

## CHAPTER ONE

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# The Books of History An Overview

Sunday School children memorize the divisions of the Old Testament library as five books of law, twelve books of history, five books of poetry, five major and twelve minor prophets. The second of these divisions is the focus of this volume.

### THE TWELVE VOLUME COLLECTION

Actually the 5-12-5-5-12 breakdown of the thirty-nine Old Testament books is but one of several systems for organizing this material. The rabbis of old, as well as modern writers, have proposed other schemes of representing the organization of the Old Testament library.

#### **A. Ancient Arrangements.**

As early as the second century BC Jews saw their Bible as consisting of three divisions: Law (*Torah*), Prophets (*Nebhi'im*) and Writings

(*Kethubhim*). The modern Hebrew Bible follows this arrangement. The five books of Moses—the so-called Pentateuch—constitute the first division. The Prophets consists of eight books: Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings (the Former Prophets); Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve (the Latter Prophets). The remaining books are considered the Writings. In this system the books which follow the Book of the Twelve (the Minor Prophets) are: Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles.

Not much has been written about the twelve historical books as a collection. This is probably due to the false perception that the arrangement of books in the modern Hebrew Bible represents an ancient assessment of the Old Testament collection. The evidence, however, points in a different direction.

While it is true that the tripartite organization of the Old Testament can be traced to pre-Christian times, the present-day assignment of books to the three divisions (5-8-11) can be traced only to the fourth century AD. In the days of Josephus (c. AD 90) the second division (*Nebhi'im*) contained thirteen books. According to Josephus the third division (*Kethubhim*) consisted of four books containing “hymns to God” and “precepts for the conduct of human life” (*Against Apion* 1:8). Most likely those four books were Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.

The reasons for shifting Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Ruth and Esther from the *Nebhi'im* to the *Kethubhim* after the days of Josephus are obscure. The important point is, however, that the twelve historical books were considered as being “prophetic,” i.e., written by prophets. These twelve books—eleven when Ruth is counted as part of Judges—were a unit even from pre-Christian times.

Whereas the tripartite arrangement of the Old Testament books is attested as early as Ben Sira (c. 280 BC), the Dead Sea Scrolls point toward a twofold breakdown, namely, the law and the prophets. Both the twofold and the threefold system are reflected in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> One is therefore forced to conclude that the two ways of organizing the Old Testament books enjoy equal antiquity.<sup>2</sup>

Other ancient evidence regarding the organization of the Old Testament books is more difficult to assess. The earliest extant

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manuscripts of the Septuagint (Greek) version come from the fourth century AD and come from Christian circles. Here the books of the Apocrypha—books which never were accepted as Scripture in authoritative Jewish circles—have been mingled with the canonical books of Scripture. A discussion of the reasons for this strange circumstance lies beyond the scope of the present volume. The lists of Old Testament books which come from the early Church Fathers support the conclusion that at least the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, and 1 & 2 Chronicles were regarded as a unit. Ruth and Esther and sometimes Ezra and Nehemiah were mingled in these lists with the poetic books.<sup>3</sup>

### **B. Modern Arrangements.**

J. Sidlow Baxter<sup>4</sup> has proposed a modern threefold breakdown of Old Testament books as they appear in the English Bible. He classifies the first seventeen books as history and the last seventeen as prophecy. Sandwiched between are the five experiential books which focus on the inner life of Old Testament believers. In detail his organizational scheme looks like this:

- I. HISTORY (17)
  - A. Basic Law (5)
  - B. Preexilic Records (9)
  - C. Postexilic Records (3)
- II. EXPERIENCE (5): the heart
- III. PROPHECY (17)
  - A. Basic Prophecy (5)
  - B. Preexilic Prophets (9)
  - C. Postexilic Prophets (3)

Another threefold way of viewing the Old Testament library is as follows:

- I. FOUNDATIONAL BOOKS (5): Genesis–Deuteronomy
- II. FRAMEWORK BOOKS (12): Joshua–Nehemiah
  - A. Premonarchy (3)
  - B. Monarchy (3 double books)
  - C. Postmonarchy (3)

- III. FOCUS BOOKS (22): Psalms-Malachi  
 A. Focus on Individuals (5): Psalms-Song  
 B. Focus on Issues (17): Isaiah-Malachi

**Chart No. 1**

<b>THE CONTENTS OF THE HISTORICAL BOOKS</b>					
<b>PRE-CROWN</b>		<b>CROWN</b>		<b>POST-CROWN</b>	
Joshua	Judges	1-2 Samuel	1-2 Kings	Ezra	Nehemiah
Conquest of Canaan	Unrest in Canaan	Birth & Expansion of the Kingdom	Decline & Destruction of the Kingdom	Return to Canaan	Rebuilding in Canaan
<div>Ruth A Family Preserved</div>		<div>1-2 Chronicles A Dynasty Preserved</div>		<div>Esther A Nation Preserved</div>	
<b>Settling in Canaan</b>		<b>Ruling over Canaan</b>		<b>Returning to Canaan</b>	

In the above scheme the framework books are those which give the outline for the history of Israel from the time of the conquest through the second governorship of Nehemiah. Merely seeing these twelve books in a list, however, conveys the erroneous impression that each continues the history which was recorded in the preceding book. Actually in each of the triads of books the first two might be designated “forward motion books” because they advance the history of Israel chronologically. Thus Judges, for example, advances the history which was narrated in the Book of Joshua. Kings advances the history of Samuel and Nehemiah that of Ezra.

The third book in each triad might be labeled a “sidestep book” or “spotlight book.” The Book of Ruth highlights an incident which chronologically fits somewhere into the Book of Judges, probably into chapter 10. The two books of Chronicles (considered one book in Jewish tradition) spotlight God’s dealings with the Davidic dynasty. The Book of Esther fits chronologically between chapters 6 and 7 of the Book of Ezra. Ruth records the preservation of a family, Chronicles the preservation of a dynasty, and Esther the preservation of a nation. The arrangement of the historical books in the English Bible

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moving two steps forward and one to the side creates the impression that one is virtually waltzing through a thousand years of history.

## THE SCOPE OF ISRAEL'S HISTORY

History has been defined as that branch of knowledge which records and explains the past. Bible history would then be that recitation and interpretation of the past which is recorded in the Bible. Perhaps Old Testament history could be defined as that part of history in which God prepared for Christ through a specially chosen and trained people. The history of Israel should be defined still more narrowly as the history of that people which became a nation at Mt. Sinai and was subsequently known as Israel.

Those who have written in the field are not united in their understanding of the scope of the history of Israel. The *terminus a quo* for this study has been taken to be creation (Sanders, Snell, Ottley); Abraham (Payne, Bright); the Exodus (Oesterley and Robinson, Bailey and Kent); and the settlement in Palestine (Noth). The present work is not technically a history of Israel, but is a survey of the historical books of the Old Testament. Hence the starting point has been defined by the historical circumstances reflected in the first chapter of the Book of Joshua.

Scholars are also divided over the *terminus ad quem* (ending point) of the history of Israel. Should it be the second governorship of Nehemiah (Flanders, Crapps, W. Smith)? The end of the Maccabean revolt in 165 BC (Bright)? The first Roman conquest of Jerusalem in AD 70 (H. Wheeler Robinson)? Or the final revolt against Rome in AD 135 (Noth, Payne, Oesterley and Robinson)? Some would even argue that the history of Israel continues to modern times (Bailey and Kent). Because this present volume is a survey of the twelve historical books of the Old Testament the *terminus ad quem* has been defined as the conclusion of the Book of Nehemiah which relates what is chronologically the last event of the Old Testament.

## THE NATURE OF BIBLICAL HISTORY

In one of the most significant studies of the past fifty years Mered-

ith Kline<sup>5</sup> has proposed a revolutionary way of looking at the Old Testament canon. Building upon research into ancient treaty forms, Kline has proposed viewing the entire Old Testament as a treaty (covenant) document consisting of a basic treaty core (Genesis-Deuteronomy) and four types of related treaty documents. The core consists of a prologue (Genesis-Exodus 19) and stipulations (Exodus 20-Deuteronomy). All the other books are creative expansions of that core document.

Kline saw the Old Testament wisdom books—especially Proverbs—as an expansion of the stipulation section of the core document. These books also explore the mysteries of the government of Yahweh the Great King to whom Israel had pledged allegiance at Sinai. The Psalms expand upon the vassal ratification response of the people found in the treaties of the ancient Near East and in the core covenant document (e.g., Exod 24:1-8).<sup>6</sup> The role of the prophets in Israel corresponds to the role of the ambassadors of the great kings in the politics of the ancient world. Their job was to declare Yahweh's claims, enforce his will, and apply the ancient covenant sanctions in new situations.

According to Kline, the so-called historical books are an extension of the prologue in the core document. The theme of these twelve books is the covenant relationship with God. In these books Yahweh's fidelity to the covenant is placed in juxtaposition to Israel's infidelity.

The shape of all historical works is determined by the sources available to the historian and the focus which he wishes to give to the material. Thus some choose to focus on economics, others on political history, still others on social institutions. The biblical historians wrote from a prophetic point of view. They wrote sacred history which emphasizes the role of God in human events. They feature the acts of prophets like Samuel. They emphasize the great prophetic themes of the Exodus, the gift of the land of Canaan, and the covenant obligations of justice and exclusive worship of Yahweh. This, then, is sacred history. The persons, peoples, movements, institutions herein described are those which God used to fulfill his gracious and holy purpose.

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### **THE METHOD OF BIBLICAL HISTORY**

All historians are dependent on contemporary sources. The biblical books of history, with the possible exception of Joshua and Nehemiah, cover such enormous time spans that the use of earlier written sources and oral tradition was mandatory. The biblical historians often mention the sources from which they derived their information. In Chronicles, for example, some twenty-five extrabiblical documents are named.<sup>7</sup> Some of these sources were journals or day books in which principal events of the two kingdoms were recorded by court “remembrancers.” Other sources were memoirs of various prophets. The “Book of Jasher” mentioned twice in the text (Josh 10:13; 2 Sam 1:18) appears to have been a poetic account of the battles of ancient Israel.

From these ancient sources the biblical historians selected the strands of raw material with which they wove their account of covenant history. The Holy Spirit guided in the selection process so that no erroneous material was incorporated into the text. These twelve books are part of Holy Scripture which the Lord Jesus, the Apostles and the early church regarded as inspired of God (2 Tim 3:16). The exact mechanics of the working of the Spirit cannot now be explained. What is important is that the writings of these historians are different from all other histories ever written except those which are found in the New Testament. Thus these books contain “sacred history” not only because of the facts related therein, but because this material has the imprimatur of God’s Holy Spirit.

### **COMPOSITION OF THE BOOKS**

As in the case of most of the Old Testament library, the critical and conservative explanations of the composition of the historical books are quite different.

#### **A. Critical View.**

Modern historical criticism has proposed two alternative theories to explain the composition of the historical books. The first—the so-called documentary theory—was advanced by Otto Eissfeldt. In this

theory the Book of Joshua is regarded as the concluding volume of a Hexateuch. The documentary sources (J,E,D & P) which the critics imagine they have discovered in the Pentateuch are traced through Joshua. The second theory, which was put forward by Martin Noth, envisions an independent historical work consisting of the Book of Deuteronomy followed by Joshua through Kings. This material was organized sometime after the Exile by a redactor which the critics have dubbed the “deuteronomist.”

These critical theories flounder on one hard fact. Both historically and exegetically the historical books are distinct from the Pentateuch. The trend in Old Testament studies is to focus on the final shape of each of the canonical books, to appreciate each as separate and distinct from the others. While there is certainly interdependence among these books, they yet reflect a certain independence. In any case, after a century of scholarly debate agreement among the critics remains an elusive goal.<sup>8</sup>

Critics generally regard Esther as a literary romance, i.e., a good story with a kernel of truth. Ruth is regarded as a postexilic tract written to oppose the harsh exclusiveness of Ezra and Nehemiah.

## **B. Conservative View.**

The authorship of the various historical books will be discussed later in this volume. Suffice it to say that conservative scholars are more open to the possibility that the traditional authors of these books did in fact author them. Tradition associates the name of Joshua with the authorship of the book that bears his name. Samuel is said to have been the author of Judges. The life of David as recorded in the books of Samuel was chronicled by the prophets Samuel, Nathan and Gad (1 Chr 29:29). Tradition assigned the authorship of Kings to Jeremiah. Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah may have come from the pen of Ezra. Jewish tradition is not united on the authorship of Esther. Mordecai and Ezra have both been nominated.

Each book in this collection of twelve (with the possible exception of Ruth) should be regarded as a separate entity. The authors, however, seem to have been conscious of contributing to a continuing history. By means of a literary “hook” an author would connect his work to the work which preceded. Joshua 24:26 suggests that Joshua



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added his work to that of Moses. His work probably begins with Deuteronomy 34 and concludes with Joshua 24:28. The author of Judges would have added the record of Joshua's death (Josh 24:29-33). The author of Kings joins his work to Samuel by opening his book with the narration of David's death.

An obvious discontinuity occurs at the conclusion of Kings. Chronicles begins with genealogies stretching back to Adam. The focus quickly moves, however, to David and his descendants. The hooking principle is again evident with the opening verses of Ezra. They repeat verbatim the concluding verses of Chronicles.<sup>9</sup>

## CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

Chronologically speaking, Old Testament history begins with Abraham. Attempts to establish chronology prior to the call of this great patriarch are futile. In the broadest possible outline of Old Testament history, about six hundred years elapsed between Abraham and Moses. About four hundred years passed between Moses and David. Between David and the conclusion of Old Testament history (Ezra-Nehemiah) another six hundred years can be assigned. The intertestamental period lasted about four hundred years. Thus a pattern emerges which may be illustrated as follows:

Abraham to Moses	600 years.
Moses to David	400 years.
David to Nehemiah	600 years.
Nehemiah to Christ	400 years.

To fine tune this general picture, Old Testament history is frequently divided into twelve periods. Five of these periods are covered in the Pentateuch. These are:

Antediluvian	Duration unknown.
Postdiluvian	Duration unknown.
Patriarchal	215 years.
Egyptian	430 years.
Wilderness	40 years.

The history related in the framework books (Joshua-Esther) is usually divided into seven periods.

Conquest	40 years (1407-1367 BC).
Judges	324 years (1367-1043 BC).
United Monarchy	112 years (1043-930 BC).
Divided Monarchy	210 years (930-722 BC).
Judean	135 years (722-586 BC).
Exilic	48 years (586-538 BC).
Postexilic	106 years (538-432 BC).

## **THEOLOGICAL OVERVIEW**

The faith of Israel's historians is transparent in their writings. These writers were passionately monotheistic and aniconic (worship without idols or images). Though they were aware of the existence of local "godlings" (e.g., Baal; Asherah) and even of the national gods of surrounding nations (e.g., Chemosh, Milcom), they believed that one God—Yahweh—ruled over all. All other pretenders to deity were worthless nonentities.

The biblical historians also firmly believed that the one true God had revealed himself to man. For them the primary source of this revelation was the Mosaic law. Yahweh, however, also spoke to his people through priestly oracle, the so-called Urim (1 Sam 14:41; 23:2; 30:7f.), dreams (1 Kgs 3:5), and prophets both named (e.g., Micaiah in 1 Kgs 22) and unnamed (e.g., 1 Sam 2:27). In 1 Samuel 28:6 the three means by which God might be expected to speak to a reigning king are brought together: "When Saul inquired of Yahweh, Yahweh did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets."

If the Pentateuch lays the foundation for the coming of Christ, the historical books relate the preparation for his coming. Since the revelation at Mt. Sinai Yahweh had chosen to identify with one nation. To that people he gave his revelation (Rom 3:2). Through his special ambassadors, the prophets, he shaped and molded that people. He carved out of national Israel a spiritual remnant which longed for the Messiah. This remnant kept faith alive even in the most trying circum-

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stances. From the vantage point of the New Testament, Old Testament history consists of a myriad of arrows pointing to the fullness of times (Gal 4:4-5). Even so, Old Testament history is not merely a period of aimless waiting. Throughout these millennia God was moving decisively toward the goal of redemption for all people in Christ Jesus.<sup>10</sup>

Israel was called of God to be a light to the nations of the world, a testament to the power and grace of God. The ultimate plan was to bless all nations through Christ, the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. To that end the Lord endured a thousand years of indifference and outright apostasy broken up only occasionally by periods of renewal and revival. The history of Israel is in many ways a tragic history with a predictable conclusion. As horrendous as it was, the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC marked a turning point, at least as far as overt idolatry was concerned. When the Jews returned from exile in Babylon the old Canaanite idolatry which had polluted the nation since the days of Joshua was a thing of the past.

The message of the historical books revolves around four axes: kingship, prophets, the sanctuary and worship. Regarding kingship, the message is that God was faithful to the promises he made to David. Man-made kings were a disaster. Regarding prophets the message is that God sought at every opportunity to evoke repentance in his people. Through interpretation of past disasters and warnings of worse things to come mingled with assurances of blessing to reward fidelity, the prophets sought to impress upon Israel the need for a daily walk with the Lord.

As regards the sanctuary, the historical books make the point that the physical sanctuary—tabernacle or temple—was the earthly dwelling place of God. The one God required and permitted but one sanctuary and that could be located only at the place of his choosing. Worship was the standard by which the biblical historians measured the characters who appeared on this millennial stage. No matter what a person's accomplishments might be, if he did not worship the Lord in spirit and truth that man is judged by these historians to be a failure. The sanctuary was the nerve center of the nation.

## **IMPORTANCE OF OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY**

Many Christians have never made a serious study of the Old Testament historical books because they perceive them to be boring and impractical. What possible relevance can anything have which happened “way over there” on a sliver of real estate called Canaan over 2500 years ago? The main characters in this history have now been dead for thirty centuries or so. Even when alive they lived in a world totally different from anything experienced by the contemporary Christian. Some of their beliefs and practices offend modern sensitivities and seem, on the surface at least, to oppose the spirit of Christ. So why bother with the twelve historical books?

Many good reasons can be advanced for studying these books. First, Israel’s historians produced great literature, though that was not their purpose. They tell thrilling stories with consummate skill. Indeed the books of Samuel and Kings “contain some of the noblest and most moving stories in all literature.” Like all great literature these books have the power to uplift, delight, console, encourage and warn the human heart.<sup>11</sup>

The historical books have a certain ethical power. Both by example and warning they inspire noble conduct. The challenging stories found here challenge the readers to make a decision to emulate what is worthy and to shun what is base.<sup>12</sup>

Even more important, the twelve historical books were part of the Bible of the Lord Jesus. He knew and loved these books. If no other reason could be offered for a study of Old Testament history this alone should cause the disciple of Christ to want to master the content of these books.

The Apostle Paul suggested that Old Testament history offered many valuable lessons for Christians (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11). The Scriptures of the Old Testament were capable of making one wise unto salvation (2 Tim 3:15). In these books are prophecies and pointers toward Christ (John 5:39; Luke 24:44f.).

Still other good reasons for the study of the historical books can be advanced. First, these documents are completely true (John 10:35; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21). Virtually every issue of archaeological journals contains verification of details of the history contained in these books.

