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JOSHUA

*The land promise to Abraham is fulfilled*

SETTING

Joshua leads Israel into the Promised Land (c. 1405-1370 BC)

KEY VERSE

*"So the Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their ancestors, and they took possession of it and settled there."*

21:43

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## Introduction

The main theme of this book is that God is faithful and fulfills His promise to provide the Israelites with a land. The book starts with God repeating the promise that they will inherit the land (1:1-9), and the fulfillment is mentioned in both 11:23 and 21:43-45. This divides the book into three parts:

* Chapters 1-12: The country is captured, and the kings are taken.
* Chapters 13-21: The land is distributed. The tribes themselves must drive the people out of their areas.
* Ch 22-24: "Epilogue". Joshua's speech and establishment of the covenant.

In chapter 12, it seems like they have taken the whole land, but there is still a lot of land left in chapter 13, which can be a bit confusing. But the land is "taken" in chapter 12 because all the kings listed in that chapter have been overcome. Israel has thus gained dominion in the country, and in chapters 13-21, it is the tribes' task to drive the people out of the areas they have been assigned.

Finally, there are three chapters where the people renew the covenant. As Moses did in Deuteronomy, Joshua also speaks to the people as if they were present at Mount Sinai. And like Moses, he encourages them to choose God:

*"Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."* (24:14-15)

The people answer three times that they will serve the Lord, and they do. This generation is perhaps the best in many hundreds of years. Right after Joshua’s death and we enter the Book of Judges, the situation becomes completely different.

Another important theme in the book of Joshua is the people's unity and faithfulness to God. It comes down hard on things that can destroy unity and their relationship with God. The book also brings out many parallels between Moses and Joshua to show the continuity between these two as leaders of God's people.

**Jesus in Joshua:**

Jesus and Joshua are the same name: "Yeshua", and the land is a picture of salvation (Heb 4:8). Joshua and the promised land thus point toward salvation in Jesus. The book of Hebrews says that Joshua got them into the land, but not really into the rest. The final rest that the promised land pointed toward comes with Jesus.

All the wars were God's judgment on sin and pointed out that Jesus will judge the world one day.

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| **The Introduction (1:1-9)** | **Themes in the book** |
| v. 2: *“…you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them”* | Main theme: God is faithful and fulfills his promises  The people's unity and faithfulness to God  Parallels between Moses and Joshua  God's reassurances  God is the judge of all nations |
| v. 3: *“I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.”* |
| v. 5: *“As I was with Moses, so I will be with you”* |
| v. 6: *“Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.”* |
| vv. 7-8: *“Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.”* |
| v. 9: *“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”* |

### The land is captured (Chapters 1-12)

Ch. 1-5: Preparations (1 month)

The conquest itself (about 7 years). A general takeover where 31 kings were captured, but many Canaanites remain.

Ch. 6-8: Central parts are taken (Jericho and Ai)

Ch. 9-10: Southern areas taken (Mackedah, Libnah, Lachish, Eglon, Hebron, Debir)

Ch. 11-12: Northern areas are taken (Hasor, etc.)

### The land is distributed (Chapters 13-21, approx. 8 years)

The tribes themselves must drive the people out of their areas. More details complement chapters 6-12.

### Epilogue (Chapters 22-24)

Joshua's speech. The people renew the covenant. Joshua urges them to serve God and not the idols.

## What has been told about Joshua previously in the Bible?

Ex. 17:8-16 Led the war against the Amalekites and won.

Ex. 24:13 Was with Moses up on the mountain

Ex. 32:17 Was on the mountain with Moses and not at the golden calf feast.

Ex. 33:11 Used to stay in the Tabernacle.

Num. 11:28 Asked Moses to stop those who were prophesying in the camp.

*“Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke with him [Moses], and he took some of the power of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied—but did not do so again. However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out to the tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp. A young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses’ aide since youth, spoke up and said, “Moses, my lord, stop them!” But Moses replied, “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!”* Num 11:24-29

Num. 13-14 One of the 12 scouts and one of two who had faith in God.

Num. 26:65, 32:12 One of two from the first generation who were allowed to enter the land.

Num. 27:18-22 A man in whom is the spirit, chosen as a new leader.

Num. 32:28, 34:17 Assigned to divide the land among the tribes.

Deut. 1:38, 3:21 Encouragement to Joshua for the tasks that lay ahead of him.

Deut. 31 Appointed as the new leader.

Deut. 34:9 Filled with the spirit of wisdom, and the people listened to him.

Rahab shows faith in the God of Israel (the Bible's first confession of faith). Based on what she has heard about the events in Exodus and Numbers, she turns away from the gods of her people and realizes that "the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below." (2:11)

A prelude to the salvation of the Gentiles, which is the goal of the whole story, including the story in Joshua.

*"By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient."* Heb 11:31

*"In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?"* James 2:25

*"Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab"* Matthew 1:5a

## Chapter 2

Rahab and all the other Canaanites responded to the same message (2:10). All feared the God of Israel (2:9, 5:1). Rahab responded by turning to God, while the others chose to resist (2:3, 6:1, 7:4-5, 9:1-2, 10:1-5, 11:1-5). The Gibeonites chose to *"resorted to a ruse"* (9:4).

