**—Throughout Joshua and Judges, there is a tension between an essentially completed conquest and an incomplete occupation of the land. Joshua’s campaigns broke the back of the native resistance in the Promised Land, but possessing the land was a huge endeavor with many things left to do. The text unfolds the particulars of this task in 13:2-5.

I cannot leave this observation without pointing out its spiritual parallels. Ours is a completed salvation. We rest in the all-sufficient work of the Lord Jesus and are heirs with Him of glory. Yet how many of us live like the princes and princesses which we are? How many of us live beneath our privileges and fail to possess our spiritual inheritance? We are in need of the kind of exhortation given in this text, to live up to our birthright, to take back the fertile valleys of spiritually abundant living, and to seize the strongholds that have been stumbling blocks to us in the past. This section of the text relating to Israel possessing their inheritance can be dull reading of a surveyor’s geographical postings or an encouraging exhortation to press on to the high call of God in the Lord Jesus (Phil. 3:13-14) and truly be who we are in Him. Let us come to the anvil of the Spirit and allow Him to make real in us subjectively what the Lord Jesus did for us objectively.

**13:2-5**—The territory that remained to be conquered consisted of three regions:

- Philistia, including its five major cities and the regions to the south of them;
- Phoenician coastal zone;
- Lebanon mountain zone east of Syria.

**B. Distribution of Land East of the Jordan (13:8-33)**—This segment has a straightforward structure. Joshua 13:8-13 surveys the Transjordan area. Then the text describes the provision for the Levites (13:14) and the assignments made to Reuben (13:15-23), Gad (13:24-28, and the half tribe of Manasseh (13:29-33).

**1. Description of the Area to be Assigned (13:8-13)**

**2. Provision for the Levites (13:14)**

**3. Reuben’s Assignment (13:15-23)**

**13:22**—The author records Balaam’s death. Balaam was the seer that Balak, king of Moab, sought to hire to curse Israel (Num. 22). Balaam’s donkey had more sense than the seer. However, Balaam did contrive the seduction of Israelite men by Moabite women that resulted in a serious plague breaking out in the Israelite camp. He paid for his involvement in that episode with his life.

**4. Gad's Assignment (13:24-28)**

**5. Manasseh's East Bank Assignment (13:29-33)**

**C. Distribution of Land West of the Jordan (14:1-19:51)**—Joshua 14-19 contains a description of the allotment of the land west of the Jordan. Chapter 14 is introductory to this segment in two ways. First, Joshua 14:1-5 sets forth the allotment procedures, the number of tribes concerned, and the authorization for this endeavor. Second, Joshua 14:6-15 describes Caleb's outstanding faith in claiming an inheritance inhabited by formidable foes. This story is meant to convey the type of faith and covenant loyalty required for Israel to possess their inheritance.

**1. Description of the Assignment Process (14:1-5)**—The amount of text devoted to the description of the territory of each of the tribes and the order of presentation correspond to the importance of each tribe in Israel's history.

**2. Caleb's Assignment (14:6-15)**—Caleb and Joshua were the two faithful spies who believed God was able to give Israel the land of Canaan (Num. 14:6-9, 30). The inheritance of these two men frames the story of the dividing of the west bank territory between the tribes, Caleb's appearing in this text and Joshua's at the end (19:49-50).

**14:10-12**—The relationship between the account of Joshua's victory over the Anakim (11:21-22), Caleb's desire to drive the Anakim from the land expressed in this text, and the story of Judges 1 is a matter of continuing debate. Perhaps Joshua's defeat of the Anakim was not as decisive as 11:21-22 would seem to signify. Some of the Anakim may have escaped and lived elsewhere for a while. This would account for their early resurgence.

**3. Judah's Assignment (15:1-63)**—Chapter 15, dealing with Judah's territorial allotment, consists of four parts:

- a description of Judah's boundaries (15:1-12);
- a short account of the victories of Caleb and Othniel (15:13-19);
- a list of cities in Judah's domain (15:20-62); and
- a concluding note of warning concerning Judah's inability to drive the Jebusites out of Jerusalem (15:63).

**15:13-19**—Note the interaction of Joshua 11:21-22; 14:6-15; 15:13-19; and Judges 1:10-15. Since Caleb made his request for Hebron at the advanced age of eighty-five, the conquest of the area must have taken place soon after his request was granted. That would mean that the action described in Judges 1;10-15 took place during Joshua's lifetime.