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Second, the historical books of the Old Testament have had a major influence on the fine arts.<sup>13</sup> Third, these books contain the record of God's dealings with a unique and wonderful people. Fourth, these books are valuable for homiletical purposes. Fifth, these books throw invaluable light upon ancient practices and beliefs. Sixth, they furnish a framework in which the message of Israel's prophets can be understood.

Perhaps the best statement ever written about the value of studying Old Testament history was penned by F.K. Sanders in 1914.

The study of history ought to inspire students with generous ideals of active and responsible citizenship, with sincere ambitions for sane, strong leadership, with convictions regarding national policies and the power to distinguish between that which is clever and that which is fine and noble. No history surpasses that of the Hebrew people in its power to transmit and impress such results as these.<sup>14</sup>

## INTERPRETING BIBLICAL HISTORY<sup>15</sup>

About forty percent of the Old Testament is in narrative form. Most of that material is contained in the twelve books which are the subject of this study. Those who read these narratives tend to make several mistakes in interpretation. They tend, for example, to regard these narratives as simply being stories about those who lived in Old Testament times. The biblical authors were not entertainers who could spin a good yarn. It is the work of God through people which should be emphasized. In the final analysis God is the hero of Old Testament narrative.

Others treat the stories as allegories which teach mysterious truths. Some even go so far as to read into the narratives such outlandish things as spaceships and extraterrestrials.

Another mistake which is commonly made is the attempt to identify some direct lesson or moral in each story. Every individual account is like the piece of a puzzle, which when joined to other pieces, presents the big picture. Biblical narrative illustrates what is explicitly taught elsewhere. One should not attempt to formulate doctrinal propositions based solely on a narrative.

Interpreters of Old Testament history should remember that narratives record what actually happened, not necessarily what should have happened. Therefore, the conduct of individuals in these accounts is often less than praiseworthy, and sometimes just plain despicable.

By its very nature narrative is selective and incomplete. Not all questions about an episode that one might wish to be answered are in fact answered. For this reason the Old Testament deuterographs—substantially the same narrative appearing in two separate books—may seem on the surface to be contradictory. One writer chose to emphasize certain details of what took place, while another adds additional details. A student would do well to purchase a harmony of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles before undertaking a serious study of these books. In the bibliography for the monarchy books two of these tools will be cited.

## ENDNOTES

1. The twofold arrangement is reflected in such passages as Matt 5:17 and Luke 16:16-17; the threefold in Luke 24:44.

2. R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969), pp. 140-48.

3. F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), pp. 68-97.

4. J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), 1:15-20.

5. Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972).

6. Kline did not address the issue of the Song of Solomon in relation to his covenant theory. The core document, however, has much to say about sexuality. The Song may be a positive expansion of those stipulations dealing with sex.

7. These sources are conveniently itemized by Willis J. Beecher, "Chronicles, Book of" in *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 1:630.

8. Peter Craigie, *The Old Testament, Its Background, Growth and Content* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), p. 144.

9. R. Laird Harris, "What Books Belong in the Canon of Scripture?" in *Can I Trust the Bible?* (Chicago: Moody, 1968), pp. 71ff.

10. Walter Roehrs, *Survey of Covenant History* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1989), p. 11.

11. Gordon Robinson, *Historians of Israel (1)* in "Bible Guides" (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), p. 81.

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12. Ibid., p. 83.

13. Cynthia P. Maus devotes over six hundred pages to a discussion of the art, music and literature generated by the events in Israel's history. *The Old Testament and the Fine Arts* (New York: Harper, 1954).

14. F.K. Sanders, *The History of the Hebrews* (New York: Scribners, 1914), pp. 6-7.

15. The material in this section is a summarization of the excellent chapter on the proper use of Old Testament narrative in *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth* by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), esp., pp. 74-78.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY: GENERAL

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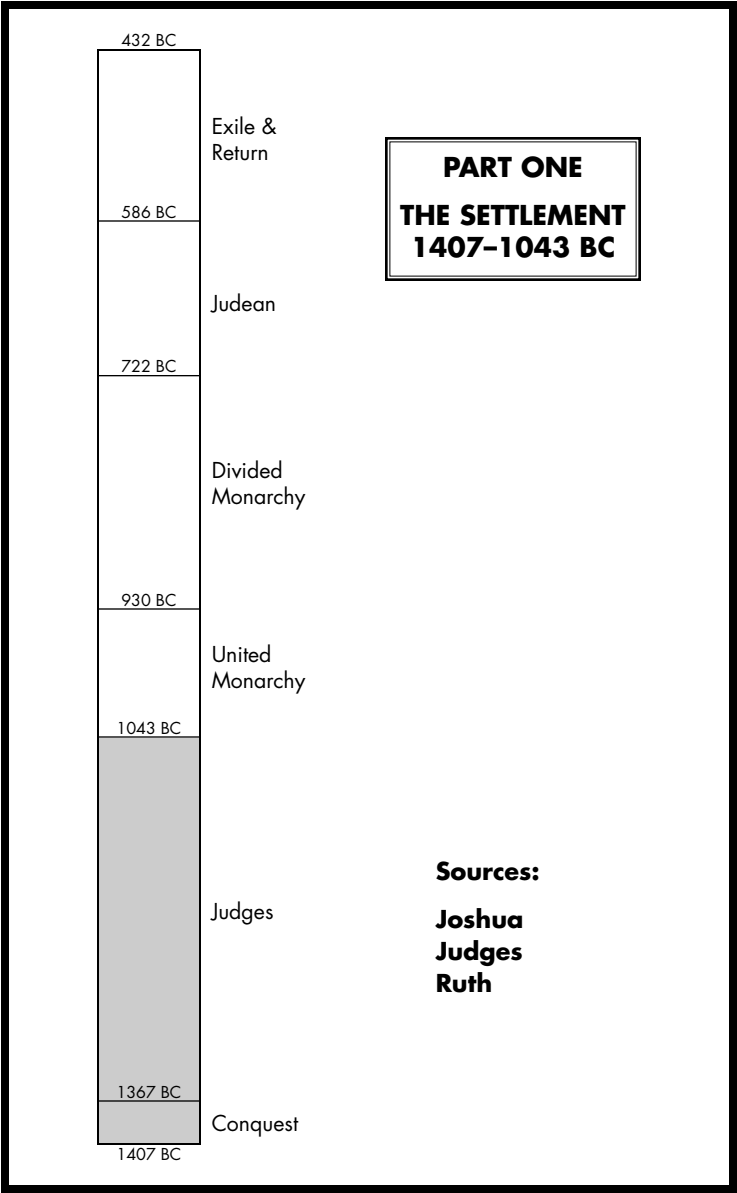
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PART ONE

THE SETTLEMENT

PERIOD



## CHAPTER TWO

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# The Premonarchy Books An Introduction

Joshua, Judges and Ruth describe Israel's history between 1407 and 1043 BC. This is sometimes called the Settlement Period of Old Testament history. These four centuries may be subdivided into the Conquest Period (1407-1367 BC) and the Judges Period (1367-1043).

### **THE BOOK OF JOSHUA**

The Book of Joshua occurs at a strategic place in the Old Testament canon. The book forms a bridge between the Pentateuch and that which follows. The Pentateuch concludes with the account of the death of Moses, the great Lawgiver. The Book of Joshua begins with the words "*After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, it came to pass that the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister . . .*" Thus the Historical Books take up the account of God's dealings with Israel where the Pentateuch left off.

The Mosaic books depict Israel moving toward Canaan. Joshua describes Israel entering into Canaan.

Besides this continuity of event, the book indicates continuity of authority. Joshua succeeded Moses. In many respects Joshua functioned like a second Moses. He enjoyed many of the privileges accorded the great Lawgiver. Scripture, however, takes care to point out frequently that the entire conquest of Canaan corresponded to the arrangements Moses had set forth as God's command.<sup>1</sup> Thus Moses is honored as the architect of the Conquest. Joshua is presented as the faithful executor of Moses' will (cf. Deut 31:3-8).

Continuity, however, is not the whole story. The Book of Joshua is a kind of climax of all which had gone before. The land promise made to Abram almost seven centuries earlier (c. 2092 BC) was now fulfilled. Israel's earlier failure to enter the land (Num 14:39-35) was now reversed. The glorious *vision* of faith set forth by Moses in his closing speeches (Deut 26-33) now became the *venture* of faith. The prospect of a land flowing with milk and honey now became the possession of Canaan. Israel was on the pinnacle. The predominant note (with an occasional sour note) in Joshua is one of joy, confidence and exuberance.

With the possession of the land a new phase of Israel's history began. Joshua is the threshold of a thousand years of sacred history. Here and there the book anticipates the future. The last speeches of Joshua contain admonitions for continued faithfulness and warnings that all will be lost if Israel proves unfaithful (23:15-16; 24:19-20).

Thus the Book of Joshua honors past revelation, celebrates present success and anticipates future problems. It is a connecting link between the promise made to the Fathers and the perils which tested the people of God once that promise had been realized. In the words of Baxter, Joshua is "complementary to the five books of Moses, and introductory to the new historical group of twelve books."<sup>2</sup>

### **A. Background.**

After emerging from the wilderness, Israel fought major battles in Transjordan with the Amorite kings Sihon and Og. While camped at Shittim on the edge of Canaan, the men of Israel yielded to the seduction of the Midianite women and their fertility dances. Moses launched

a holy war of retribution against the Midianites because of this incident. Following his final discourses to the nation, Moses climbed Mt. Nebo to view the Promised Land and depart to meet his Maker. After an appropriate period of mourning for the death of Moses, the Israelites were ready to march into the land of promise under the leadership of Joshua the son of Nun.

### **B. Circumstances of Writing.**

The sixth book of the Old Testament is named after the leading character of the narrative. The name Joshua means "Yahweh is salvation." In the Greek language the name *Joshua* becomes *Jesus*. Hebrews 4:8 in the King James Version has confused some students because it uses the Greek spelling *Jesus* to refer to the Old Testament leader.

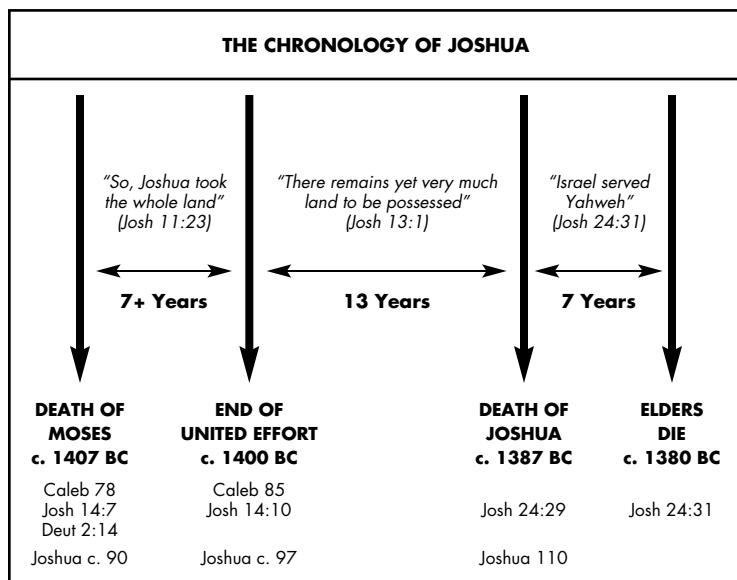
Jewish tradition ascribes the authorship of the sixth book in the Old Testament to Joshua himself. No solid reasons have been put forth for categorically rejecting this view. Certainly Joshua knew how to write (8:32). In fact, Joshua 24:26 states that he wrote covenant stipulations in "*the book of the law of God.*" This indicates that Joshua was regarded even during his lifetime as a prophet inspired of God. Only one who spoke inspired words would have been permitted to add anything to the writing of the great prophet Moses.

The author of the book participated in the events which he narrates (5:1,6). Rahab, the harlot who was spared when Jericho fell to the Israelites was still living when the book was written. Thus the author must have been part of the Conquest. No better candidate than Joshua has been proposed as the author of this book.

The concluding verses of the book which narrate the death of Joshua were no doubt appended by a later prophet. This prophet may have been Samuel. Two accounts in the book may have been inserted into the book by this same prophetic figure. The first episode is Othniel's capture of Kiriath-sepher (15:13-17; cf. Judg 1:9-13). The second episode which might be post-Joshuanic is the Danite migration of Joshua 19:47 (cf. Judg 18:27-29). The chronological placement of these events is problematic.

## C. Chronology of the Book.

Chart No. 2



The crossing of the Jordan by the children of Israel (ch. 3) can be dated about 1407 BC. The last event recorded in the book is the assembly at Shechem in which Joshua delivered his farewell address to the nation (ch. 24). A comment by Caleb (Josh 14:7-10) enables the modern student to compute the length of time which the united effort against the Canaanites took. Caleb was forty when he had been sent forth from Kadesh-barnea with eleven others to spy out Canaan. He was eighty-five at the time he was given his personal inheritance within the tribal territory of Judah. Presumably this took place after the united tribal conquest led by Joshua. Of the forty-five years which elapsed between Kadesh-barnea and the designation of Caleb's inheritance in Joshua 14, thirty-eight years were consumed in the wilderness wandering (Deut 2:14). Thus seven years must have been consumed in the united conquest of Canaan. The final allotment of the newly conquered land must have been made about 1400 BC.

How much time is covered in the Book of Joshua after the final allotment of the land cannot be computed precisely. The only clue is found in the concluding verses of the book. Israel served Yahweh during the lifetime of Joshua and the elders who outlived Joshua (Josh 24:31). Twenty years would be a conservative estimate of the time which elapsed from the time of Caleb's inheritance to the passing of Joshua and the elders. The Book of Joshua, then, covers a period of roughly twenty-seven years.

#### **D. Contents of the Book.**

The Book of Joshua contains a variety of types of literature, some inspirational and exciting, others, quite frankly, boring to the average reader. The historical narrative of the book pulsates with excitement. The divine revelation, farewell speeches, and prayers are full of spiritual challenge. On the other hand, nothing in the Bible is less interesting than the seemingly endless lists of villages assigned to this or that tribe (chs. 12–21).

#### **Chart No. 3**

THE STRUCTURE OF JOSHUA				
PREPARING FOR VICTORY	ENGAGING THE FOE	CONQUERING THE LAND	POSSESSING THE INHERITANCE	ENCOURAGING THE COMMITMENT
chs. 1–5	chs. 6–9	chs. 10–12	chs. 13–22	chs. 23–24
The Lord Reveals the Plan	The Lord Gives the Victory	The Lord Empowers Israel	The Lord Fulfills the Promise	The Lord Demands Fidelity
THEME: THE VICTORY OF FAITH				

The theme of the Book of Joshua is *the victory of faith*. Joshua 1:3 is probably the key to the entire book “Every place upon which the sole of your foot shall tread, to you I have given it, just as I spoke unto Moses.”<sup>3</sup> The key thought in the book is *God's faithfulness*. The God who brought them out of Egypt also brought them

into the Land of Promise (Deut 4:37f.), and that in spite of the unworthiness of two generations of Israelites.

The Book of Joshua opens with a word of the Lord for Joshua. That opening speech virtually outlines the entire book. *“Arise, go over Jordan”* (1:2) points to the preparation for conquest (chs. 1–5). *“No man shall be able to stand before you”* (1:5) announces in advance the result of the Israelite-Canaanite clash (chs. 6–12). *“You shall cause this people to possess this land which I swore to give to their fathers”* (1:6) is prophetic of what is described in chapters 13–22. The exhortation *“Be strong . . . to guard to do [i.e., to carefully do] according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you”* (1:7) anticipates the concluding hortatory section of the book (chs. 23–24) in which Joshua pleads with the people to be faithful to the Lord. Chart 3 diagrams the structure of the book.

### **E. Teaching of Joshua.**

Christians who find significance only in Old Testament books which prophetically portray the coming of Christ will be disappointed with the Book of Joshua. The book contains no personal messianic prophecy. Some see in the Captain of Yahweh’s host (5:13-15) a Christophany or a pre-incarnate manifestation of Christ (cf. Rev 19:11-14). While this view is probably correct, the passage is not predictive. Consequently it adds little to the great stream of messianic revelation in the Old Testament.

According to Hebrews 3–4, Old Testament Canaan is a type of the believer’s present position and possessions in Christ. Thus the Christian teacher does not err by suggesting comparisons between the present spiritual warfare and the ancient efforts of Israel to conquer Canaan.

The Book of Joshua illustrates two great principles of Scripture. The first is, *“Yahweh is a man of war”* (Exod 15:3). Yahweh ordered Israel into battle against the Canaanites. The God of holiness is in perpetual conflict with the forces of evil. To be sure, this move to exterminate the Canaanites came only after lengthy probation (Gen 15:16) and only after dramatic illustrations of Yahweh’s wrath against immorality right there in the land of Canaan (Gen 18–19). In the course of time the cup of Canaanite iniquity was full. The holiness of



God could no longer overlook the corruption of those peoples (Lev 18:24-27). He therefore commissioned Joshua to unleash his wrath upon these hardened sinners. Total surrender to Yahweh was the only escape from destruction. Every Canaanite who surrendered to Yahweh was spared. Thus even in the midst of judgment the Lord showed mercy to those who sought it.

The second grand principle which is illustrated in the Book of Joshua is found in 1 John 5:4. *"This is the victory which has overcome the world, even our faith."* In battle after battle the Israelites fought against superior numbers and superior weaponry. Yet they prevailed. God gave the victory! When they marched, walls came tumbling down!

## THE BOOK OF JUDGES

The seventh book of the Old Testament takes its name from a series of twelve individuals who arose in Israel as military leaders in emergency situations. Even the chapters which do not speak directly of the Judges (chs. 1, 9, 17-21) contribute to explaining the underlying causes of the national predicaments which caused God to raise up these military reformers. This book, then, is appropriately named. One should not conclude, however, that this book contains the accounts of *all* of Israel's Judges. Both Eli and Samuel (1 Sam 1-7) are said to have judged Israel, but they differed in important respects from those who are introduced in the Book of Judges.

In general the following observations can be made about Israel's Judges. They were God's vice-regents in the land. They seem to have experienced some "call" from God and thereafter served lifelong. No regular succession of Judges is in evidence. God raised them up as needed. They served without pomp and equipage. They had no power to make laws, for the law had already been given at Sinai. They had no power to interpret laws, for that was the responsibility of the priests. Their prime responsibility was to enforce God's law or justice and thereby bring "rest" to the land.

### A. Background of the Book.

The united tribal effort to conquer Canaan lasted seven plus years.

Once Joshua had broken the back of Canaanite resistance, he assigned the tribes to their territories within the land. The individual tribes were required to eliminate any remaining enclaves of Canaanites within their borders. This process actually began before the death of Joshua in about 1387 BC. For a brief time after the death of Joshua the tribes attempted to continue clearing the Canaanites from the land. Gradually, however, conquest gave way to toleration, accommodation and assimilation. Israel departed from the Lord. God then sent against them a series of foreign invaders. This process began with the invasion of Cushan-rishathaim from Mesopotamia. With this invasion at about 1367 BC the period of the Judges began.