Those who believed in God were saved. (= the gospel)

The same three responses to the gospel: turn to God, resist, or "peaceful coexistence”.

## Chapter 3

A repetition of the miracle at the Red Sea for the new generation. Shows continuity with Moses and reminds the Canaanites that it is this same God who is coming now (2:8-11, 5:1):

*"Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof and said to them, “I know that the Lord has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below."* 2:8-11

*"Now when all the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and all the Canaanite kings along the coast heard how the Lord had dried up the Jordan before the Israelites until they had crossed over, their hearts melted in fear and they no longer had the courage to face the Israelites."* Jos 5:1

## Chapter 4

"Twelve" is mentioned 5 times and emphasizes unity. The people fear Joshua as they had feared Moses (v. 14).

## Chapter 5

Parallels with Moses:

* Both caused their enemies to fear (v. 1, Exodus 15:14-16)
* Both performed circumcision before a task (vv. 2-9, Exodus 4:24-26)
* Both celebrated Easter as part of the journey towards the land (vv. 10-12, Exodus 12)
* Both took off their shoes before the Lord (vv. 13-15, Exodus 3:5)

## The meeting with the leader of the Lord's army (5:13-15)

**Two surprising answers:**

*“Are you for us or for our enemies?”*

*“Neither,” he replied, “but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.”*

*“What message does my Lord have for his servant?”*

*“Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.”*

*"It would be wrong to refer to the brutal military stories in Joshua and at the same time overlook these keys in the narrative of how they should be read."* John Dickson

## Chapters 6-11

The conquest took a long time (11:18), and only four selected battles are described.

1. Jericho (Ch. 6)
2. Ai (7:1 - 8:29)

The center of this part is found in 8:30-35. The law was read out to all the people as a reminder of what this was really about.

1. The coalition in the south (Ch. 10)
2. The coalition in the north (Ch. 11)

## Chapter 6: Jericho

The oldest city in Canaan (from 9000 BC). A symbol of the Canaanite’s power. Its fall symbolized that the whole land would be given to Israel. Appears to have been only 225 x 80 m. Approximately 600 meters to walk around according to *The OT World* by Martin Noth (1966).

"The plunder belongs to the conqueror"; therefore, "*The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the Lord.*" (6:17). (Heb.: *"herem"*)

The curse in 6:26 is fulfilled in 1 Kings 16:34.

*"At that time Joshua pronounced this solemn oath: “Cursed before the Lord is the one who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho: “At the cost of his firstborn son he will lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest he will set up its gates.”"* 6:26

*"In Ahab’s time, Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. He laid its foundations at the cost of his firstborn son Abiram, and he set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, in accordance with the word of the Lord spoken by Joshua son of Nun."* 1 Kings 16:34

## Chapter 7: Achan

*“But the Israelites were unfaithful in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Karmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them.”* 7:1

Achan *"was faithless and abused the forbidden goods"* (7:1) as forbidden in 6:18-19, he *"was unfaithful in regard to the devoted things"* (22:20).

*“But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord and must go into his treasury.”* 6:18-19

This was a sin, and he broke the covenant (7:11). This involves the entire people collectively.

*"Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions."* 7:11

We see a typical pattern of how one falls into sin:

saw- well - coveted - took (7:21) – The same pattern as in Genesis 3:6 and 2 Sam 11:2-4

*"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her* *husband, who was with her, and he ate it."* Genesis 3:6

*"One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, “She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.” Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness.) Then she went back home."* 2 Sam 11:2-4

Achan calls it *"the plunder"* (v. 21), and he does not see it as forbidden. He saw it as something he had earned, not something that God won. Shows that he has no respect for and trust in God. Nor does he admit anything until he is exposed. Shows no remorse until he can't get away.

Collective thinking: The family is also punished. They may have known about it and said nothing. Physical death in the OT does not necessarily mean eternal punishment in hell.

*"Physical death as a punishment for sin has a prominent place in the OT. This shows God's displeasure with sin. Conclusions about the eternal fate of individuals who were punished in this way should not be drawn too quickly."* M. H. Woudstra

The valley of Akor (vv. 24, 26) got its name from this event (Akor: "*misfortune"*, a pun on Achan)

Parallels with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5): They steal from God and act deceitfully - and die on the spot. Two critical moments in history: the conquest of the land and the "conquest of the world" (the spread of the gospel).

Whoever does not trust God will not be allowed to live. (= the gospel)

## Chapters 9-10: Southern Canaan is taken

Ch. 9: Gibeon sneaks into a peace pact

Ch. 10: Five Amorite kings unite and attack Gibeon because of chapters 6-9.