**15:63**—Note Judges 1:8 and 21, which indicates that Judah did dislodge the Jebusites from Jerusalem (1:8) but that Benjamin could not dislodge them (1:21 seems to indicate that the conquest in 1:8 was very temporary in nature). Also note that David had to conquer Jerusalem again early in his reign (2 Sam. 5:6-10) and that conquest turned out to be permanent in nature. This suggests the very fluid nature of the Israelite occupation of the land.

**4. Assignments to Joseph's Tribes (16:1-17:18)**—These chapters open with a description of the southern boundary of the entire territory allotted to Joseph tribes on the west bank (16:1-4), followed by a delineation of Ephraim's territorial inheritance (16:5-10), Manasseh's west bank assignment (17:1-13), and the incident of Ephraim and Manasseh contesting their assignments (17:14-18).

**17:14-18**—Note how different the tone of this discussion is from that of Caleb’s claim in 14:6ff. This does not augur well for what will happen when the Canaanites dig in and earnestly resist Israelite occupation of the land. As in Judges 1:19, the use of iron chariots by the enemy is the reason given for the Israelites’ failure to completely conquer areas of Canaan.

**5. Assignments to Remaining Tribes (18:1-19:51)**—This segment begins with a survey of the remaining land to be distributed (18:1-10), describes the assignments to Benjamin (18:11-28), Simeon (19:1-9), Zebulun (19:10-16), Issachar (19:17-23), Asher (19:24-31), Naphtali (19:32-39), Dan (19:40-48, see Judges 18), and finally the assignment to Joshua and a summary of the process (19:49-51).

**18:1**—Shiloh emerged very early as a cultic center for the Israelites. There are indications of pre-monarchic religious activity at Shiloh in the era of the Judges (Jud. 21:19-23) and in the time of the monarchy prior to the construction of the temple in Jerusalem (see Ps. 78:60; Jer. 7:12-15).

**18:11-28**—Note Benjamin’s city list. Jericho, Bethel, and Gibeon are all included in this list. These cities figured significantly in the early stages of Joshua’s campaign (see Josh. 6-10).

**19:1-9**—Simeon loses its tribal identity over the course of Israel’s history. The tribe is not given an independent portion of land, but instead its inheritance falls within the allotment to Judah. Judah and Simeon act closely together in later historical accounts (see Jud. 1:3). A comparison of the lists in Numbers 1 and 26 reveal declining numbers for Simeon and 1 Chronicles 4:24-43 details Simeon’s decreasing size. Consider Genesis 49:5-7 in this regard.

**19:40-48; see Jud. 18:1-31**—The Danites were under continual pressure from the Amorites, who forced them from the hill country (see Jud. 1:34). Dan later migrated north, a sordid story told in detail in Judges 18. Either they could not conquer their territory or, after a brief tenure, were forced from their possessions by the Amorites. At any rate, the tribes of Joseph reconquered the Danites’ original allotment (see Jud. 1:34-36).

**19:49-51**—The land assigned to Joshua and a summary of the distribution process concludes this segment. As pointed out above in 14:6-15, the territory assigned to the two faithful spies who believed God was able to give Israel the land of Canaan (Num. 14:6-9, 30) bookends the west bank distribution account among the tribes.

**D. Assignments for Religious and Legal Purposes (20:1-21:45)**—There were two classes of special cities, cities of refuge (six in number and discussed in Joshua 20) and the Levite cities (forty-eight in number and discussed in Joshua 21).

**1. Cities of Refuge Designated (20:1-9)**—See also Exodus 21:12-13; Numbers 35; Deuteronomy 4:41-43; 19:1ff. There were six of these cities, three on the east bank (Bezer, Ramoth Gilead, and Golan) and three on the west bank (Kedesh, Shechem, and Hebron). The purpose of these cities was to counteract the “avenger of blood”, the principle of revenge so prevalent in ancient Near East culture. The existence of these cities—

- emphasize the value of every human being;
- begin a movement to a genuinely common system of justice since Joshua 20:9 indicates that these cities were open to foreigners too;
- have been seen as a type of Christ’s atoning work for sinners, in that they were easily accessible to those in need, were always open, available to all races, and were the only legal hope against the avenger of blood.

**20:9**—Asylum in the cities of refuge was offered to any alien within the borders of Israel as well to the Israelites. This provision is based on the many years of Israel being aliens in Egypt and a testimony to God’s concern for all humanity.

**2. Cities for the Levites Designated (21:1-45)**— This segment is composed of a summary of the assignment (21:1-8), before delineating the assignments to the Kohathites (21:9-26), the Gershonites (21:27-33), and the Merarites (21:34-42).