### **B. Circumstances of Writing.**

Although the Book of Judges is anonymous, several clues point to the time of its origin. Judges was composed after the death of Joshua (2:7) and after "*the captivity of the land*" (18:30). This "captivity" is sometimes taken to be a reference to the Assyrian captivity of the northern kingdom which occurred in stages toward the end of the eighth century BC. This interpretation, however, is not necessary. The reference is probably to the Philistine captivity of Israel which occurred in the Judgeship of Eli (1 Sam 4–6). The book was probably written before the seventh year of David's reign (1004 BC) since the Jebusites still were holding Jerusalem (Judg 1:21; cf. 2 Sam 5:6). The book was written from a prophetic point of view (cf. 3:7; 4:1). A date of about 1035 BC during the reign of Saul would be close to the time of the composition of this book. Jewish tradition assigns the authorship to Samuel, and nothing in the contents precludes his authorship.

The immediate purpose of the author of Judges was to record the major events from the death of Joshua to the founding of the monarchy. By so doing the author was attempting to explain the establishment of the monarchy as necessitated by the social and political chaos which resulted from disobedience to God's word.

### **C. Chronology of the Book.**

One of the most difficult problems facing the student of the Old Testament is the chronology of the Book of Judges. Part of the problem is created by the structure of the book itself. The opening verse

announces the death of Joshua and gives the impression that what follows occurred after the old warrior had departed this world scene.<sup>4</sup> Some of the episodes narrated in that first chapter, however, have already been recounted in the Book of Joshua. To complicate matters further, the death of Joshua is narrated a second time (2:8). Apparently the author began this book with a series of episodes, some of which happened before the death of Joshua and some of which followed his death.<sup>5</sup>

A still more formidable chronological problem faces the interpreter in the last five chapters of Judges. Two episodes are recorded in these chapters: (1) the Danite migration; and (2) the civil war against the tribe of Benjamin. A careful study of the details in these episodes indicates that they most likely transpired even before the invasion of Cushan in 1367 BC. Since the Danite migration is recorded in the Book of Joshua (Jos 19:47), Judges 17–18 may be narrating an event which transpired even before the death of Joshua!

Aside from these internal chronological problems, reconciling the data in Judges with external chronological data is extremely difficult. The stated periods of oppression and rest in the book total 370 years. Scholars opting for the late date for the Exodus are forced to reduce this figure by almost fifty percent in order to make the period of the Judges fit between an Exodus in 1275 BC and the crowning of Saul at about 1043 BC. However, even scholars opting for the early date for the Exodus (1447 BC) cannot comfortably fit in a period of Judges lasting 370 years. Therefore, some compression seems necessary. Some of the Judges must have been regional heroes whose judgeship was concurrent with similar leaders in other parts of the land. Determining how much compression must be applied to the figures in Judges, and where that compression should be applied are difficult problems. Chart 4 (next page) indicates the scheme adopted in this survey.

#### **D. Contents of the Book.**

The transition from the Book of Joshua to the Book of Judges is abrupt. If Joshua rings with shouts of victory, Judges echoes with sobs of defeat. Possession of the land becomes oppression within the land. Freedom and progress give way to bondage and regression. The

**Chart No. 4**

<b>THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF JUDGES</b> <b>306 Years</b>			
<b>AGENTS</b>	<b>PERIOD</b>	<b>YEARS</b>	<b>DATE BC</b>
<b>TRIBES</b>	<b>TRANSITION</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>1387-1367</b>
<b>CUSHAN</b>	<b>OPPRESSION</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1367-1359</b>
<b>OTHNIEL</b>	<b>DELIVERANCE</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>1359-1319</b>
<b>EGLON</b>	<b>OPPRESSION</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>1319-1301</b>
<b>EHUD</b>	<b>DELIVERANCE</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>1301-1221</b>
<b>SISERA</b>	<b>OPPRESSION</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>1281-1261*</b>
<b>DEBORAH</b>	<b>DELIVERANCE</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>1261-1221*</b>
<b>MIDIAN</b>	<b>OPPRESSION</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1221-1214</b>
<b>GIDEON</b>	<b>DELIVERANCE</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>1214-1174</b>
<b>ABIMELECH</b>	<b>OPPRESSION</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1174-1171</b>
<b>TOLA</b>	<b>JUDGESHIP</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>1171-1148</b>
<b>JAIR</b>	<b>JUDGESHIP</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>1148-1126</b>
<b>AMMON</b>	<b>OPPRESSION</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>1126-1108</b>
<b>JEPHTHA</b>	<b>DELIVERANCE</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1108-1102</b>
<b>IBZAN</b>	<b>JUDGESHIP</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1105-1098*</b>
<b>ELON</b>	<b>JUDGESHIP</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1097-1087</b>
<b>ABDON</b>	<b>JUDGESHIP</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1089-1081*</b>
<b>*Overlaps previous period</b>			

faithfulness of God's people in Joshua is countered by their faithlessness in Judges. If the Israelites are walking by faith in Joshua, they are living in the flesh in Judges. Jensen calls Judges "one of the saddest parts of the Bible . . . a book of failure."<sup>6</sup> Baxter calls Judges "a pathetic anticlimax" to the Book of Joshua.<sup>7</sup>

Judges does not offer a wide variety of literary genres. The book is mostly historical narrative with a few speeches and one song (ch. 5) mixed in. Two verses vie for the designation of key verse in the book. The first is 2:19 (*"And it came to pass when the Judge died they again acted more corruptly than their fathers to follow after other gods and bow down to them; they did not cease from their practices nor their stubborn ways"*). The second is 17:6 (*"In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes"*). The key word in the book is *deliver* and its cognates (some 49 times). The key phrase is "*did evil*."

Those who characterize the Book of Judges as consisting of cycles

of rebellion, retribution, repentance and rest have not given careful attention to the text. The history of this period did not go in cycles like a carousel. Rather it moved like the plunge of a roller coaster with peaks and valleys, yet ever winding its way toward rock bottom. To change the metaphor, the author traces the deterioration of Israel from good health in the days of Joshua through the stages of ill, seriously ill, to critically ill.

The Book of Judges consists of a central core of narratives which focus on Israel's sin, servitude, supplication and salvation over the course of some three centuries. Each episode in the central core is introduced by a literary framework which when complete contains five elements.<sup>8</sup>

**Chart No. 5**

<b>THE STRUCTURE OF JUDGES</b> <b>"THE DARKNESS OF DISOBEDIENCE"</b>				
<b>EXPLANATORY PROLOGUE</b>		<b>THE NARRATIVE CORE</b>	<b>ILLUSTRATIVE EPILOGUE</b>	
<b>National Sin</b>  1:1-2:5	<b>National Servitude</b>  2:6-3:6	<b>God's Awesome Wrath</b>  <b>SIN</b> <b>SERVITUDE</b> <b>SUPPLICATION</b> <b>SALVATION</b> 3:7-16:31	<b>A Migration</b>  chs. 17-18	<b>A Mustering</b>  chs. 19-21
<b>Review</b>	<b>Preview</b>	<b>God's Amazing Grace</b>	<b>Idolatry in Dan</b>	<b>Immorality in Benjamin</b>

The core material in Judges is framed by a prologue (1:1-3:6) and epilogue (chs. 17-21) which depict the disunity of Israel. The prologue contains two distinct parts. In the first the conquest efforts of the various tribes before and after the death of Joshua are reviewed (1:1-2:5). The prologue then goes on to preview the theological rhythm of the period of the Judges. Ever-increasing sin was followed by ever more severe oppressions, and these in turn by ever less spec-

tacular deliverances (2:6–3:6). The epilogue contains two narratives illustrating the extent to which idolatry and immorality had permeated Israel in this period. If the prologue stresses the need for political unity, the epilogue emphasizes the need for moral unity. Chart 5 diagrams the structure of the Book of Judges.

### **E. Teaching of the Book.**

The Book of Judges demonstrates the terrible consequences of disobedience to God. The path to destruction is clearly marked in the book. Disregard for God's command to drive out the Canaanites led to toleration, compromise, intermarriage and outright apostasy. This path led to political disunity, foreign oppression, social chaos, and individual immorality. A basic lesson in Judges can be discovered by placing in juxtaposition two emphases. Twice the book declares that *"every man did what was right in his own eyes"* (17:6; 21:25). Seven times Judges states that *"the children of Israel did evil in the sight of Yahweh"* (e.g., 2:11). These two emphases stress that the natural man is inclined to do evil. Without revelation and the motivation to obey it man will inevitably choose the path of destruction.

Judges illustrates the methods God employs in dealing with his people. Here the anger of God burns against sin (2:14,20). He *"sold"* his people (2:14; 3:8; 4:2; 10:7) or *"gave"* them (2:14; 6:1; 13:1) into the hand of some enemy. Once God is said to have *"strengthened the hand"* of an enemy against Israel (3:12). Thus the God of holiness cannot and does not ignore sin but on the contrary, he punishes it.

The Book of Judges also illustrates the principle that where sin abounds, grace abounds much more (Rom 5:20). Five times Israel *"cried"* (*za'aq*) unto Yahweh (3:9,15; 4:3; 6:6; 10:10). Three times God spoke to his people, presumably through prophet-like individuals (2:1-3; 6:8-10; 10:11-14). Only once is national repentance clearly indicated in the text (10:10-16).<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, the Lord was moved to pity by the the groaning of his people in the midst of their various oppressions (2:18). Therefore, he raised up a deliverer for them (3:9,15) through whom the current enemy was subdued (3:30; 4:23; 8:28; 11:33). Then the land would enjoy *"rest"* for a time (3:11,30; 5:31; 8:28). The lack of emphasis on the repentance of Israel in the text serves to underscore the amazing grace of God in this book.

On a more devotional level, Judges illustrates the principle that God chooses weak and foolish things to confound the wise and powerful things of this world (1 Cor 1:27). To gain the victory in Judges God used an ox goad (3:31), a nail (4:21), some trumpets, pitchers and lamps (7:20), a millstone (9:53) and the jawbone of a donkey (15:15). Some of the deliverers God raised up were most unlikely candidates: a bastard son, a ladies' man, a left-handed butcher, a mother, and a cowardly idol worshiper.

## THE BOOK OF RUTH

Two books in the Bible bear the names of women: Ruth and Esther. Both of these heroines were great and good women. Here, however, the similarity ends. Ruth was a young Moabite girl who came to live with the Israelites. Esther was a Jewess who lived in far-away Persia. A marriage figures prominently in both books. Ruth married a wealthy Israelite farmer and became part of the royal line of David. Esther married a foreign king and became a queen. Ruth knew the discipline of field work. Esther was pampered with beauty treatments in the royal harem. The books named for these women are a contrast as well. They differ in size (four chapters vs. ten) and the degree to which the heroine is involved in the story. The Book of Ruth is the only instance in the Bible in which an entire book is devoted to a woman.

### A. Background.

The setting of the Book of Ruth is "*in the days when the Judges ruled*" (1:1). Yet the contrast between this small book and the Book of Judges is stark. After navigating through the turbulent rapids of Joshua and Judges the reader comes at last to the placid waters of the Book of Ruth. Here there are no more sordid stories of crime and bloodshed, of lawlessness and savage revenge. The atmosphere of simple devotion pervades the story. One senses throughout the overruling providence of God quietly moving forward with his program in those dark days of the Judges.

## B. Circumstances of Writing.

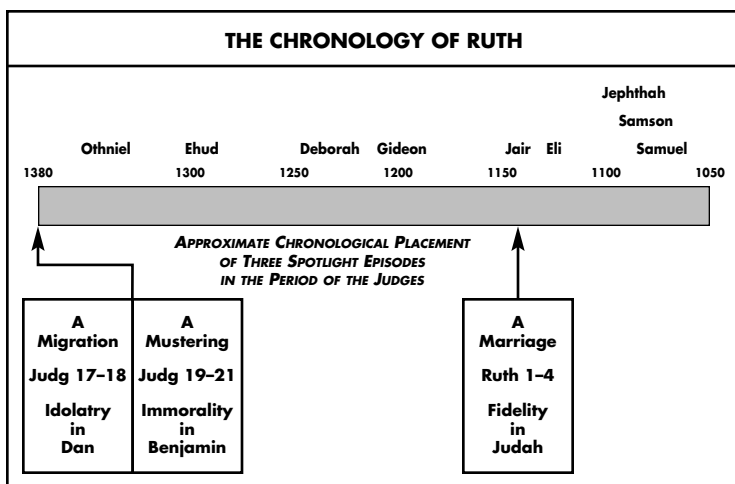
The Book of Ruth has been dubbed a “masterpiece . . . one of the world’s greatest short stories.”<sup>10</sup> Such language suggests that the book is an independent composition which may have had as its original purpose merely the entertainment of the reader. Actually the “book” of Ruth was originally the concluding portion of the Book of Judges. Ruth derives its ultimate significance from its original context as part of the larger book.

When was the story of Ruth excised from the Book of Judges? Sometime after the time of Josephus (c. AD 90). Why was this done? Apparently to facilitate the ease with which this material could be read at the feast of Pentecost. The newly created book was placed along with four other short Old Testament books in a collection called in Jewish tradition *Megilloth* (“Scrolls”). Rabbinic tradition required that each of these small books be read at major religious observances.<sup>11</sup>

Since Ruth was originally part of Judges, this book must have been penned by the author of that book. As noted above, Samuel is the traditional author of Judges.

## C. Chronology of the Book.

Chart No. 6





The Book of Ruth is a sidestep book. Like the two appendices which follow the Samson saga in the Book of Judges (chs. 17–21), Ruth does not advance the history of God's people. The last five chapters of Judges and the four chapters of Ruth—three distinct episodes—are like three spotlights on social life during the period of the Judges. Though the events in Ruth clearly took place during the period of the Judges (1:1), exactly at what point in those three plus centuries is not easy to determine. Since Boaz was the great grandfather of David (Ruth 4:21), a date of about 1130 BC for these events would not be far off. For this reason several scholars date events in the book to the judgeship of Jair (1148-1126 BC).

#### **D. Contents of the Book.**

The purpose of Ruth must have been the same as the two episodes with which the present Book of Judges concludes, namely, to shed light on the everyday life in Israel during the period of the Judges. In the first two episodes the author depicted the idolatry in the tribe of Dan and the immorality in the tribe of Benjamin. Ruth stresses fidelity in the tribe of Judah. All was not completely black in Israel's dark ages. Boaz, "*a man of wealth*" (NASB) or "*standing*" (NIV), is portrayed as a devout and obedient follower of Yahweh. Boaz stands out in this period as one stalwart oak in a forest of fallen timber. Ruth's devotion to the Lord is even more amazing. In spite of her pagan Moabite upbringing, in spite of seeing God's people in circumstances of suffering and deprivation, in spite of Israelite prejudice against her race, she still chose to worship Yahweh and identify with his people.

#### **E. Teaching of Ruth.**

No personal messianic prophecy is found in Judges-Ruth. In Ruth, however, rich typology is present. The kinsman redeemer (*go'el*) in Ruth is taken to be a type of Christ. Archer goes so far as to say that Ruth is one of the most instructive books in the Old Testament concerning the mediatorial work of Christ.<sup>12</sup> Ruth demonstrates that the *go'el* must (1) be a blood relative; (2) have the wherewithal to purchase the forfeited inheritance; (3) be willing to buy back that inheritance; and (4) be willing to marry the wife of a deceased kinsman.

The genealogy at the end of Ruth deserves special attention. Such genealogies in Scripture remind the reader of “the continuity of God’s purpose through the ages.”<sup>13</sup> Behind the romantic short story is the genealogy of Messiah. Thus the author relates to his readers the long-range consequence of Ruth’s devotion to Naomi and her God. Her faith and love put her into the direct line of the Messiah.<sup>14</sup>

For the second time in the historical books the principle is established that those who were far off from the covenant promises could become part of the family of God through obedient faith. Rahab the Canaanite and Ruth the Moabite demonstrate that those who cried out to Yahweh for refuge found a loving welcome.

In a more devotional vein the book teaches that it is possible to live for God in the darkest circumstances. Boaz was loyal to God while surrounded by immorality and idolatry. Materially and socially speaking, Ruth had everything to lose and nothing to gain by casting her lot with the people of God. Yet she chose Yahweh. Although God’s grace is free and open to all, it can save only those who make it theirs by an act of deliberate choice.

## ENDNOTES

1. C.J. Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, Bible Student’s Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), pp. 5f. Passages indicating compliance with Mosaic instruction: 8:31; 11:15,20,23; 13:8,15,32,33; 20:2.

2. J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), I, 237.

3. These other passages have been nominated as the key texts in the Book of Joshua: 1:5-9; 23:3b-11; 24:14-15.

4. A.E. Cundall considers Judg 1:1a to be the title for the whole book. He assigns the events of 1:1b-2:6 to the lifetime of Joshua. A.E. Cundall and Leon Morris, *Judges and Ruth: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1968), p. 51.

5. K.A. Kitchen cited by M. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 10.

6. Irving Jensen, *Jensen’s Survey of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), p. 152.

7. Baxter, *Explore*, II, 9.

8. The five parts of the literary framework of the Book of Judges are: (1) the assessment of evil (“Israel did evil”); (2) the assertion of judgment (Yah-

weh “sold” or “delivered” them into the hand of an enemy, or “strengthened” an enemy against them); (3) the appeal for intervention (“Israel cried unto Yahweh”); (4) the announcement of action (“Yahweh raised up a deliverer” or “subdued” the enemy); (5) the analysis of results (“the land had rest”).

**9.** Dale Ralph Davis questions whether Israel’s cry implies repentance. His study of the uses of the Hebrew *za’aq* led him to conclude that the word by itself does not connote repentance. See *Such a Great Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), pp. 49f.

**10.** J. Lawrence Eason, *The New Bible Survey* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963), p. 128.

**11.** The other four books of the *Megilloth* and their place in the annual cycle of religious observances were Song of Solomon (Passover), Lamentations (Ninth of Ab), Ecclesiastes (Tabernacles) and Esther (Purim).

**12.** Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Rev. ed.; Chicago: Moody, 1985), p. 287.

**13.** Cundall and Morris, *Judges and Ruth*, p. 318.

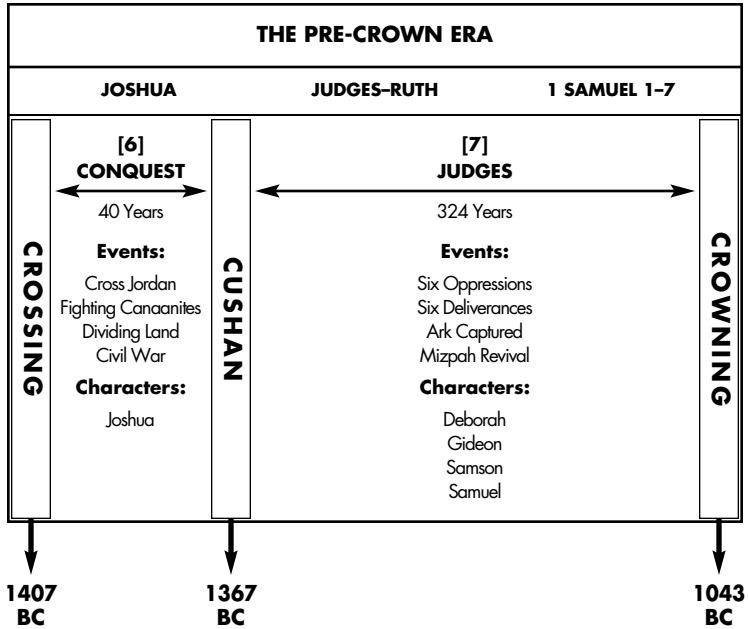
**14.** Ruth is one of four women listed in Matthew’s genealogy of Christ (Matt 1:1-16). The other three—Tamar, Rahab and Bathsheba—are associated with unworthy conduct. Ruth’s life is without blemish, unless it be that she was a Gentile by birth and once gave allegiance to pagan gods.

