

Joshua

Joshua, the first of the twelve historical books (Joshua - Esther), forges a link between the Pentateuch and the remainder of Israel's history. Through three military campaigns involving more than thirty enemy armies, the people of Israel learn an invaluable lesson under Joshua's capable leadership: victory comes through faith in God and obedience to His Word, rather than military might or numerical superiority.

The first half of Joshua (chapters 1-12) describe the seven-year conquest of the land; the second half (chapters 13-24) chronicles the partitioning and settlement of the land among the twelve tribes.

INTRODUCTION

The theme of Joshua is Israel's possession of the Promised Land and enjoyment of God's blessings through obedient faith. Joshua's historical purpose is to document the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites under Joshua's leadership.

Theologically, Joshua teaches that victory and blessing come through obedience and trust in God. Active faith leads to obedience which in turn brings blessing. God required the people to attempt the impossible in submission to His directions before He made it possible for them to succeed. The book emphasizes God's covenant faithfulness to His promises regarding a land for Israel, and God's holiness in bringing judgment upon the immoral Canaanites.

The title of this book is appropriately named after its central figure, Joshua. His original name is *Hoshea*, "salvation" (Numbers 13:8); but Moses evidently changes it to *Yehoshua* (Numbers 13:16), "Yahweh Is Salvation." He is also called *Yeshua*, a shortened form of *Yehoshua*. This is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek name *Iesous* (Jesus). His name is symbolic of the fact that although he is the leader of the Israelite nation during the conquest, the Lord is the Conqueror.

AUTHOR

Although it cannot be proven, Jewish tradition seems correct in assigning the authorship of this book to Joshua himself. Chapter 24, verse 26 makes this clear statement: "Then Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God." This refers at least to Joshua's farewell charge, if not to the book as a whole (see also 18:9). Joshua, as Israel's leader and an eyewitness of most of the events, was the person best qualified to write the book. The book was written soon after the events occurred: Rahab was still alive (6:25).

Joshua, born a slave in Egypt, becomes a conqueror in Canaan. He serves as personal attendant to Moses, as one of the twelve spies (of whom only he and Caleb believed God), and as Moses' successor. His outstanding qualities are obedient faith, courage, and dedication to God and His Word.

DATE & SETTING

Joshua divides neatly into three geographical settings: (1) the Jordan River (1-5); (2) Canaan (6-13:7); and (3) the twelve tribes situated on both sides of the Jordan (13:8-24:33). The setting of the first five chapters begins east of the Jordan as Joshua replaces Moses, crosses the Jordan on dry land, and finally prepares for war west of the Jordan.

Like a wise general, Joshua utilizes the divide-and-conquer strategy; and his campaign leads him to central Canaan (6-8), southern Canaan (9-10), and finally to northern Canaan (11-12).

After listing those areas yet to be conquered (13:1-7), Joshua undertakes the long task of dividing the Promised Land to all the tribes. First, he settles those two-and-a-half tribes east of the Jordan (13:8-33) and then the nine-and-a-half tribes west of the Jordan (14:1-19:51). Completing this, he is free to assign the six Cities of Refuge and the forty-eight Cities of Levites, which are scattered among all the tribes.