The tribe of Levi was divided into three branches: the Gershonites, the Kohathites, and the Merarites. Each branch received cities, the location of which was determined by lot. Note that the six cities of refuge were also Levite cities. The Levites were the priests and teachers of Israel. This scheme distributed them throughout the land so they could teach the people and be examples of faithful living. That intention makes the two stories that conclude the book of Judges particularly painful (see Jud. 17-21). Both accounts involved Levites involved in completely sordid episodes and demonstrated that many Levites of the age lost sight of their reason to be.

**3. Summary of the Lord's Faithfulness in Providing for Israel (21:43-45)**—This passage sheds light on the purpose of the book. The text of Joshua intends to highlight the faithfulness of God who keeps His covenant promises given to Israel’s forefathers. Joshua 21:43 refers primarily to the distribution of the land in Joshua 13-21, Joshua 21:44 reflects on the actual conquests discussed in Joshua 1-12, and Joshua 21:45 places the entire book within the perspective of God’s faithfulness.

The book sees the conquest as both complete (see 1:23; 10:40-42; 12:7-24; 21:43-45) and incomplete (see 13:2-6; 14:12; 17:12-18; 18:2; 23:5, 7, 12). God fulfills His promise to give them the entire land and yet their enjoyment and occupation of it depends on their loyalty to Yahweh’s covenant and their faith and vigorous obedience in possessing their inheritance.

**IV. Conditions for Staying in the Land (22:1-24:33)**—Three sermons close the book of Joshua (22:1ff; 23:1ff; 24:1ff). Joshua preaches as a “dying man to dying people”, waxing eloquent to the eastern tribes for their continued fidelity (22:1-8), to Israel’s leaders urging them to obedient faithfulness (23:1ff), and to the people gathered at Shechem, exhorting them to obey and serve the Lord (24:1ff). He consistently emphasizes covenant fidelity and obedience as the conditions for staying in the land and experiencing the full blessing of God.

**A. Controversy Over an Altar of Witness (22:1-34)**—After Joshua dismisses and blesses the east bank tribes (22:1-8), they construct an altar at Geliath which is misunderstood by the rest of Israel and threatens a civil war among the tribes (22:9-12). This potential catastrophe is averted by the mediation of Phinehas (22:13-34).

**1. Joshua Dismisses and Blesses the East Bank Tribes (22:1-8)**—The theme of this text is the need to acknowledge and serve God in peace as well as war, when things seem secure as well as when they are up for grabs. Joshua’s address focuses on the concern for Israel’s unity, expressed in 1:12-18 relating to the east bank tribes’ participation in the west bank conquest. They had fulfilled their initial pledge, but the covenant bonds in Yahweh between the tribes must bridge the geographical distance that now separate them.

**2. Construction of an Altar at Geliath Brings Threat of Civil War (22:9-12)**—The eastern tribes build an altar at Geliath, an act misinterpreted by the west bank tribes which almost caused a civil war among the Israelites. The east bank tribes meant the altar as a memorial

to remind the Israelites on both the west and east banks of their essential unity (22:21ff). The west bank tribes initially interpreted the construction of the altar as an immediate departure from covenant loyalty by their east bank comrades.

**3. Phinehas Mediates the Dispute Between the Tribes (22:13-34)**—Some commentators see this episode as a wonderful example of the preeminent importance of doctrine and the necessity and courage to stand true to it. They commend the delegation from the west bank for their forthrightness in describing their concerns (22:16-18), their willingness to pay the price to reclaim their “lost” brethren (22:19), and their ability to convince their east bank brethren of the weight of their concerns, if not their accuracy (22:22-24). However, it is also an example of how easy it is for true believers to misunderstand each other, jump to hasty conclusions, and in their zeal move precipitously toward conflict.

The east bank tribes erected an unauthorized altar, admittedly a deep concern given the instruction in Deuteronomy 12, prohibiting unauthorized places of worship. Their motive in doing so was from misdirected piety. Would the west bank tribes make a superior claim to the God of the covenant by reason of their proximate location to a worship center? Was not the Jordan River an ever-present barrier? Would it not be a terrible thing for one part of the covenant nation to tell the other part that they had no share or an inferior share in the Lord?

The precise doctrinal concern was in the proper understanding of Deuteronomy 12, instructing Israel not to worship like the natives of the land, but in an authorized fashion. Deuteronomy 12 did not insist on one central sanctuary, although some may have understood it in that fashion. The chief concern behind Deuteronomy 12 was to set the site of Yahweh worship in sharp distinction to the plurality of places the Canaanites used for their fertility rites. There were a plurality of places of Yahweh worship prior to the reforms of Josiah in the seventh century B.C., without condemnation. What Deuteronomy 12 prohibited was the arbitrary choice of cult worship places without divine authorization (precisely what the east bank tribes did, albeit with good motives).