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Chart No. 7



## CHAPTER THREE

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### Preparing for Victory Joshua 1:1-5:12

As the Book of Joshua opens, the people of Israel are poised to push into Cis-jordan, the heart of the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The plan of God revealed by Moses required the armies of Israel to cross the Jordan and dislodge those who were occupying the territory which was Israel's by divine decree. That would not be an easy task. Canaanite cities were well fortified; their armies were well equipped. In theory at least Canaan at this period was under Egyptian hegemony. The Pharaoh's assistance to his vassal clients was always a possibility. Even with his limited military experience Joshua must have realized that, humanly speaking, his forces faced incredible odds against success beyond the Jordan.

The opening chapters of Joshua focus on the preparations which were ordered before the commencement of the campaign. Four types of preparation are in evidence here: (1) hortatory, (2) military, (3) logistical, and (4) spiritual.

**HORTATORY PREPARATION**  
**Joshua 1:1-18**

The Book of Joshua opens and closes with exhortation. The first chapter consists of three hortatory utterances: (1) Yahweh to Joshua, (2) Joshua to the tribes, and (3) the people to Joshua.

**A. Yahweh to Joshua (Josh 1:1-9).**

At about the age of ninety Joshua must have been filled with apprehension about succeeding Moses. The very fact that God would speak directly to him (1:1) was of itself a significant encouragement to this aging man of God. Previously the Lord had spoken only to Moses, “*the servant of Yahweh.*”<sup>1</sup> Joshua had been only Moses’ servant, a position of honor and apprenticeship (cf. Num 27:15-23; Deut 1:38; 3:21f.), but nonetheless a secondary position. Now Joshua would be the intermediary for divine revelation to Israel. That God broke the silence was the first of several steps taken by the Lord to bolster the confidence of Joshua and to magnify him in the eyes of the people. In his message the Lord first brought encouragement and then he offered exhortation to Joshua.

**Chart No. 8**

THE LIFE OF JOSHUA					
IN EGYPT	IN THE DESERT	IN CANAAN	A WARRIOR	AN ADMINISTRATOR	AN ORATOR
A SLAVE	A SERVANT	A SPY	3 Great Campaigns chs. 1–12	Land Division chs. 13–22	2 Great Speeches chs. 23–24
PREPARATION c. 90 Years			↓ Death of Moses 1407 BC	LEADERSHIP c. 20 Years	



1. *The encouragement (1:2-5).* The encouragement took several forms. First, Yahweh assured Joshua that the plan to conquer Canaan had not been altered by the death of Moses. Joshua and the people were to arise and pass over Jordan (1:2a). Earlier the Lord had told Joshua that he would lead Israel into the Promised Land (Deut 31:7,23). Now he was being encouraged to assume that leadership role. Second, Yahweh reassured Joshua that he was about to give them (a participle implying imminent action) the land (1:2a).<sup>2</sup>

In the third and fourth words of encouragement God is addressing the entire nation through Joshua. This is indicated by the switch from the singular to the plural second person pronoun in the Hebrew. The Lord declared that he had already given (perfect form of the verb) every place within that territory where they would have the faith to tread (1:3). The gift would be in proportion to the faith which they exercised in marching through the land. God always rewards courageous faith!

To magnify the promise just made, the Lord gave a verbal sketch of the broad contours of the territory he intended to give Israel (1:4).<sup>3</sup> Their territory would stretch from the wilderness<sup>4</sup> to the Lebanon mountains and Euphrates river in the north, and from the territory they already occupied in the east to the Great (Mediterranean) Sea in the west. The Lord specifically indicates that “*all the land of the Hittites*” would be theirs. The Hittites had in recent years been an international power which controlled territory in Syria and northern Palestine.<sup>5</sup>

Fifth, God assured Joshua—the pronoun now reverts to singular—that, though Israel would face resistance, anyone who would try to defend the land would not be able to stand before him (1:5).<sup>6</sup> Sixth, the Lord repeated what Moses had already told Joshua (cf. Deut 31:8), that he could count on the same divine assistance which Moses had received during his tenure as leader. With his own eyes Joshua had seen the supernatural intervention with which the Lord had come to the aid of Moses in crisis after crisis.

2. *The exhortation (1:6-9).* The promises just made to Joshua were conditional. Joshua was commanded three times to “*be strong and courageous.*”<sup>7</sup> He must manifest a fearless confidence in God’s ability to fulfill what he had sworn to do for his people.<sup>8</sup> Joshua must

believe that he would lead his people to “inherit”<sup>9</sup> their land (1:6). If he would enjoy success in his work he must manifest that same fearless confidence in executing exactly what Moses had commanded in the Law regarding the Conquest. Joshua’s “way”—his life and leadership—would be prosperous if he was careful to obey the stipulations of God’s word (1:7-8). Finally, God commanded fearless confidence because that is the only appropriate disposition for one who has God as a traveling companion (1:9). Fear and anxiety are tantamount to unbelief.

### **B. Joshua to the Tribes (Josh 1:10-15).**

Bolstered by the encouraging revelation from the Lord, Joshua immediately began to exercise his authority over the people. He spoke first to the officers, and then to the eastern tribes.

1. *Commandment to the officers (1:10-11).* A chain of command within Israel was recognized. The tribal officers<sup>10</sup> were to pass on to the people a command, an explanation and a promise. The command was to “prepare provisions” (NASB), i.e., to gather up all supplies they might need to sustain them until they were established in Canaan.<sup>11</sup> The explanation for the command was that within three days they would be crossing over Jordan to possess their inheritance. The promise was that God would give them that land as their own possession.

2. *Conversation with the eastern tribes (1:12-15).* Joshua immediately sought out the leaders of the two and a half tribes which were intending to settle in Transjordan. He reminded them that Moses had already given them their rest—their inheritance (cf. Num 32:16-32). That gift, however, had been made conditionally. The Reubenites, Gadites and half tribe of Manasseh were to leave their families in Transjordan and lead the way across the Jordan “in battle array” (NASB) or “fully armed” (NIV).<sup>12</sup> They were to help their brothers until they had been given rest, i.e., the cessation of hostilities, and had possessed their inheritance. Joshua understood that in the wars of the Lord God’s people must be united. The issue which Joshua explored with these tribes was that of leadership. Would they honor their word to Moses? Would they recognize Joshua as Moses’ legitimate successor?

### **C. The People to Joshua (Josh 1:16-18).**

The leaders of the eastern tribes immediately recognized the authority of Joshua. *"All that you have commanded us we will do."* They would leave their families behind and march together with their brothers until the victory was achieved. They were willing to go wherever Joshua might wish to send them. The eastern tribes would render to Joshua the same cheerful obedience which they had given to his predecessor. Furthermore, they would regard as treason any rebellion against the authority of Joshua. The death penalty would be executed against any who refused to obey the voice of the new leader (cf. Deut 17:12).

The speech of the Transjordan leaders contains provisos which are certainly wishes and may be prayers. Both are introduced by the word *"only."* First, they expressed the hope (condition?) that God would be with Joshua as he had been with Moses. These men realized that divine intervention would be necessary if the campaign in Canaan was to be successful. Second, the easterners prayed that Joshua might *"be strong and courageous."*<sup>13</sup> They knew that without courageous leadership the mission would fail.

## **MILITARY PREPARATION**

### **Joshua 2:1-24**

Jericho was the first objective beyond the river. Joshua needed to know what he was up against there. Perhaps he anticipated receiving information which would bolster troop morale on the eve of the river crossing. In any case, the dispatching of the two spies is evidence of Joshua's foresight as a general.

### **A. The Mission of the Spies (Josh 2:1-7).**

Joshua secretly dispatched two men from Shittim<sup>14</sup> to spy out Canaan, especially Jericho. Why secretly? Did he not wish his own people to know what he had done? Did he think that such a move might imply that his faith was not strong? Or was the stealth necessary to avoid Canaanite patrols on the western bank of the Jordan? The text offers no clue. Nor does the account describe what must have been a harrowing adventure for these two men in crossing that rampaging, flood-swollen river (2:1).

The spies proceeded immediately to Jericho. They found lodging in the house of a harlot<sup>15</sup> named Rahab. Perhaps they chose this house of ill repute because they thought that fewer questions might be asked of them there. Even so, the men were quickly spotted, recognized as Israelites, and reported to the king of the city. Messengers were sent to Rahab ordering her to bring out the men who had entered her house. If Rahab was a sacred prostitute connected with one of the temples of the city that might explain why the authorities did not simply barge into the house and seize the strangers (2:2-3).

Rahab was not too sure that the sanctuary of her house would be respected by the king's men. She took the precaution of hiding her guests among stalks of flax on the flat roof of her house. As it turned out, this was unnecessary. Rahab was able to convince the soldiers that the strangers had indeed come, but they had left about sundown when the city gate was closed. She feigned concern that the soldiers pursue immediately after these men so that they might overtake them (2:4-6).

The soldiers followed the woman's advice. They searched every road leading to the Jordan. Though a sizable search party must have been sent out of the city, precautions were taken to shut the gate after their departure. Fear gripped the city that the Israelites might launch a surprise attack even during the night (2:7).

## **B. The Covenant of the Spies (Josh 2:8-21).**

After the soldiers left, Rahab went immediately to the roof to converse with her two guests. At the door of her home she had taken a stand. She had renounced her country and its gods. Now she enthusiastically embraced Yahweh as "*God in heaven above and earth beneath.*" She confessed her faith in the program of God: "*I know that Yahweh has given you the land.*" Her conviction grew out of personal observation and prior testimony. Rahab had personally observed that the Canaanites already had lost their land because they were too terrified to offer effective resistance.<sup>16</sup> This fear grew because of reports of what Yahweh had done for Israel over the past forty years. Through traveling merchants the Canaanites knew of the crossing of the Red Sea on dry land. Within the past few months fugitives from the Amorite kingdoms of Sihon and Og had reported how

Israel had put their nations under the curse (*cherem*) of total destruction. These reports led to two results: fear and faith. For most Canaanites it was only fear; for Rahab, both fear and faith (2:8-10).

Rahab not only believed in the power of Yahweh, she must have also believed in his mercy. For this reason she pled with the spies to enter into a covenant with her that she and her household might be spared in the day of attack. On condition that she tell no one about their mission the two spies pledged on their lives that Israel would deal “*in covenant loyalty and faithfulness*,” i.e., they would honor the covenant with Rahab (2:12-14).

In the overcrowded city of Jericho Rahab’s house had been built upon the wall. When the men descended by rope from the window of her house they would be outside the walls. Rahab urged the men to head west toward the nearby mountains which are honeycombed with caves. If they waited there for three days it would be safe for them to return to their camp east of Jordan (2:15-16).

Before leaving the scene the spies underscored again the conditions of the oath which they had just made to spare Rahab and her house. The oath would not be binding if these conditions were not met. First, she would need to tie “*this cord*”—apparently the rope upon which they had descended—in her window. This rope was made of bright scarlet thread woven together; it would be easily recognizable in the day of battle. (At this point the men assumed Jericho would fall by battle). Second, she would be responsible for gathering her family into the designated house. The spies would not guarantee the safety of anyone outside the house. Third, they underscored again the necessity of absolute secrecy. Rahab agreed to those conditions. She put the scarlet cord in her window apparently that very night (2:17-21).

### **C. The Report of the Spies (Josh 2:22-24).**

The spies disappeared into the night. They followed the advice of Rahab and headed for the hills, exactly the opposite direction of that which the pursuers assumed they had taken. There they hid for three days. Then they returned to camp by the route they had come. They reported to Joshua that the Canaanites had melted away in fear before Israel. Their conclusion was “*Surely Yahweh has given all*

*the land into our hands.*” This is now the fifth utterance of this glorious truth. The Lord said it to Joshua (1:2,3), Joshua said it to the officers and the Transjordan tribes (1:11,15), Rahab said it to the spies (2:9) and now the spies say these words to Joshua.

## **LOGISTICAL PREPARATION**

### **Joshua 3:1-4:18**

Before undertaking the Conquest one formidable challenge had to be met. The Jordan river, never easy to cross, was in flood (3:5). Though two robust spies had navigated that river, now an army of thousands, not to mention women, children and livestock, would have to cross.

#### **A. Approaching Jordan (Josh 3:1).**

After three days of breaking camp (1:11), Joshua led the Israelites to a position closer to the Jordan. No hint had yet been given as to how they would be able to negotiate that raging river. In miles the distance from Shittim east of Jordan to Gilgal on the western bank was not more than six miles. Those miles, however, were potentially the most difficult and terrifying traveled thus far by Israel. Yet if there was to be a Conquest at all, Joshua had to reposition his forces in a staging area west of the river. For three days they awaited further instructions.

#### **B. Further Instructions (Josh 3:2-13).**

After three days the plan for crossing Jordan began to take shape. Instructions were passed from the Lord to Joshua, and from Joshua and the officers to the people.

1. *Instructions of the officers (3:2-4).* The plan was for the people to follow the ark of the covenant as it was carried by the Levitical priests.<sup>17</sup> Because of the vast number of people, the ark would be 2000 cubits (3000 feet or over half a mile) in front of the group. That way every Israelite would know that Yahweh was leading them forward. The rationale for letting the Lord lead is as valid for the believer today as for the Israelites then: “*You have not passed this way before.*” The officers mentioned nothing of a miraculous crossing on

dry land. That, apparently, had not yet been revealed. They simply were trusting God to provide a way through an impassable barrier.

2. *Initial instructions of Joshua (3:5-6).* Joshua addressed first the people and then the priests. He urged the people to “consecrate” themselves. He challenged them to believe that on the morrow they would see Yahweh “do wonders”<sup>18</sup> among them. He did not state, however, what those wonders would be. Perhaps his words would bring to their mind what had happened at the Red Sea some forty years earlier.

Joshua then spoke to the priests, directing them to take up the ark and move forward ahead of the people. They immediately obeyed. What great faith was being demonstrated by these men of God! God’s people can only do the impossible when the leaders of the faith are willing to be out in front.

3. *Instructions of the Lord (3:7-8).* Yahweh revealed a bit more of the plan to Joshua. He was first assured that the events of that day would exalt him in the eyes of his people. They would realize that Joshua enjoyed the divine blessing upon his work as much as Moses had before. What God had promised in his commission (1:5,9) would now be fulfilled. The great miracle would be initiated by the courage of the priests. Joshua was to command those men to wade out into the the river and stand there. The Lord needed to say no more. Joshua got the picture. He hastened to pass his vision on to the people.

4. *Final instructions by Joshua (3:9-13).* Joshua introduced his final precrossing directive to the people as “the words of Yahweh.” This suggests that Joshua received more direct information from the Lord than has been recorded in the text in 3:7-8. The miracle of the crossing would lead to experiential knowledge of two key propositions of faith. First, what happened at the river would prove that the “living God” was among his people. Second, the river crossing would be a pledge that all the “ites”—the seven ethnic groups which occupied Canaan—would be dispossessed by the invading Israelites (3:9-10).

Joshua pointed out that the ark was already moving forward. He ordered that one man from each of the twelve tribes be designated. Presumably they were to follow the priests into the river. Joshua then indicated that at the moment those priestly feet entered the river, the

Jordan would stop flowing south (3:11-13). That Joshua was able to *predict* the miracle adds to the wonder of the event. God may have used natural means to produce the path across the river, but the timing of that action requires that the event be regarded as thoroughly supernatural.

### **C. Crossing Jordan (Josh 3:14-17).**

The remaining verses in typical Hebrew style relate in detail how the predictions of Joshua came to pass. When the priests carrying the ark dipped their feet into the river, the flow of water was cut off “*a great distance away at Adam.*” The priests stood on dry ground in the middle of the river bed while all the people passed over on dry ground.

### **D. Commemorating the Crossing (Josh 4:1-9).**

After the crossing, Yahweh spoke directly to Joshua for the third time. The function of the twelve men previously designated (3:12) was now indicated. These men were to pick up twelve stones from the place where the priests had stood in the midst of the riverbed. They were to carry these stones to the lodging place on the western bank and erect them as a monument. Those stones would be a “*sign*” or monument to provoke inquiries from future generations. Adults would be able to rehearse in the ears of the children the wondrous act of covenant faithfulness which God had performed for them through his ark (4:1-8).

Joshua himself erected a twelve-stone monument in the riverbed where the feet of the priests had stood. Those stones still protruded above the waters of the river at the time the Book of Joshua was written, about twenty years later (4:9).

### **E. Conclusion of the Crossing (Josh 4:10-18).**

The conclusion of the crossing account stresses the obedience of all those who participated. Joshua had faithfully carried out all that the Lord had spoken to him in the past through Moses and more recently in direct communication. The priests had also done exactly as Joshua had commanded them. The people cooperated by hurrying across the dry riverbed (4:10).



When the crossing ended, the ark of God again moved to the lead position in the march formation.<sup>19</sup> The Transjordan contingent—forty thousand strong<sup>20</sup>—followed the ark. Again the emphasis is on the obedience of these warriors to the instruction which Moses had given them (4:11-13).

Yahweh honored his own word that day. He had promised to exalt Joshua in the eyes of the people. That is exactly what he did. The people came to revere Joshua all the days of his life just as they had revered his predecessor (4:14).

The description of the ark's departure out of the Jordan is every bit as dramatic as that of the ark's approach to the river. The priests left the riverbed at Joshua's command which was issued in obedience to the directive of the Lord.<sup>21</sup> As soon as their feet touched the western bank a raging wall of water came down the riverbed. The water again overflowed its banks as before. The timing of the return of the waters was just as much a miracle as the crossing had been a few hours before (4:15-18).

## **SPIRITUAL PREPARATION**

### **Joshua 4:19-5:12**

After crossing the river the people camped at Gilgal (location uncertain). The event is so important that the date was long remembered. Israel camped in Canaan for the first time on the tenth day of the first month in the forty-first year after leaving Egypt (4:19). While encamped there the children of Israel made spiritual preparation for the long struggle to follow.

#### **A. Covenant Faithfulness Recalled (Josh 4:19-5:1).**

Under Joshua's direction the twelve stones taken from the midst of the Jordan were set up in Gilgal. The establishment of this memorial was accompanied by a brief speech by Joshua. As he had previously indicated (4:6f.), those stones were to have a pedagogical purpose. Children over the years would be inclined to ask what those twelve huge boulders, obviously stacked by human hands, meant. Adults would then be able to recount the glorious story of the crossing. The crossing of the Jordan is linked by Joshua to the crossing of the Red Sea. Both

miracles were designed to teach all peoples that Yahweh is indeed mighty. At the same time, both miracles were designed to underscore God's special relationship with Israel. Such mighty acts should have made Israel reverence Yahweh their God forever (4:19-24).<sup>22</sup>

Rahab had alluded to the Red Sea crossing and the effect of that miracle on the peoples in Canaan who had heard about it. The author now indicates the effect of the Jordan crossing upon those same people. Not just the common people, but even the kings of the region melted in fear at the news that Israel had transversed the Jordan on dry ground. The kings knew that they would now be compelled to face the armies of the Living God, the God of heaven and earth (5:1).