Causes Israel to take the southern part of the land (10:40-42)

## Did the sun and moon really stand still in 10:13-14?

v. 12: Gibeon was to the east and Ajjalon to the west → suggests that the sun was rising and the moon was setting. This happened during full moon. (Bible Background Comments)

1. **The Earth stopped rotating.** Certainly no astronomical evidence that this has happened. One often thinks that this happened in the evening and that Joshua was asking for more time. It is a strange time to ask for this if it happens in the morning.
2. **The sun "delayed going down".** A refraction of light that extended daylight. Nothing in the text points to this. Also, if it was morning, it was an odd time.
3. **The sunlight was blocked.** *"Stood still"* can be translated as "was silent/mute". A solar eclipse? An early morning hailstorm (vv. 9, 11)? But the moon "stopped". The parallelism suggests that we are talking about movement. No solar eclipse fits with this period. Nothing in the text points to this.
4. **Joshua asks for a sign, an unusual juxtaposition of sun and moon, which the Amorites will take as a bad sign.** Similar expressions were used about reading signs in the sky.
5. **Figurative expression.** God made the sun and the moon fight for Israel in the same way as the stars in Judges 5:20, or as when the sun and moon stood still in awe of God in Hab 3:11, or as rivers and mountains who cheer and clap in Ps 98:8.

*"From the heavens the stars fought, from their courses they fought against Sisera."* Judges 5:20

*"Sun and moon stood still in the heavens at the glint of your flying arrows, at the lightning of your flashing spear."* Hab 3:11

**About 4 and 5:**

*"Before a whole day was over"* sounds like something else. (Some believe this should be translated *"as when the day has come to an end"*.)

v. 14 is then taken to mean that the incredible thing is that God listened to a man, not necessarily that the earth stopped rotating. A possible parallel with Moses (Deuteronomy 34:10)

*"Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face"* Deuteronomy 34:10

## Chapters 11-12: Northern Canaan is taken

Hasor: Large, fortified city; 20,000-40,000 inhabitants. The most important city in the north (11:10).

The king of Hazor forms a coalition with the kings of the north against Israel.

11:16-23: New update, a summary of the entire conquest.

## Chapters 13-21

13:1-7a: Introduction

13:7b-33: The tribes east of the Jordan (half of Manasseh, Reuben, and Gad) who received territories in the Book of Numbers.

Ch. 14-19: The rest of the tribes (including Caleb's part)

Ch. 20-21: Levi

## Chapters 13-21: The land is distributed

13:1-6: It seems that Israel managed to capture the mountain areas while the Canaanites remained in the lowlands because Israel became discouraged because of the iron chariots (17:16, Judges 1:19).

17:12, 16: The Canaanites settled in Ephraim and Manasseh.

18:1-3: The tabernacle is set up in Shiloh (Ephraim), quite centrally in the country (cf. Numbers 1-10). The land was now subdued but not yet taken over (13:1-5).

## Epilogue: Chapters 22-24

Ch. 22: The misunderstanding about the altar at the east of the Jordan (a witness, not for sacrifices)

**Ch. 23: Joshua's speech**

v. 5: Still people who must be driven out.

vv. 6-16: The key and the only way: Keep the law, stick to God, and do not mix with these peoples and their gods. Pointing forward to the Judges where the next generation fails to drive out the peoples and does not stick to God. Worst case: Lose the country. (→ The Books of Kings)

v. 14: “Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed”, although people still live there.

**Chapter 24: Covenant renewal (based on the structure of a covenant document)**

vv. 1-2: Introduction: "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says:" (v. 2)

vv. 2-13: Historical prologue

vv. 14-15: Covenant provisions

vv. 19-20: Warnings against breaking the covenant

vv. 22, 27: Witnesses

v. 26: Location of the document

## Moses → Joshua

God promised to be with both (Exodus 3 — Josh 1)

Both led Israel through water (Exodus 14 — Josh 3)

Both took off their shoes in God's presence (Exodus 3 — Josh 5)

Both interceded for the people when they sinned (Exodus 32 (++) — Josh 7)

Both occupied land and distributed it (Numbers 32/Josh 12:1-6 — Josh 14:1-5)

Both blessed the people (Exodus 39:43/ Leviticus 9:23 — Josh 22:6-7)

Both are mediators for the old covenant (Josh 24)

## Jesus in Joshua

Joshua and Jesus have the same name. Joshua "carried" Jesus' name at the head of the army. A deep meaning in that it was Joshua, and not Moses, who led the people into the land and distributed it to them as an inheritance.

The land is used as a picture of salvation (Heb 4:8). The rest Jesus gave supersedes the rest Joshua gave. Joshua gave them a temporary inheritance, while Jesus gives us an eternal inheritance.

The wars were God's judgment on sin and pointed out that Jesus would judge the world one day. The nations are judged by Joshua so that the blessing of Jesus can come to all nations (Genesis 12:3) by Israel being preserved as God's people until Jesus comes from them.

## What does this book tell us?

The way to true success is obedience to God. What does this book say about what this entails?

God is the judge of all nations, and the wars point to the time when Jesus will judge the living and the dead. Is this a distant thought for you? Why/why not?

The people's unity and faithfulness to God. Unity among God's people is still very important (John 17:20-23). When we have fellowship with God, we also have fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7). There is a connection between unity and closeness to God. Where do we stand and what can be done?

*"But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."* (24:15) Idols in our lives can be wealth, success, pleasure, or reputation. How can we choose to serve the Lord and not these “idols”?