Note the west bank tribes’ assumptions and approach. They did not start by asking the east bank tribes what they were doing or thinking, but by accusing them of immediate apostasy of the worst order, as in the incident of Peor in Numbers 25, or in individual apostasy with terrible national consequence as in the incident of Achan in Joshua 7. Admittedly, having the two sides meet and talk about their differences rather than in persisting in denunciation based on misunderstanding beats other incidents of this type in church history. However, the tenor of the discussion did not need to be accusatory in the first instance.

**22:21-24**—The vivid report of this sincere reaction of the east bank tribes is intended to leave a deep impression on the reader. Both accused and accuser stand together in condemning idolatrous worship.

**22:34**—The name of the altar—A Witness Between Us that the Lord is God—would answer an inquiry as to its intended purpose. It was not meant to be a novel and unauthorized way of worshiping the Lord but rather as a reminder to all, made within the context of the covenant, of the exclusive worship demanded by Yahweh.

**B. Joshua's Charge to Israel's Leaders: Obedient Faithfulness (23:1-16)**—This is Joshua’s farewell message to Israel’s leaders, contrasting God’s blessing as the reward for covenant faithfulness (23:1-11) and His judgment as the consequence for unfaithfulness (23:12-

16). There is significant similarity between Joshua 23 and Joshua 24. Both chapters exhort the readers to remain faithful to the God of the covenant. Chapter 23 has three distinct exhortations to this effect (23:6-8, 9-13, and 14-16). Joshua addresses a more limited assembly in Joshua 23, than the one in Joshua 24. The location of the two assemblies might have differed as well, Joshua 23 at Shiloh (see 18:1; 21:2; 22:1-9) and Joshua 24 at Shechem (see 24:1).

**C. Covenant Renewal at Shechem (24:1-33)**—Many commentators have claimed to detect various elements of ancient suzerainty treaties, dating from the second and first millennia B.C., in this chapter. These treaties usually followed a fixed format, including the following elements—

- Preamble (24:2?);
- Historical prologue (24:2-13?);
- Stipulations and response (24:14-25?);
- Deposition of the text of the treaty (24:26?) along with a public reading;
- Witness to the treaty (24:22, 27?);
- Curses and blessings (24:19-20?).

This is an interesting observation as to the form this covenant renewal took, without shedding much light on the impact of this covenant renewal on the people. There are several covenant renewal ceremonies recorded in the Old Testament text (see Ex. 24:1-8; Josh. 24; 2 Ki. 23:1-3, 21-22; and Neh. 8:5-9).

This segment unfolds with Joshua's sermon. He provides a recitation of Israel's history (24:1-13) and then exhorts the people to serve the Lord who respond affirmatively (24:14-24). This is followed by the covenant renewal itself (24:25-28) and then the report of the burial of Joshua, Joseph, and Eleazar in the Promised Land (24:29-33).

### 1. Joshua's Sermon: We Will Serve the Lord (24:1-24)

**24:1-13**—Joshua's review of redemptive history is instructive. He puts God right in the middle of things. That God acts in space and time is clearly stated and understood as essential in the life of faith. History is not seen as primarily a series of moral or immoral choices, but as the stage upon which a sovereign God puts His plan and purpose into operation.

**24:14**—The fear of the Lord sums up the religious demeanor expected of the people (see Deut. 4:10; 6:2, 13, 24). The fear of the Lord is an attitude of awe and filial reverence rendered sincerely and faithfully and expressed with true-hearted simplicity. Such reverence and awe was to be the wellspring of exclusive and devoted service to Yahweh.

**24:19**—"Rebellion and sins" translate two different Hebrew words for sin. The more common expression (*het*) designates missing the mark of the righteous demands of God's law. "Rebellion" (*pesa*) expresses a willful insurrection against God.

### 2. Covenant Renewal (24:25-28)

**3. Death and Burial of Leaders in Canaan (24:29-33)**—The burials of Joshua, Joseph, and Eleazar are recorded. Joshua was instrumental in Israel possessing the Promised Land. Joseph looked forward in faith to the fulfillment of God's promise to His people. Eleazar helped distribute the land among the tribes.

Note how the report of the death and burial of Joshua parallels that of Moses in Deuteronomy 34. This is consistent with many parallels between Joshua and Moses developed in this book—the

appearance of a mysterious figure at the beginning of their respective ministries; the crossing of the Jordan reflecting that of the Red Sea; the respect with which the two leaders were held by the people; and the bestowing of the honorary title of the servant of the Lord on each man.

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