### **B. Covenant Sign Renewed (Josh 5:2-9).**

In the fourth direct divine communication with Joshua, the Lord ordered a renewal of the rite of circumcision. This very basic covenant rite (Gen 17:11) had been suspended during the years of desert punishment, but for what reason is a matter of conjecture. In any case, Joshua was ordered to make flint knives<sup>23</sup> and circumcise that second generation of Israelites who had never received the sign of the Abrahamic covenant in their flesh. The place where the surgery was performed was called Gibeath-haaraloth, the hill of the foreskins. The men were forced to remain in camp until all were healed (5:2-8).

A declaration of the Lord to Joshua—the sixth divine communication to him—provided the name for that first camping spot. Now that Israel had been brought into the land flowing with milk and honey, and through circumcision had recommitted themselves to the covenant of the fathers, “*the reproach of Egypt*” had been rolled away. The Egyptians had heaped ridicule on the people of God with their dreams of a homeland. This was especially the case when the Israelites had been forced to wander so many years in the desert. Merchants and desert nomads kept the Egyptians informed of the whereabouts of this nation of former slaves. While Israel wandered in circles in the desert they must have been the butt of many a joke in Egypt. But no more. The God who had brought them out of Egypt had now brought them into Canaan. So they called that first camping spot Gilgal, “*rolling*,” to commemorate the fact that God had rolled away their reproach (5:9).

### **C. Covenant Meal Revived (Josh 5:10-12).**

The first Passover was observed in Egypt the night of the death plague against the firstborn of the land. The second Passover was observed while Israel was camped at Mt. Sinai. So far as the record goes, the third observance of this great festival took place at Gilgal. Henceforth the Passover celebration would not only commemorate the “going out” (Exodus), it would also commemorate the “entering in.”

Like circumcision, Passover seems to have been suspended during the period of wilderness wandering. In fact, no uncircumcised person was permitted to participate in the Passover ritual (Exod 12:48). Therefore, as the years of wandering progressed, an ever increasing percentage of Israelites would have been disqualified from observing the feast. Now that barrier had been removed. On the fourteenth day of Nisan, four days after the circumcision (cf. 4:19), the nation observed the first of thousands of Passovers in the Promised Land. Most of the males were still quite sore from the surgery which had been performed upon them. Nonetheless, the celebration must have been joyous indeed (5:10).

A special feature of this Passover was the eating for the first time of the “*produce of the land.*” They ate “*parched grain*” along with the unleavened bread which was normally eaten at Passover. Once they were able to feed upon the fruits of Canaan, God no longer miraculously provided for them the manna which he had supplied over the past forty years (5:11-12).

In preparing for victory God’s people had to overcome four great obstacles: (1) the death of Moses (ch. 1); (2) the morale of the troops (ch. 2); (3) the raging waters of Jordan (chs. 3-4); and (4) the spiritual condition of the people (ch. 5). The first obstacle was surmounted by words of encouragement and exhortation; the second, by information derived from reconnaissance; the third, by dramatic manifestation of the power of God; and the fourth, by renewal of basic ceremonies which marked Israel as the special people of God.

## ENDNOTES

1. Moses is called “*the servant of the Lord*” in Deut 34:5 and frequently in the Book of Joshua. At the conclusion of his life Joshua was given this title (Josh 24:29). Others who were called “*the servant of the Lord*” were Abraham (Gen 26:24), David (1 Kgs 8:66) and even Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 25:9).

2. The theme of the “giving” of the land can be traced back to the Patriarchal narratives. See Gen 12:7; 13:15; 15:18; 26:3-4. That which had been promised was about to be fulfilled (cf. 13:1).

3. In different language, but with the same geographical vista, the boundaries of the Promised Land are given in Gen 15:18; Deut 1:7; 11:24. Only during the days of David and Solomon did Israel control all the territory encompassed here.

4. “The wilderness” in Josh 1:4 is the desert of Zin or perhaps the desert of Paran lying south of Canaan (Num 13:3,21).

5. “Hittites” may be used in Josh 1:4 in a representative sense to embrace all those who lived within the territory broadly sketched out here. For centuries after the time of Joshua the region of Syria-Canaan was known as the “Hatti (Hittite) land” in the Near East.

6. The promise given to the entire nation in Deut 11:25 is now given to Joshua personally as the leader of that people.

7. In the Hebrew the terms “*be strong*” and “*be courageous*” are virtually synonymous.

8. God’s oath to the fathers concerning the land can be found in Gen 15:18; 24:7; Exod 32:13.

9. The verb inherit (*nachalah*) and the derived noun are important words in Joshua. They appear in 11:23; 14:13; 16:4; 17:6. Cf. also Deut 1:38; 12:10. The word argues for Israel’s legitimate claim to the land. The concept has been carried over into the New Testament to speak of kingdom blessings which are inherited by the believer (e.g., 1 Pet 1:4).

10. The Hebrew term translated “*officers*” (NASB; NIV) literally means “literate men” or “scribes.” The same term is used in Josh 3:2; 8:33; 23:2. These men were probably civil servants rather than military men.

11. The “*provisions*” would not include the manna, which could not be stored from day to day. Deut 2:6 suggests that Israel was able to secure other provisions now that they were out of the desert.

12. The Hebrew term *hamushim* literally means “a fivefold arrangement of army troops.”

13. Joshua was hearing the exhortation “*be strong and courageous*” for the fifth time. Previously he had heard these words from Moses (Deut 31:6) and three times from the Lord (Josh 1:6,7,9).

14. Shittim is probably the same as Abel-shittim (Num 33:49). Here Israel sinned with Baal of Peor (Num 25:1-3). “Shittim” means “acacia trees.” The site is uncertain.

**15.** Rahab is called a *zonah*. Heb 11:31 and Jas 2:25 confirm that she was a harlot or prostitute. Josephus and the Jewish Targums call her an “innkeeper.”

**16.** Rahab’s words confirm the fulfillment of one of the Exodus promises, namely, that God would put his terror in the hearts of those who inhabited the Promised Land. See Exod 15:14ff.; 23:27.

**17.** Literally, “*the priests, the Levites*.” Normally the Levites of the clan of Kohath carried the ark. On special occasions, however, the priests carried the ark. See e.g., Deut 31:9; 1 Kgs 8:3,6. They are called Levitical priests, not to distinguish them from other priests (Woudstra) but to underscore the signal honor bestowed upon their tribe through its priestly members in leading the procession into the Promised Land.

**18.** Hebrew *niphla’oth*. Literally, “things to be astounded at.”

**19.** Another understanding of the expression *liphne ha ‘am* is “*before the eyes of the people*,” i.e., while they were watching from the western bank.

**20.** The forty thousand from the Transjordan tribes constitutes less than forty percent of the men of war of these tribes counted in the census taken a few weeks before by Moses (Num 26).

**21.** Josh 4:15f. is the fourth direct revelation to Joshua. The ark is here called “*the ark of the testimony*” because the ark contained the testimony (Exod 31:18), i.e., the tablets containing the ten commandments.

**22.** “*Fearing Yahweh*” includes all that is involved in Old Testament religion. The expression conveys the recognition of God’s glory and loving obedience to his commandments.

**23.** *Flint* knives may have been used to convey the thought of the antiquity of the ceremony as dating to a time before the use of metal was common.



## CHAPTER FOUR

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### Engaging the Foe Joshua 5:13-9:27

In the initial engagements of the Canaan campaign the Israelites encountered three very different types of enemies. At Jericho the enemy was holed up within their fortifications. At Ai the enemy was more bold, venturing beyond their walls to attack the Israelites. The Hivites who dwelled in Gibeon resorted to trickery to avoid a military confrontation with Israel.

#### **FAITH INSTRUCTED Joshua 5:13-6:5**

A parenthetical note (6:1) makes clear the condition of the first enemy which Israel faced. The city gates were tightly shut. No one was entering and leaving the city. Israel was unskilled in siege warfare. The situation was hopeless from a military standpoint.

Thus far the author has indicated six occasions when Yahweh spoke directly to Joshua. The seventh divine communication came in

a theophany—a visible manifestation of God. The captain of Yahweh's host revealed to Joshua the battle plan for the first campaign in Canaan.

### **A. The Encounter (Josh 5:13-15).**

Joshua had assumed even before the river crossing that Jericho would be the first objective in Canaan. From a distance he reconnoitered the city and contemplated what strategies might give Israel access to those walls with the least amount of casualties. Joshua thought he was alone with his thoughts. As he lifted up his eyes, however, he was shocked to see “a man” standing before him with a drawn sword, i.e., ready for combat. The scene was full of ambiguity. Joshua drew near with a question: “*Are you for us or for our adversaries?*” (5:13).

The stranger responded that he was not a mere soldier fighting on either side. Rather he was the commander of the host of Yahweh.<sup>1</sup> Joshua immediately bowed to the ground in respect to this one who was his military superior. He indicated that he was prepared to receive any orders which the captain might have for him. The captain let Joshua know that mere respect such as one officer might have for a superior was not sufficient. He, like Moses at the burning bush, was standing on holy ground. He needed to remove his sandals. This was a symbol of the removal of impurity and a token of respect for the holy presence of God. Joshua immediately complied (5:14-15).

Clearly a superhuman presence is depicted here. This person was undoubtedly the same as the angel of the Lord who appeared at various points in Patriarchal history,<sup>2</sup> a visible manifestation of God's presence. The drawn sword conveyed the thought that God himself would fight for Israel.

### **B. The Plan (Josh 6:1-5).**

In the person of the captain of Yahweh's host the Lord assured Joshua that “*I have given Jericho into your hands.*” The king of the city and all his valiant warriors would fall into Joshua's hands. Chapter 6 of the Book of Joshua celebrates the most outstanding instance of God's “giving” of the land to Israel.<sup>3</sup> God always has a better plan. The fall of Jericho would be an act of faith (Heb 11:30) as well as an



act of God. What a relief those words must have been to Joshua (6:2).

The plan was simple. The Israelite army was to march around the walls of Jericho every day for six days. Seven priests carrying ram's horn trumpets were to escort the ark in that procession. On the seventh day the Israelite troops were to march seven times around the walls. The number seven is obviously symbolical, recalling God's works of creation.<sup>4</sup> Then the priests were to blow their trumpets, and the people were to shout with a great shout. At that moment, God promised, the walls would "*fall down flat*." At whatever point in the procession an Israelite soldier might find himself, he would be able to move straight ahead into the city. The protective walls of Jericho would virtually melt away (6:3-5).

### **FAITH TRIUMPHANT** **Joshua 6:6-7:1**

The Hebrew narrative skillfully employs repetition to underscore what the author considered important in the account. His style emphasizes the exact compliance with the directives of the captain of Yahweh's host.

#### **A. The Plan Presented (Josh 6:6-10).**

Joshua immediately passed on the instructions of the Lord. He first explained the role of the priests (6:6). He then told the people (6:7) about the march around the city. A unit dressed in full battle array would precede the ark. This may be a reference to the forty thousand Transjordan contingent of 4:13. The advanced guard was followed by the priests who marched "*before Yahweh*," i.e., the ark which symbolized Yahweh's presence. Another military contingent—the rear guard—would follow the ark. Apparently the strange plan for the conquest of Jericho was accepted without question. Both the people and the priests fulfilled their respective roles in the strategy (6:8-9). A final detail of the plan was that the procession was to march in silence. Not one word was to be spoken until Joshua gave the signal (6:10).

#### **B. The Plan Executed (Josh 6:11-15).**

Apparently on the same day the captain of Yahweh's host

appeared to Joshua, the Israelites began their march around the walls. Given the known size of ancient Jericho—about thirteen acres—a trip around the walls would have only taken about an hour. The text gives the impression that the first day's march took place late in the day. When the ark—the emphasis on the ark should be noted—had made its trip around the walls the first day the soldiers returned to the camp at Gilgal where they spent the night (6:11).

The march was repeated on each of the next five days. On the seventh day the procession marched around the wall seven times as God had ordained (6:12-15).

### Chart No. 9

VICTORIOUS FAITH: A COMPARISON		
Hebrews 11:30		Galatians 3:26,27
The walls of Jericho fell down	WHAT	You are all the children of God
by faith	How	by faith
after they had been compassed about seven days	WHEN	for as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ
TO SAY THAT WE ARE SAVED BY FAITH WITHOUT OBEDIENCE IN BAPTISM IS TO SAY THE WALLS OF JERICO WOULD HAVE FALLEN WITHOUT MARCHING		

### C. The Ban Applied (Josh 6:16-25).

On the seventh circuit of the seventh day the priests gave a special blast on the trumpets. Joshua signaled for the shout of victory. Standing before those towering walls which as yet had shown no signs of weakening Joshua made a great proclamation of faith: "Yahweh has given you the city!" (6:16).

At this point the text records Joshua's orders regarding the ban (*cherem*) which was to be placed on the city. He probably had given these orders to tribal officers earlier in the camp, but they are placed

here in the account because they were about to be executed. The concept of the ban was simple: everything within the city belonged to God either to be used in his worship or destroyed. In this case all metallic objects were to be considered holy, i.e., set apart for God, and therefore placed in the treasury of the Lord. No captives were to be taken. All human inhabitants and animals were to be slain.<sup>5</sup> To confiscate for private use anything within the city would bring a curse on the camp. The only exception to these general rules was Rahab. Since she had hidden the Israelite spies, Rahab and her family were to be spared (6:16-19).

When the trumpets blew and the people shouted with a great shout, the walls of Jericho *"fell down flat,"* i.e., crumbled before them. The Israelite soldiers surged forward and took the city, apparently with some resistance on the part of the inhabitants (cf. 24:11). Every living thing in the city was utterly destroyed with the edge of the sword. The exception was Rahab and her family (6:20-21).

Joshua assigned the task of protecting Rahab's family to the two spies who had stayed in her home. Apparently one portion of the wall had been left standing, namely, the portion where Rahab's house was located. The converted harlot and her relatives were brought out safely. Since they were Gentiles and inhabitants of a city under God's curse they were ceremonially unclean (Lev 13:46; Deut 23:3). They were therefore compelled to live for a time outside the camp of Israel. After certain days, Rahab lived in the midst of Israel. Eventually she even married an Israelite man. She was still living in the midst of Israel at the time the Book of Joshua was written (6:22-25). Israel was a community of faith. Purely racial components never have defined "Israel."<sup>6</sup>

### **D. Concluding Notes (Josh 6:26-7:1).**

Joshua made the children of Israel take an oath that Jericho would never be refortified.<sup>7</sup> Anyone who violated that oath would be cursed before Yahweh. In the process of trying to rebuild the walls and gates of the place the violator would lose his own sons in death (6:27).<sup>8</sup>

What happened at Jericho is a magnificent example of the divine assistance promised at the outset of the campaign. Because Yahweh was with him, the fame of Joshua spread throughout the region (6:27).

The account of the glorious triumph at Jericho is marked by one sour note. The terms of the ban were not strictly observed by everyone. Achan of the tribe of Judah took for his personal use some objects which were under the ban, and which therefore belonged to God. Although only one man was the offender, the entire people were viewed as having “*acted unfaithfully*.”<sup>9</sup> God considered Israel an organic unity. A sin by one brought guilt upon all. Achan’s sin caused the anger of the Lord to burn against the sons of Israel. Corporate guilt and individual responsibility go hand in hand in Joshua 7.<sup>10</sup> Thus the author prepares the reader for the account of the first setback experienced by Israel in their inheritance campaign (7:1).

### **FAITH FALTERING**

#### **Joshua 7:2-26**

Following the great victory at Jericho, Joshua was determined to press his advantage. His strategy was to knife up into the mountains and dissect the land separating the powerful Canaanite forces in the northern part of the land from those in the south. Joshua soon learned that not all the enemy would cower within walled cities. He learned too that on the road to ultimate victory Israel would have to cope with setbacks.

#### **A. Defeat at Ai (Josh 7:2-5).**

Joshua determined that Ai would be the next objective of the campaign. Ai was a military outpost in the mountains which guarded the approach to the larger city of Bethel. Ai is said to have been near to Beth-aven (location uncertain).<sup>11</sup> Following the same strategy he had used at Jericho, Joshua dispatched some men to reconnoiter Ai. These men returned with the report that Ai was not heavily defended. Two or three thousand men should be sufficient to capture the place. The entire armed forces need not make the toilsome trip up into the mountains (7:2-3).

Joshua dispatched three thousand troops to attack Ai. The defenders launched a counterattack which caught the overconfident Israelites off guard. Joshua’s troops “*fled from before the men of Ai*.” Thirty-six Israelites died on the mountain slopes, the first to taste death in

the inheritance campaign. This setback rekindled fear in the hearts of the people of Israel. In their first attempt to take a city of Canaan by military means they had failed. God was not going to hand them Canaan on a silver platter. They would have to fight for their inheritance, and in the process of that fighting many would die (7:4-5).

### **B. Distress in the Camp (Josh 7:6-9).**

Joshua was distraught by this experience of defeat. He tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the covenant. Both he and the elders put dust on their heads as a symbol of mourning. The leaders remained prone before the ark until that evening (7:6).

Out of his despondency Joshua voiced a pathetic prayer. He began with the word “*Alas!*” by which he expressed deep pain and perplexity.” Second, Joshua requested light in the present darkness. “*Why did you, Lord, bring this people over the Jordan only to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites?*” How prone are believers in times of discouragement to blame God for life’s setbacks (7:7).

Third, Joshua actually expressed the wish that the entire nation had remained on the eastern side of Jordan. Fourth, he used narrative prayer to describe to God the tragedy which so concerned him: “*Israel has turned their backs before their enemies.*” The anticipated result of this would be that the inhabitants of Canaan would be emboldened by this news. They would surround and exterminate Israel at Gilgal. Finally, Joshua made an oblique request in the form of a question: “*Then what will you do for your great name?*” Yahweh’s reputation was linked with the people who worshiped him. If Israel disappeared, so would any reputation that Yahweh might have among the Gentiles. Thus Joshua was appealing for help. He was suggesting that helping Israel would be in God’s own self-interest (7:8-9).

### **C. Directions for Joshua (7:10-15).**

The Lord rebuked Joshua for lingering in this prayer of discouragement. He should have known when God did not aid his people at Ai that there must be sin in the camp. After all, Joshua had just warned Israel that if they violated the ban at Jericho they would bring trouble

to the camp (6:18). That was exactly what had happened. Israel had sinned in regard to the things which were put under the ban at Jericho. The contraband objects were still in the camp. Thus a curse rested upon the camp. Until those objects were destroyed God would no longer be with his people. The sons of Israel would continue to flee before their enemies (7:10-12).

So what must be done? First, God told Joshua to “*rise up*.” Prayer must never be a substitute for action! Second, he was to order the people to “*consecrate*” themselves. Third, he was to announce to the people what most would be horrified to hear: “*Things under the ban are in your midst*.” Fourth, he was to indicate the results of the presence of this forbidden material within the camp: “*You cannot stand before your enemies*.” Fifth, he was to outline a process by which the guilty party could be identified. Tribes, clans, families, households and finally individuals would “*come near*” presumably to the ark of the covenant. There by lot God would indicate where the guilt lay.<sup>12</sup> Sixth, he was to stipulate the punishment which would be heaped upon the guilty party. The violator and all which belonged to him would be burned (following execution by stoning) because of the magnitude of the sin committed. The guilty party had “*transgressed*” and had committed a “*shameful thing*” in Israel (7:13-15).

#### **D. Discovery of the Culprit (Josh 7:16-21).**

Early the next morning Joshua did exactly what God told him to do. In the lengthy process of finding the culprit first the tribe of Judah was taken, then the clan of the Zerahites, and finally the family of Zabdi. When Zabdi brought his family near the ark the lot fell on Achan (7:16-18). Why did not the Lord simply reveal the name of the trespasser to Joshua? Why this time-consuming identification process? Probably the intention was to give the guilty party opportunity to repent. By refusing to come forth earlier in the process Achan revealed his hardened and defiant heart.

Joshua pled with Achan to acknowledge his guilt. Though it was too late for forgiveness, his admission would at least bear witness to the omniscience of God in pointing him out. Now that the finger of accusation pointed straight at him, Achan admitted what he had done. He confessed to stealing from the contraband (1) a beautiful

garment from Shinar (Babylon), (2) two hundred shekels of silver (about 6.5 lbs.), and (3) a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels (about 1.1 lbs.). The irony of his sin is that he never received any benefit at all from that which he had stolen. In his own words, he *saw, coveted, took* and *concealed* that which he had taken in the soil beneath his tent (7:19-21).

### **E. Death to the Guilty (7:22-26).**

Messengers were dispatched immediately to the tent of Achan. There they found the contraband just where Achan had said. These items were brought to Joshua and the congregation. They were then “*poured out before Yahweh*” in acknowledgment that the Lord was the true owner. None of these items, however, could be placed in the treasury. The taint of Achan’s sin required their destruction (7:22-23).

Joshua and all Israel took Achan, the items he had stolen, and all his possessions and brought them to a valley which after this event was named Achor (“Trouble”). Before the execution Joshua pointed out the appropriateness of what was taking place. Achan had troubled Israel; now he was to be troubled. All Israel then stoned Achan and his children. The fact that the children (Achan seems to have been a widower) were also stoned suggests that they were accessories after the fact (if not actual accomplices) to the transgression. The bodies of the guilty were then burned along with all the possessions of the man (7:24-25).

A great heap of stones—the third thus far—was raised up over the charred carcass of Achan to bear witness through the years to the necessity of rendering unto God his due. Thus was the fierce anger of the Lord, which had come against Israel because of Achan’s transgression (7:1), now turned away (7:26).

## **FAITH REBOUNDED**

### **Joshua 8:1-29**

Once the camp had been purged, the time had come to get back on the victory trail. After the Ai debacle Joshua needed special encouragement if he was to continue in his mission. He would not dare have renewed the Conquest without an express word from the

Lord. In his ninth direct revelation to Joshua the Lord commanded his captain to take all the army and proceed to Ai. This directive contains an oblique rebuke to Joshua for having misjudged the enemy strength earlier. At the same time it was a reminder that the Conquest was to be a united effort of all the people. God promised that he would now give Ai into the hands of the Israelites (8:1).

The rules of engagement were a bit different. First, like Jericho, Ai was to be completely destroyed. All the inhabitants of the place were to be executed. Second, permission was granted for the spoils and livestock to be taken as plunder by the Israelites.<sup>13</sup> This was the standard procedure both before (Deut 2:34f.; 3:6f.) and after Jericho. Third, the Lord briefly revealed how Joshua was to organize the attack against Ai. The method of victory this time would be a military stratagem (8:2).

Joshua sent forth 30,000 valiant warriors by night to become part of an elaborate ambush at Ai. The plan was for the main body of troops to lure the soldiers out of Ai by feigning a rout. The ambushment would then seize the city and burn it.<sup>14</sup> Joshua assured the men that the strategy came from the Lord. If they followed that strategy they would be victorious over Ai. With these words of reassurance the thirty thousand immediately departed and assumed their position "*between Bethel and Ai*" on the west of Ai (8:3-9).

Joshua and the elders led the main body of troops to Ai early the next morning. He pitched camp on the north side of Ai in a valley. Joshua dispatched another five thousand men to serve as a rear guard still further to the west of where the ambushment had been deployed the previous night. These men were probably guarding against any attempted intervention from Bethel (8:10-13).

The strategy at Ai worked to perfection. The king of Ai saw Joshua and some of his men deployed in the valley. A sortie was sent forth to test the attackers. Then Joshua feigned a rout. The king of Ai ordered a total mobilization to pursue the Israelites. No one was left behind to guard Ai or Bethel.<sup>15</sup> At this point the Lord took direct control of the operation. He ordered Joshua to give the signal to begin the full attack on Ai. This tenth direct divine communication with Joshua concluded with the encouraging words "*I have given it into your hands*" (8:14-18).



When they saw Joshua raise his javelin, the ambushment arose, entered Ai, and set the town ablaze. This fire was probably intended as the signal for the retreating Israelite forces to turn and press the attack toward the city. When the men of Ai looked behind them they knew they were trapped “*in the midst of Israel*.” Every soldier of Ai was cut down. Only the king was spared and brought to Joshua. Once the field army was destroyed the troops returned to the burning city and put the rest of the inhabitants to the sword (8:19-24).

Twelve thousand inhabitants of Ai died that day, the entire population. The Israelites took the spoils of Ai as their own. Ai was left “*a heap*,” i.e., a total ruin. The king of Ai was killed (cf. 10:26) and then his corpse was impaled on a tree until evening. This disgrace demonstrated the curse of God upon those who resisted the movement of God’s people. The body of the king was then buried beneath a heap of stones in front of the gate of Ai (8:25-29). This is now the fourth heap of stones erected by Joshua during the Conquest.

### **FAITH RENEWED**

#### **Joshua 8:30-35**

Now that resistance in central Canaan had been neutralized, Joshua was able to carry out a directive of Moses (Deut 11:29; 27:2-8). He led the tribes to the area of Shechem, right in the center of Canaan. At Mount Ebal he built an altar of uncut stones in order to avoid even the slightest hint of the “*graven images*” forbidden in the Ten Commandments. There they offered burnt offerings (symbolic of complete commitment) and peace offerings (symbolic of unbroken fellowship with God) before the Lord. On plaster covered stones (cf. Deut 27:1-8) Joshua wrote the law of Moses in the presence of the sons of Israel. How much of the law was written on the stones is not indicated (8:30-32).<sup>16</sup> This mound of stones—the fifth to be erected by the Israelites—proclaimed the sovereignty of Yahweh over the entire land.

Something else took place at the twin mounts. The new generation of Israelites formally accepted Yahweh as their king by accepting the terms of his law. Joshua positioned the tribes, half on Mount Ebal and half on Mount Gerizim just as Moses had commanded. The Levit-

ical priests who carried the ark of the covenant were positioned in the valley between the two mountains. Joshua read aloud the blessings and the curses of the law. The people responded by saying “Amen” (cf. Deut 27:11-26). All Israel, including women and children, recommitted themselves to observe the law of Moses (8:33-35).

The importance of the covenant renewal ceremony at the twin mounts cannot be overstated. The passage is a key for understanding the Book of Joshua. The main point is that possession of the land was granted those who voluntarily chose to place themselves under the authority of God as revealed in the Sinai covenant. The ceremony also served to formally recognize Joshua as Moses’ successor.<sup>17</sup>

### **FAITH ENDANGERED**

#### **Joshua 9:1-27**

Among the inhabitants west of Jordan two reactions to Joshua’s initial successes manifested themselves. Most of the city states determined to band together to withstand the advance of the Israelites. The inhabitants of Gibeon,<sup>18</sup> however, “*acted craftily*.” They determined that they would try to trick the Israelites into a solemn nonaggression treaty (9:1-3).

The Gibeonite plan was simple. They sent envoys to Joshua who pretended to be from a distant land. These men were dressed in tattered clothing, they carried worn-out sacks and mended wineskins. Even their bread was dry and crumbled. From their home in the mountains these envoys traveled the nineteen miles to Gilgal to which Israel had returned after the covenant renewal ceremony at Mount Ebal (9:4-6).<sup>19</sup>

Though the Israelites suspected a ruse, the envoys nonetheless convinced them that they had come from a distant land. They claimed that the fame of Yahweh had caused them to seek out Joshua. They had heard of what the Lord had done for his people in Egypt and in Transjordan. They were too cunning to mention the more recent news of the fall of Jericho and Ai since news of these victories would not yet have reached a distant land. The elders<sup>20</sup> of Gibeon had dispatched these envoys with instructions to seek a peace treaty with Israel (9:7-13).<sup>21</sup>

Because they were suspicious, the men of Israel checked the provisions in the knapsacks of the travelers. Everything seemed to be as the envoys claimed. Therefore, the men of Israel *“took some of their provisions”* (NASB).<sup>22</sup> Here, however, the leaders of Israel were making a tragic mistake. They were trusting their senses. *“They did not ask counsel of Yahweh.”* Joshua made *“peace”* and a *“covenant”* with the Gibeonites. The leaders of Israel bound themselves to the covenant with a solemn oath (9:14-15).

Three days after the covenant had been negotiated, the Israelites discovered that these envoys were Hivites who came from a city within the territorial limits which Yahweh had assigned to Israel. The Israelites immediately marched toward Gibeon to demand an account. No doubt the Gibeonites met them at the border to remind them of the covenant and to point out that the terms of that covenant also applied to three neighboring villages under Gibeon’s jurisdiction. The advance troops refused to attack because of the oath which the leaders had taken. Though they honored the oath, the whole congregation grumbled against the leaders (9:16-18).<sup>23</sup>

The leaders explained to the people that an oath taken in the name of God could not be broken even if that oath had been negotiated under false pretenses. Israel would incur the wrath of God should they slay any of these Hivites. The terms of the covenant, however, did not prohibit other kinds of action against the Hivites. The plan was to subject the Hivites to rigorous and humiliating servitude (9:19-21).

Joshua summoned the Hivite leaders to report the decision to them. He first reproached the Hivites for their deception. He then announced that these people would be under a perpetual curse as slaves to Israel. The Hivites attempted to explain their actions. They had heard that Yahweh had commanded Moses to give the land of Canaan to Israel and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land. *“We feared greatly,”* the Hivites admitted. They seemed to be very grateful to accept whatever fate short of death that the Israelites might assign them (9:22-25).

So Joshua prevented the Hivites from being killed. He made them, however, lowly servants from that day forth. Their twofold task was to serve as hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation in

nonreligious activities, and for the worship center as well. Since the Lord had not yet indicated where his sanctuary would be, the text does not name the place where the Gibeonites would serve (9:26-27).

## ENDNOTES

1. Yahweh's army is composed angels (1 Kgs 22:19; Ps 103:20f.; 148:2). In other passages the term includes to the armies of Israel.

2. The Angel of the Lord appeared in Gen 16:7-14; 21:14-21. Later he appeared in Judg 2:1 and 6:12,22.

3. M.H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 108.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

5. Transjordan also had been placed under the *cherem* (Josh 2:10; Num 21:21-35; Deut 2:34; 3:4). The temporal *cherem* foreshadows the final judgment upon rebellious sinners at the end of days.

6. Woudstra, *Judges*, p. 116.

7. The curse does not apply to those who merely used the site of Jericho for habitation. See Josh 18:21; Judg 3:13; 2 Sam 10:5.

8. Exactly how the builder of the fortifications would lose the lives of his sons is not clear, whether by sacrificial rite on his own part or by divine action. In any case, 1 Kgs 16:34 reports the fulfillment of the curse.

9. The Hebrew *ma'al* literally means "to act under cover; to deal treacherously." It indicates a breach of trust (Lev 5:15), usually against the Lord.

10. Woudstra, *Judges*, pp. 120f.

11. Hosea and Amos use Beth-aven ("House of Nothingness") as a mocking name for Bethel (e.g., Hos 4:15). Here, however, Beth-aven is clearly distinguished from Bethel.

12. Just how the lot was cast in such situations is unknown. The suggestion has been made that white and black stones were used. A black stone drawn from the pouch would indicate guilt. Whatever the mechanics of the process, the lot was under the direction of God. This was but another means by which God revealed information to his people.

13. The ban was enforced more strictly because (1) this was the first Canaanite city to fall to Israel in the Promised Land; and (2) because the army of Israel played such a small role in the victory there.

14. The Hebrew uses two different verbs to distinguish this initial burning by the ambushment and the final burning of the city in 8:28. The first limited blaze was designed to signal the soldiers of Ai that their cause was now hopeless.

15. Either the defenders of Bethel had reinforced the garrison at Ai before the arrival of Joshua, or some communication system existed between the two sister towns. The Book of Joshua, which gives only an outline of the

Conquest struggles, does not mention the capture of Bethel. The king of Bethel, however, is named among those slain by Joshua (12:16).

**16.** The stones may have contained only the Ten Commandments. Others have suggested that they contained the blessings and curses from Deut 28.

**17.** This conclusion is based on what is known of ceremonies of covenant renewal in countries surrounding Israel. The best treatment of the present passage in the light of ancient Near Eastern custom is found in M.G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), pp. 36, 121ff.

**18.** While some still dispute the location of Gibeon, most scholars have settled on a site called el-Jib eight miles north and slightly west of Jerusalem. An imposing ancient water works has been found at this site. See *New Bible Dictionary* (2nd ed.; Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1982), s.v. "Gibeon."

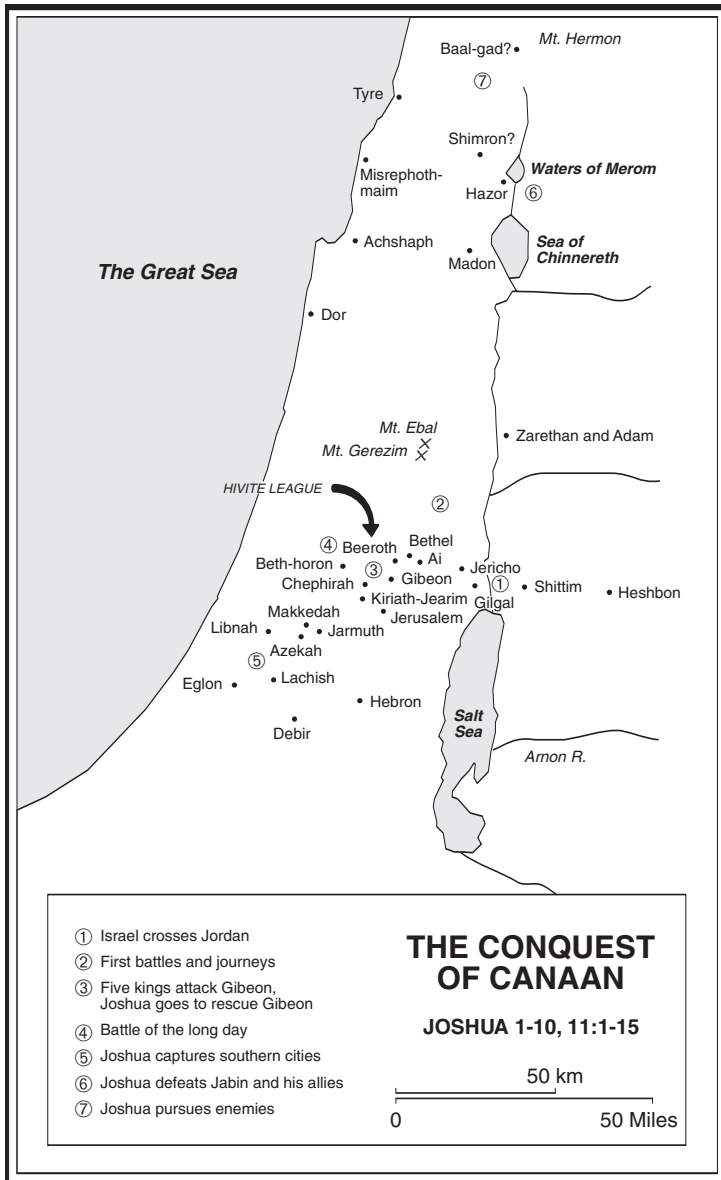
**19.** Some scholars think a different Gilgal, one in the region of Shechem, or Shiloh is intended. For a listing of the various Gilgals of the Book of Joshua, see *New Bible Dictionary*, s.v., "Gilgal."

**20.** Elders are mentioned at Gibeon, but no king. Perhaps Gibeon was under the jurisdiction of the king of Jerusalem. The other alternative would be that Gibeon's government differed from the other cities of the region.

**21.** The words "*we are your servants*" (9:8) were a formal expression of courtesy in the Near East, not an offer of subordination. C.J. Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, Bible Student's Commentary (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1986), p. 92.

**22.** The men of Israel took the provisions in order to inspect them. Another possibility is that they shared the provisions of the Gibeonites in a meal intended to seal the treaty which had just been made.

**23.** The verb used here (*lun*) is the same one used to describe the murmuring of Israel during the wilderness wandering. See e.g., Num 16:41 (Heb 3:17).



## CHAPTER FIVE

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### Conquering the Land Joshua 10-12

With the conquest of Jericho and Ai and the capitulation of Gibeon Joshua was the master of central Canaan. The remaining city states of the area were resolved to band together to resist the Israelite invaders. Unfortunately, from their point of view, Joshua had driven a wedge through the midst of their territories. Nonetheless, two major coalitions did emerge, one in southern Canaan, the other in the north.

#### **THE SOUTHERN CAMPAIGN** **Joshua 10:1-43**

Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem was concerned about the destruction of Ai and the capitulation of Gibeon. Ai was a relatively small village. Gibeon, however, was “a great city.” Historians theorize that Gibeon was within the jurisdiction of the king of Jerusalem. Therefore Gibeon’s treaty with Israel would be a renunciation of its allegiance to Jerusalem.

**A. Attack against Gibeon (Josh 10:1-8).**

Adoni-zedek invited four other kings of the region to join him in an attack against Gibeon. By military pressure the coalition would punish Gibeon for having taken the part of the Israelites. So the five kings went up, camped against Gibeon and initiated the hostilities. This assault was the first serious effort on the part of the Canaanite kings to resist the invasion of the Israelites (10:1-5).

**Chart No. 10**

THE SOUTHERN COALITION Joshua 10			
KING	CITY	AMARNA LETTERS	LOCATION
Adoni-zedek	Jerusalem	yes	
Hoham	Hebron	no	19 miles SSE of Jerusalem
Piram	Jarmuth	yes	16 miles W of Jerusalem
Japhia	Lachish	yes	25 miles SW of Jerusalem
Debir	Eglon	yes	Near Lachish (?)

The Gibeonites reported this attack to Joshua. They requested immediate help against the hill country coalition. Probably the covenant which the Israelites had signed with the Gibeonites provided for such military support (10:6).

Joshua immediately mobilized his troops. He took not only the elite troops (*“valiant warriors”*) but all the rest of the army as well. In his eleventh direct communication to Joshua, Yahweh urged his general not to be afraid. He promised to deliver the enemy into the hand of Joshua. Not one of the enemy would be able to stand before the army of Israel (10:8).

**B. Victory by Israel (Josh 10:9-11).**

Joshua 10 clearly reveals again the principle which has appeared again and again in this book, namely, that God *gives*, and Israel *takes*.<sup>1</sup> The narrative alternates between the actions of Joshua’s army and the supernatural acts of God.

By means of a night march up steep terrain Joshua was able to position his troops for an attack upon the southern coalition. The forced march caught the enemy by surprise. The summary of the



great battle is first stated, and then the details are added. Four statements are made about the outcome. First, “*Yahweh confounded*” the enemy before Israel.<sup>2</sup> Whether the enemy was confounded by the surprise attack or by the hailstorm which followed is not clear. Second, Yahweh “*slew them*” with a great slaughter at Gibeon. Third, when the enemy fled via the road leading to Beth-horon,<sup>3</sup> Yahweh pursued them. The Canaanites fled in a westerly direction toward the coastal plain. The slopes above the road gave the Israelites excellent opportunity to continue to bombard the fleeing remnants of the enemy army. Finally, Yahweh continued to strike down the enemy as far south as Azekah and Makkedah (10:10).

Yahweh used a hailstorm to smite down the enemy troops as they tried to escape from the Gibeon area. The “*great stones*”<sup>4</sup> continued to fall upon them from the “*ascent of Beth-horon*” as far as Azekah. More died in the hailstorm than died by the sword of the Israelites (10:11).

### **C. Miracle in the Heavens (Josh 10:12-15).**

The narrator has established that the Lord fought for Israel in the battle of Beth-horon after the initial rout of the enemy at Gibeon. Next he explains how the divine intervention came about. “*Then Joshua spoke unto Yahweh,*” i.e., he prayed. When? After the hailstorm? Not necessarily. “*Then*” (‘az) in Hebrew does not necessarily imply sequence. It is an indefinite indication of time. The prayer *may* have come before the great hailstorm. In any case, the prayer was “*in the sight of Israel.*” Perhaps Joshua assumed some posture which the Israelites immediately associated with prayer. He must have uttered his words audibly with Israel as eyewitness (10:12a).

Joshua’s prayer was that the sun might “*stand still*” at Gibeon and the moon over the valley of Aijalon (10:12b). The verb used here (*damam*) literally means “to be still, dumb or silent.” Why did Joshua utter such a prayer? Three basic positions have been taken by the commentators. First, the oldest interpretation is that Joshua wished to prolong the sunlight so that the enemy might be completely destroyed before darkness provided an opportunity to escape. Second, some have suggested that Joshua was praying for relief from the heat of the day so that his troops could press the attack more effectively. Third,

others have proposed that Joshua wished to maintain the advantage of darkness as he attacked the enemy in the earliest part of the day. In the first and third views Joshua's objective was virtually to make time stand still.

The inspired writer next describes how Joshua's prayer was answered. The sun "*stood still*" (another form of the verb *damam*) and the moon "*stopped*" (*'amad*). The verbs could be understood to indicate that the heavenly bodies ceased in their motion or that they ceased in their function. Joshua 10:13 could be understood to declare that either the daylight or the darkness was prolonged. If the sun stopped, or appeared to stop, in its *motion*, then daylight would be prolonged. If the sun stopped in its *function*, then the darkness would be prolonged. In any case, this unusual day continued until "*the nation avenged themselves of their enemies*" (10:13).

In what he has reported thus far about the battle of Beth-horon the author of the Book of Joshua has been citing the Book of Jashar (lit., upright, just). Holy Spirit inspiration does not mandate originality, only accuracy and truthfulness. The Holy Spirit often guided biblical writers to cite resource material. The Book of Jashar is mentioned one other time in the Old Testament (2 Sam 1:18). It appears to have been a poetic composition describing the wars of Yahweh. The original Book of Jashar is not extant. It is not properly speaking "a lost book of the Bible." Had God intended for it to be part of the sacred collection, the book providentially would have been preserved. A spurious edition of the Book of Jashar is available, but it is worthless for any serious historical investigation (10:13).

Some commentators attempt to explain away the miracle of Joshua 10 as poetic exaggeration. The Israelites supposedly accomplished as much in one day as they would normally accomplish in two. This approach to the text is entirely unacceptable. Though it is true that Joshua's prayer is cited in poetic form, the sacred historian himself verifies that a miracle actually happened in the heavens in response to that prayer. "*The sun stopped [or ceased] in the midst of the sky.*" The sun "*did not hasten to go down [or come] for about a whole day.*" The report of what happened, like the prayer which called it forth, is ambiguous. The Hebrew verbs could just as easily be taken to refer to a prolonged night as to a prolonged day (10:13).

Whatever happened that day in the sky over Gibeon was a miracle wrought in answer to Joshua's prayer. Never before nor since had the Lord listened to the voice of a man to alter the normal routine of the heavenly bodies. By answering Joshua's prayer Yahweh "*fought for Israel*" (10:14). This phrase used in verse 14 in connection with the sun "*standing still*" recalls the language of verses 10-11 where the Lord caused great hailstones to fall on the enemy. When the Lord caused the sun to "*stand still*" he created the weather conditions which produced the hailstones of verses 10-11. A rapid cooling of moisture laden air is the natural cause of hail. Joshua's prayer was answered when God caused the sun to cease producing light. This may have been done by means of a cloud. The sudden change in temperature produced the hailstorm. Fleeing down the ascent of Beth-horon the Canaanites were pelted by the huge hailstones.

At the conclusion of the great victory over the armies of the southern coalition Joshua and his troops returned to the camp at Gilgal (10:15). To the western reader 10:15 seems out of place. It signals the end of the story whereas it is clear from what follows that another dramatic incident occurred on that same day. The verse serves to mark the conclusion of phase one of the conquest in the south, namely, the defeat of the enemy host. Now having related the striking defeat of the armies of the southern coalition, the author relates another incident which occurred later that same day—the capture and execution of the five kings.

#### **D. Execution of the Kings (Josh 10:16-21).**

During the flight from the battle of Beth-horon, the five kings had hidden themselves in "*the cave at Makkedah*." After an unspecified period of time, the Israelites found the kings. Their whereabouts was reported to Joshua. The general issued an order that the cave be sealed and guarded. The troops were to continue to press the remnants of the southern coalition. Every effort was to be made to prevent these Canaanites from returning to their cities (10:16-19).

How long the great campaign in the south lasted is not stated in the text. After the southern coalition was completely crushed and the few survivors had entered their cities, the Israelites returned to the camp which Joshua had established at Makkedah. No one dared

challenge Israel or even utter a negative word against them in view of the smashing success which they had experienced (10:20-21).

Joshua then ordered the cave of Makkedah opened and the five kings brought out. He ordered that the military officers who were with him on this campaign come near and put their feet upon the necks of the captive kings. This act symbolized what God would do to all the enemies of Israel. Therefore, Joshua urged his subordinates to “*be strong and courageous*” (10:22-25). These words had previously been spoken to Joshua by Moses, the Lord and the people (e.g., 1:6,18). Now he for the first time uses these words to encourage his subordinates.

The kings were then executed, and impaled on five “*trees*” until evening. One who hung on a tree was considered cursed of God (Deut 21:23; Gal 3:13). In compliance with the law of Moses (Deut 21:23), before sunset Joshua ordered the corpses taken down. They were thrown in the cave in which earlier they had taken refuge. Huge stones were then placed over the entrance of the cave to serve as another stone monument, the sixth in the book (10:26-27).

### **E. Capture of Cities (Josh 10:28-39).**

At this point the author lists a number of cities in southern Canaan—the future territory of Judah—which were captured by Joshua. The passage is characterized by a certain monotony of repetition. It emphasizes the role of Yahweh in “*giving*” these cities into the hands of Israel. In each case the ban was applied. All the inhabitants were executed including the king. Six southern cities are listed: (1) Makkedah (10:28); (2) Libnah (10:29-30); (3) Lachish (10:31-32); (4) Eglon (10:34-35); (5) Hebron (10:36-37); and (6) Debir (10:38-39). Three of these cities were mentioned earlier in the chapter as part of the southern coalition. While the author presents a stereotypical description of the capture of each of these cities, certain individual variations in the reports are present.

1. In four of the six reports the execution of the king is mentioned. No mention is made of the fate of the kings of Lachish and Eglon.

2. The language used to describe the movements of Joshua’s army is different depending on the geographical circumstances of each particular city. So Joshua “*passed on*” or “*went up*” or simply “*returned*” (NASB).

3. The city of Lachish received aid from the king of Gezer delaying the capture of that city by one day. The army from Gezer was crushed (10:33).

4. Both Debir and Hebron had to be recaptured at a later period.<sup>5</sup>

5. The mention of the execution of the king of Hebron in 10:37 is interesting in the light of 10:23 in which he was executed on the day of the smashing victory. The conquests reported in 10:28-39 must have stretched over considerable time. The citizens of Hebron had replaced their fallen king.

### **F. Southern Region Summary (Josh 10:40-43).**

The author of the Book of Joshua next gives a description of the territory controlled by Israel at this point in the Conquest. First, he describes the four natural regions which had fallen into Israelite hands: (1) the hill country; (2) the Negev; (3) the lowland; and (4) the slopes. The hill country and the lowland (Shephelah) were mentioned in 9:1-2 as areas in which the kings were alarmed over the success of Joshua. The Negev ("dry area") is the region roughly south of the Gaza-Beersheba road. The southern border of the Negev merges into the highlands of the Sinai Peninsula. This region of about 4,500 square miles is nearly half the area of the modern state of Israel. The "slopes" mentioned here lie between the Judean mountains and the Shephelah (10:40a).

Second, the author indicates that Joshua applied the ban to all inhabitants within the area conquered. This was done, the reader is again reminded, at the command of Yahweh. In the light of verses to follow (15:14f., 63) it is clear that some inhabitants of these cities did escape. The text therefore means that no one was deliberately spared by Joshua's forces (10:40b).

Third, the author gives the dimensions of the territory thus far conquered in terms of terminal points in four directions. Kadesh-barnea marked the southernmost point of Conquest. This is the oasis in the wilderness of Zin where the Israelites had faltered in their faith some forty years before (Num 13). On the west the Israelites had taken Gaza. They controlled all the land of Goshen. This was a border region between the Judean mountains and the Negev. It is not to be confused with the famous land of Goshen in Egypt. The northern extremity of the Conquest at this point was Gibeon (10:41).

Fourth, the southern region had all been captured “*at one time*,” i.e., in one campaign. The author does not indicate how long the campaign lasted. It probably extended over several months (10:42a).

Fifth, the author again inserts a reminder that all the victories in the south had been made possible “*because Yahweh, the God of Israel, fought for Israel*” (10:42b).

to the north of the Sea of Galilee to make their stand against Israel (11:4-5).

### **B. Battle at Merom (Josh 11:6-9).**

Once again prior to the battle the Lord spoke words of encouragement to Joshua. This was now the twelfth recorded time when Yahweh spoke directly to Joshua. First, the Lord urged Joshua not to be afraid. Without doubt the general already knew through reconnaissance the strength of the enemy forces. Second, there was the gift promise: *"I will give all of them as slain before Israel."* Third, Yahweh gave new instructions. Joshua was to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots. To hamstring a horse—cutting the tendons at the hoof or knee—renders the animal unsuitable for further military usage (11:6).<sup>7</sup>

The next day the Israelite army swooped down *"suddenly"* upon the northern kings near the waters of Merom. True to his word, the Lord gave the northern army into the hand of Israel. The coalition broke apart. Every contingent fled for its own territory. The Israelite forces chased them in three different directions. No survivor was left to the Canaanite forces. Following the battle Joshua carried out exactly the orders he had been given by the Lord. He hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots (11:7-9).

### **C. Capture of Cities (Josh 11:10-15).**

Once the main force of the enemy had been routed, Joshua turned his attention to capturing the various cities in the north. Hazor, *"the head of all those kingdoms,"* is mentioned first. The king—presumably Jabin had escaped to the safety of his walls—was put to the edge of the sword. All the inhabitants of the city were destroyed. For the first time since Jericho and Ai Joshua ordered the city burned. Because Hazor had held the leading position among the northern cities it received a special exemplary punishment (11:10-11).

All the other cities of the northern coalition were captured. Their kings and populations were executed, utterly destroyed, just as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded. However, no city in the north was burned except Hazor. Apparently the Israelites took possession of these cities, thus fulfilling the promise of Deut 6:10. The plunder of the cities belonged to Israel, but the inhabitants were

executed. That standing order had originated with the Lord. It was passed down to Moses, and from Moses to Joshua. The author is anxious to emphasize that Joshua carried out exactly what he had been instructed to do (11:12-15).

### **THE ENTIRE CAMPAIGN** **Joshua 11:16-12:24**

Following the account of the southern and northern campaigns the author presents an overview of the entire campaign.

#### **A. Geography of the Conquest (Josh 11:16-18).**

The author loved to paint verbal pictures of the extent to which the Israelites had been successful in the conquest. He first states a generalization: "*Joshua took all that land.*" The author emphasized that point by enumerating the various regions which comprised "*that land:*" (1) the hill country; (2) the Negev; (3) "*all that land of Goshen*"; (4) the lowland; (5) the Arabah or plain; (6) the hill country of Israel; and (7) the lowland of Israel. To be more precise, the area conquered by the united effort of the tribes extended from Mount Halak<sup>8</sup> in the south to the Mount Hermon in the north. Baal-gad at the foot of Mount Hermon is the northernmost site mentioned. In this entire region the kings were all executed. The duration of this phase of the conquest is said to have been "*a long time.*" From data presented later in the text that "*long time*" can be computed to be just over seven years.

#### **B. Theology of the Conquest (Josh 11:19-20).**

Not one city attempted to make peace with Israel with the exception of the Gibeonites who used deception to secure a peace treaty (cf. ch. 9). All of the territory acquired by Israel was won on the battlefield. But why did none of the city states sue for peace? "*It was of Yahweh to harden their hearts, to meet Israel in battle.*" The destruction of the Canaanites was a judicial act of God. His will was that the Canaanites should be completely destroyed.<sup>9</sup> They should receive no mercy. That will was first revealed to Moses, and Moses laid the burden of execution on Joshua.



Yet it is a fact that one Canaanite begged for mercy and received it (cf. ch. 2). All the Canaanites knew of the mighty acts of God on behalf of his people. Only one was willing to renounce idolatry and embrace the Living God. God is said to harden a heart when an individual has rejected all prior efforts to effect moral change. The hardening of the heart is a withdrawal of further efforts to soften the heart; it is an introduction of circumstances which tend to make the wicked become ever more belligerent. In the case of the Conquest, the more territory Israel captured the more determined the Canaanites were to withstand their advance.

### **C. Climax of the Conquest (Josh 11:21-22).**

No mention has been made heretofore in the book about those dreaded Anakim which had so terrified the ten spies in the initial reconnaissance of the land (Num 13:33). This was a giant race of people which made the Israelites feel like grasshoppers. Anakim were encountered at various locations in the hill country of Judah and in the hill country of Israel. Joshua utterly destroyed them with their cities. No Anakim were left in the land of Israel. Only in three locations in the Philistine plain did any of this race survive. The author surely withheld any information to this point about the Anakim to suggest that in defeating these giants a climax in the Conquest had been reached.

### **D. Concluding Statement (Josh 11:23).**

To his account of the united Conquest the author adds a concluding summary. In it he states first that Joshua took the whole land. In so doing he fulfilled the promises regarding the Promised Land which God had made to Moses. The conquered territory was then divided up as an inheritance to the tribes of Israel. The details of how that was done will be recounted in the following chapters. "*Thus the land had rest from war.*" This note must be understood in a limited sense. The author refers to the massive confrontations of armies and bloody sieges of cities. Certainly he does not mean that once the territory was divided there was no more conflict, for that would contradict what he relates in subsequent chapters. He means that the enemy's chief resistance was now broken. The united effort of "*all Israel*" was

now over. From this point on it would remain for each tribe to remove remaining pockets of Canaanites from their inheritance.

### **E. An Appendix (Josh 12:1-24).**

To the narrative account of the Conquest the author has appended a systematic listing of thirty-three kings defeated by the Israelites. This boring list is in reality a song of praise for the triumph of the King of Kings over the kings of this world. The author speaks first of the conquests under Moses east of Jordan, and then of the more recent conquests under Joshua west of Jordan.

1. *Kings conquered east of Jordan (12:1-6).* The geographical extent of the territory conquered by Israel east of Jordan is first given. This may have been done for three reasons: (1) to draw another parallel between Moses and Joshua; (2) to stress the unity of Israel; and (3) to underscore that the Transjordan area was now considered part of the Promised Land. The Arnon river valley marked the southern boundary, the foothills of Mount Hermon, the northern boundary. This territory included all the Arabah or plain of the Jordan east of the river (12:1).

King Sihon was the first to be conquered when Israel emerged from the desert (Num 21:21-35). His capital was Heshbon. This Amorite kingdom stretched from the Arnon river to the Jabbok river. It included all the valuable Arabah (Plain) between the Sea of Chinneroth (Galilee) and the Salt (Dead) Sea (12:2-3).

The second territory conquered east of Jordan was that of Og who ruled the region north of the Jabbok known as Bashan. Og was a remnant of the Rephaim, a giant race of people. He had two capitals, one at Ashtaroth, the other at Edrei (12:4-5).

Both Sihon and Og were defeated by Israel under the leadership of Moses. This territory was then given to the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh (12:6). Twice in this verse Moses is called "the servant of Yahweh," perhaps to underscore the legitimacy of Israel's claim to the Transjordan territory.

2. *Kings conquered west of Jordan (12:7-24).* The author next lists the kings conquered by Joshua west of the Jordan. These kings had ruled collectively a large territory extending from Baal-gad at the foot of Mount Hermon to Mount Halak in the south. This territory

embraced several distinct geographical regions: (1) hill country, (2) lowlands, (3) Arabah, (4) slopes, (5) wilderness and (6) Negev. Several different ethnic groups lived in this region: (1) Hittite, (2) Amorite, (3) Canaanite, (4) Perizzite, (5) Hivite and (6) Jebusite. Within this territory Joshua conquered thirty-one kings whose cities are now enumerated without comment. Perhaps this list was intended to be recited from time to time to remind the Israelites of the glorious victories that had been theirs when they experienced tribal unity under Joshua's leadership. Four observations regarding this list are in order.

**Chart No. 11**

<b>THE CONQUERED KINGS</b> <b>Joshua 12</b>			
<b>Kings East of Jordan</b> <b>Defeated by Moses</b> Sihon Og			
<b>Kings West of Jordan</b> <b>Defeated by Joshua</b>			
1. Jericho	8. Gezer	16. Bethel	24. Achshaph
2. Ai	9. Debir	17. Tappuah	25. Taanach
3. Jerusalem	10. Geder	18. Hepher	26. Megiddo
4. Hebron	11. Hormah	19. Aphek	27. Kadesh
5. Jarmuth	12. Arad	20. Lasharon	28. Jokneam
6. Lachish	13. Libnah	21. Madon	29. Dor
7. Eglon	14. Adullam	22. Hazor	30. Gilgal
	15. Makkedah	23. Shimron-meron	31. Tirzah

First, the list of defeated kings follows roughly the order in which events have been narrated in the preceding chapters. Second, half of the names on the list have not been mentioned in the Conquest narratives. Most of the new names are of cities in central and northern Canaan, where the narratives were extremely sketchy. Third, from subsequent narratives it becomes clear that the Canaanites were not permanently driven out of all of these towns. Some even had to be reconquered.

Fourth, the most puzzling name on the list is the thirtieth—the king of Goiim in Gilgal. Goiim could be translated “*nations*.” Here, however, it is probably the name of a small tribe. Obviously the “*Gilgal*” here is not the camping spot near Jericho. This seems to have

been a Gilgal in the region of Galilee. In fact, the Septuagint here reads “*Galilee*” which may well be the most ancient reading.<sup>10</sup>

## ENDNOTES

1. The observation of K. Gutbrod, cited by M.H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 171, n. 12.

2. The Hebrew term *hamam* is used of various meteorological phenomena which God employs against the enemies of Israel on the battlefield. See Exod 14:24; Judg 4:15; 5:20f.; 1 Sam 7:10; 2 Sam 22:15.

3. In Joshua 10 the road to Beth-horon is called both an ascent (v. 10) and a descent (v. 11). The road from Gibeon to Upper Beth-horon first goes up, and then descends to the village. From Upper Beth-horon the road descends sharply to Lower Beth-horon.

4. Some scholars (e.g., Velikovsky) think the “great stones” came from a rain of meteorites.

5. On the recapture of Hebron and Debir see Josh 14:6-15; 15:15-17; Judg 1:10-13.

6. Hazor is mentioned in the Mari tablets dating to the eighteenth century BC as well as the Amarna tablets from the fourteenth century. The city at its height could have accommodated forty thousand people. See *The New Bible Dictionary* (2nd ed. Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1882) s.v. “Hazor,” p. 456.

7. H. Freedman, *Joshua*, Soncino Books of the Bible (London: Soncino, 1950), p. 64.

8. In 10:41 the southernmost point conquered was Kadesh-barnea which lay further west than Mount Halak (“Bald Mount”). Mount Halak is said to rise toward “Seir” or Edom.

9. God also hardened Pharaoh’s heart. For a discussion of the concept see James E. Smith, *The Pentateuch, A Survey*, 2nd ed. (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1992), pp. 275f.

10. C.J. Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, Bible Student’s Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), p. 112.

## CHAPTER SIX

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### Possessing the Inheritance Joshua 13-24

The united effort of the tribes in the conquest of Canaan took just over seven years. Under the brilliant generalship of Joshua and the providential intervention of the Lord, the backbone of Canaanite resistance had been broken. The second half of the Book of Joshua deals with issues surrounding the occupation of the land. In these chapters the author discusses (1) the distribution of the land, (2) the dispute among the tribes, and (2) the final discourses of Joshua.

#### **DISTRIBUTION OF THE LAND** **Command and Precedent** **Joshua 13:1-33**

Joshua was now approaching a hundred years of age. He is described as “*old and advanced in years*” (13:1). Joshua still had one major part of his commission to carry out. The land which had previously been conquered needed to be parceled out to the various

tribes. This long unit begins by citing the revelation which Joshua received mandating the distribution of the land. The author then describes the allotment east and west of Jordan. The unit concludes with a discussion of the cities of refuge and the Levitical cities.

### **A. The Divine Command (Josh 13:1-7).**

The thirteenth divine communication to Joshua began with a recitation of the lands which were yet to be controlled by Israel. At this point *“very much of the land”* remained to be possessed. This statement, however, seems to be at variance with what the previous chapter declared: *“Joshua took the whole land. . . . Thus the land had rest from war”* (11:23). The victories which Joshua had won gave Israel the possession of the land in principle. No Canaanite forces were left which were capable of presenting any effective resistance to Israel. Occupation in principle, however, is not the same as possession of the land. Pockets of Canaanite resistance remained here and there. These areas are now identified by the author (13:1).

1. The territory of the Philistines and allied Geshurites<sup>1</sup> along the southwest coast of Canaan. Though the Philistines were not themselves Canaanites, this territory was reckoned as *“Canaanite”* probably since the Canaanites occupied the territory before the Philistines arrived on the scene in force about 1200 BC. Since this was Canaanite territory it was part of that Promised Land which God had deeded to the Israelites.

2. The *“whole land of the Canaanite”* along the Phoenician coast as far as Aphek some twenty-three miles north of modern Beirut (13:4).

3. The land of the Gebalite and *“all of Lebanon”* eastward (13:5).

4. The mountain regions from Lebanon to Mesrephoth-maim which was located just south of the so-called Ladder of Tyre on the Mediterranean coast. This area is said to be occupied by the Sidonians (13:6a).

God promised that he would drive out all the remaining inhabitants of the area. In this statement the principle is again operative, God gives, but Israel must take. Even though some of the land was not yet fully possessed, it was to be divided among the nine and a half tribes as an *“inheritance.”* Thus, not all of the land assigned to the various

tribes actually was under effective Israelite control at this time. The very act of assigning that territory was an act of faith (13:6b-7).

### **B. Allotments East of Jordan (Josh 13:8-33).**

As has been his custom thus far, the author first deals with Trans-jordan, then with Cis-jordan. The tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh had received their inheritance east of Jordan. The boundaries which had been worked out for each tribe by Moses “*the servant of the Lord*” are now set forth.

The description of the Transjordan territory given here follows what was presented earlier (12:2-6; cf. Deut 3:8-17). To this general geographical description of Transjordan the author appends two notes. First, he notes that the children of Israel did not dispossess the Geshurites or Maacathites who lived in the vicinity of the Sea of Galilee (13:13). Second, he notes that no inheritance was given to the Levites in Transjordan. The offerings made by fire to the Lord were their inheritance (13:14). The reference is to the portions of various sacrifices which were designated for the Levitical priests.

Having introduced the Transjordan allotments the author verbally maps out the areas assigned to the two and a half tribes. The territory was assigned essentially in the order it was conquered. From the Arnon river north to Sihon’s old capital at Heshbon was given to Reuben (13:15-23). The territory between Heshbon and Ramoth-gilead—virtually the entire Jordan valley east of the river—belonged to Gad (13:24-28). Manasseh occupied Bashan, the territory formerly ruled by King Og (13:29-31).

The description of the Transjordan allotments concludes with a note that (1) stresses the authority by which these tribal assignments were made; and (2) underscores again that no land inheritance was given to Levi because of the greater spiritual inheritance which that tribe enjoyed (13:32-33).

### **THE GILGAL DISTRIBUTION Joshua 14:1–17:18**

While the territory east of Jordan was apportioned by Moses, that west of Jordan was done by committee. Joshua, Eleazar the high

priest, and the tribal leaders shared in the decision (14:1). Nine and a half tribes were given territories west of Jordan. All together then, counting the two and a half territories east of Jordan, twelve tribal areas were assigned. The descendants of Joseph received two portions, for Joseph's two sons had become full-fledged tribes in Israel. The Levites, the author continues to emphasize, did not receive a tribal allotment. They did, however, receive cities scattered throughout the tribes. All of these arrangements were exactly what Moses had stipulated (14:3-5).

### **A. The Tribe of Judah (Josh 14:6–15:63).**

The discussion of the allotment to Judah emphasizes the role of Caleb in the settlement of the tribal area. Caleb's faith and courage are held up as a model for what God expected from all of the tribal units. The request of Caleb for an inheritance is followed by a verbal description of the geography of Judah, a note about the early successful efforts of Caleb and Othniel, and a list of the cities which were in this tribal area.

1. *The request of Caleb (14:6-15).* The first of two apportionments in Canaan occurred at Gilgal. Caleb led a delegation to Joshua and reminded him of the commitments which had been made to him in the wilderness (cf. Num 14:24,30). In making his claim Caleb rehearses the history of how he had been sent from Kadesh-barnea to spy out Canaan. Because Caleb had been fully committed to the Lord, Moses swore that he would have his own personal inheritance in the Promised Land. Now some forty-five years later Caleb at age eighty-five claimed his inheritance. In the wilderness Caleb had risked his life to bring to his countrymen a positive report regarding Canaan. Now Caleb's land inheritance is placed at the head of all the allotments in Cis-jordan (14:6-10).

In spite of his age, Caleb was not inclined to seek retirement. He felt he was as strong as ever. Therefore he requested as his inheritance the hill country where the Anakim—the giants—were located. Apparently some of the Anakim who had escaped Joshua's initial conquest of the area (11:21f.) had returned to the area. Caleb believed that the Lord would honor his word (cf. 13:6) and drive those Anakim from the land. Thus Caleb was modeling the faith which God



desired all his people to have at this stage of the Conquest. This is how Caleb received Hebron and environs as his inheritance. The city, once named Kiriath-arba after Arba the greatest of the Anakim, was now renamed Hebron. Following the conquest of Hebron *“the land had rest from war”* at least for a time. The cessation of hostilities made possible the further distribution of the land (14:11-15).

2. *The borders of Judah (15:1-12)*. The author meticulously traces the tribal borders of Judah. Each tribe’s territory was designated by lot by which divine guidance was assured. The phrase *“according to their families”* suggests that tribal areas were broken down into smaller portions. Mercifully the Holy Spirit has spared modern readers the details of the family assignments. For the Israelites such lists had a legal purpose. Perhaps these boundary lists were also recited in worship liturgy in celebration of the faithfulness of God in keeping his covenant promises. Since many of the places listed in tribal areas were still in Canaanite hands, the boundary lists also served the purpose of establishing a program of expansion for each of the tribes. The overriding spiritual truth in all this is that God has a place in his kingdom for every one of his children.

3. *Caleb’s settlement model (15:13-19)*. The author relates how Caleb was successful in driving out from Kiriath-arba (Hebron) the three giant sons of Anak. Caleb then proceeded to attack Kiriath-sepher (Debir), another city previously conquered (10:36-39) but reoccupied by Canaanites. He offered his daughter Achsah in marriage to the man who could conquer this town. Othniel, his brother or half-brother,<sup>2</sup> captured Hebron and thereby won the hand of Achsah. This young lady was very insightful and determined. She knew that land without water was worthless. So she persuaded her husband to allow her to ask Caleb for some nearby springs of water as a wedding present. Pleased with the pluck of his daughter, Caleb gave her *“the upper and the lower springs”* (15:13-19).

4. *Cities of Judah (15:21-62)*. The text next lists 114 cities along with some villages which were not reckoned as “cities.” The cities are listed in four major regions: the Negev (15:20-32), lowlands (15:33-47), hill country (15:48-60) and desert (15:61-62). Some of these cities would later be taken from Judah and given to the tribe of Dan. A most significant note comes at the conclusion of the long city

catalog. This tribe was unable to drive the Jebusites out of Jerusalem (15:63). Not until the time of David did the city finally and permanently come under Israelite control.

### **B. The Joseph Tribes (Josh 16:1–17:18).**

The descendants of the two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, were reckoned as two separate tribes in Israel. The author first presents a general picture of the lot that fell to the Joseph tribes (16:1-4). He then discusses individually these two tribes.

1. *The inheritance of Ephraim (16:5-10)*. To the outline of Ephraim's boundaries (16:5-9) the author adds an important note. The tribe of Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer (16:10). They could have, but they did not. Instead the Ephraimites chose to make forced laborers out of these Canaanites.

2. *The inheritance of Manasseh (17:1-13)*. Part of the tribe of Manasseh had already been given an allotment east of Jordan (17:1). The rest of the tribe received ten portions of land in an area west of the Jordan. Five of those tracts were given to the daughters of Zelophehad. Zelophehad had died in the wilderness. He had no sons. In the plains of Moab his five daughters had come to Moses requesting that they be recognized as the rightful descendants of their father. The young ladies won their case. As long as they did not marry outside their tribe they would each be entitled to a portion in the Promised Land (Num 27:1-11; 36:5-9). Joshua honored the word of the Lord as spoken through Moses regarding these women (17:2-6).

The author next gives a verbal description of the borders of Manasseh (17:7-10). Because the area contained few cities, Manasseh was assigned six cities in neighboring tribal areas (17:11). Unfortunately Manasseh was not able to take control of all these cities. When Israel became strong, however, they put the Canaanites to forced labor (17:12-13).

3. *The complaint of the Joseph tribes (17:14-18)*. The Joseph tribes complained to Joshua about the size of their portion. In point of fact at least three other tribes were more numerous. Joshua, however, did not argue with them. He challenged them to carve out a settlement in "*the forest*" which covered a considerable portion on

the northwest of their allotment. Of course there they would have to tangle with the Perizzites and Rephaim (17:14-15).

Joshua's answer did not satisfy the Joseph tribes. They felt the hill country was not large enough. The Canaanites who lived in the valley of Jezreel possessed "*chariots of iron*." Perhaps the Josephites expected some kind of favoritism from Joshua since he was of the tribe of Ephraim. Joshua, however, would not budge. He repeated their own boasts to them. They were a numerous people. They needed more land. So take the hill country, he charged, and drive the Canaanites out. If they would only assert themselves they would have all the land they needed in spite of the iron chariots of their enemies (17:14-18).

### **THE SHILOH DISTRIBUTION** **Joshua 18:1-19:51**

Shiloh was the site at which the final allotment was made. The tent of meeting was set up there once the main Canaanite resistance had been removed. By some revelation God had designated that spot as the site of his earthly palace (cf. Deut 12:11; Jer 7:12). The site was ideal for a sanctuary because of its central location among the tribes (18:1). The complaint of the Josephites had indicated that tribal self-interest threatened national unity. The relocation of the tabernacle at this point in the tribal area of Ephraim was intended to counter this trend.

After describing how the Shiloh distribution was organized, the author proceeds to describe the territories of the tribes which had not yet received their inheritance. The tribal distribution chapters conclude with a note concerning a special portion given to Joshua.

#### **A. Organization of the Distribution (Josh 18:1-10).**

At this point seven tribes had not yet received their inheritance. Joshua chided these tribes for not entering their respective areas to take possession of them. Three men from each of these tribes were organized into a survey team. They were to go through the land, write a description of the prospective areas, and divide the remaining territory into seven areas. Then Joshua would cast lots "*before Yahweh our God*" to determine how the seven allotments would be assigned.

Joshua used this public speech to do what he did at every opportunity, namely, underscore the national unity of the twelve tribes. He did this by alluding to the Transjordan tribes, the two and a half tribes already assigned territory in Cis-jordan, and the Levites who had the priesthood as their portion (18:2-7).

The twenty-one man survey team completed their work. Probably a good portion of what is recorded in Joshua 13-19 is the result of their work. They described the land “*by cities in seven divisions in a book.*” Joshua cast lots for them before the Lord in Shiloh (18:8-10).

**Chart No. 12**

<b>COMPARATIVE SIZE OF TRIBAL TERRITORIES In Square Miles</b>		
<b>MANASSEH (EAST)</b>		<b>2,500</b>
JUDAH	1,400	306,000 Population
GAD	1,300	162,000 Population
SIMEON	1,000	88,800 Population
MANASSEH (WEST)	800	210,800 Population*
NAPHTALI	800	181,600 Population
REUBEN	700	174,920 Population
EPHRAIM	600	130,000 Population
DAN	500	257,600 Population
ISSACHAR	400	257,200 Population
ZEBULUN	300	242,000 Population
ASHER	200	213,600 Population
BENJAMIN	200	182,400 Population

Population estimates based on the military census of Num 26 x 4 for an average family. Manasseh east and west are combined.

### **B. Final Tribal Allotments (Josh 18:11-19:48).**

The lot fell in the following order: Benjamin (18:11-28), Simeon (19:1-9), Zebulun (19:10-16), Issachar (19:17-23), Asher (19:24-31), Naphtali (19:32-39), and Dan (19:40-48). Discussion of the multitude of geographical problems in this unit is beyond the scope of this survey. Concerning these allotments, however, the following observations are in order:

1. The lot of Benjamin is the most carefully described. It consists of both border stations and a city list of twenty-six entries.
2. The lot of Simeon was taken from within the tribal area of Judah because the portion of Judah was “*too large for them.*”
3. A portion of the tribe of Dan migrated to the north beyond the

territory assigned to any tribe. There they captured the town of Leshem situated near the headwaters of the Jordan. They subsequently renamed the town Dan. The details of this tribal migration are reported in Judges 18. This event probably took place after the time of Joshua. If that is the case, an editor of the Book of Joshua has placed this brief note here in order to round out his account of the allotment of Dan.

### **C. Joshua's Inheritance (Josh 19:49-51).**

The discussion of the tribal allotments west of Jordan began with the reference to the area assigned to Caleb. The same unit ends with a reference to the personal allotment of Joshua. Caleb and Joshua had risked their lives by bringing a good report regarding the land when Israel was camped at Kadesh-barnea (Num 14:6-10). How appropriate then that the author has used the inheritance of these two men as a frame around the allotment chapters.

In compliance with the commandment of the Lord, "*the sons of Israel*" gave Joshua an inheritance in their midst. The exact command regarding Joshua's inheritance is not recorded, but the idea may be implied in Numbers 14:30. He asked for and received the city of Timnath-serah in the hill country of Ephraim about sixteen miles southwest of Shechem. Joshua is said to have "*built*" (i.e., rebuilt) this city and settled it.

With the allocation of Timnath-serah to Joshua the western tribal allotment came to an end. Eleazar, Joshua and the tribal leaders had fulfilled their responsibility. The final phase of the allotment was performed at Shiloh "*before Yahweh*" at the door of the tent of meeting (19:51).

## **DESIGNATION OF SPECIAL CITIES**

### **Joshua 20:1-21:45**

Appended to the descriptions of the various tribal areas are two lists of important towns, namely, the cities of refuge and the Levitical cities. Actually all six cities of refuge were also Levitical cities which served a special function in the judicial system.

### **A. Cities of Refuge (Josh 20:1-9).**

In the fourteenth direct address to Joshua<sup>3</sup> Yahweh directed that cities of refuge be appointed. In this communication the Lord repeated the principles by which this system of asylum would operate (cf. Deut 19:1-13). Cities of refuge were sanctuaries for those who had committed manslaughter. The “*avenger of blood*” could not execute the manslayer as long as he resided within the walls of one of these cities. Some commentators think the avenger of blood was a kinsman of the person who had been killed. Another view is that the avenger was a title for a government functionary whose job it was to execute those who had committed murder.

The elders of the city of refuge would decide who was eligible for the sanctuary within their walls. The sanctuary could be temporary, i.e., until a formal trial could be conducted, or indefinite where unintentional manslaughter had been determined. In the latter case the manslayer had to remain in the city until the death of the high priest.<sup>4</sup> Then he was free to return to his own city (20:1-6).

Three cities of refuge had already been appointed by Moses east of Jordan: Bezer in Reuben, Ramoth in Gad and Golan in Manasseh. Now Joshua and his advisers appointed three additional cities west of Jordan: Kedesh in Naphtali, Shechem in Ephraim and Hebron in Judah (20:7-9).

### **B. Levitical Cities (Josh 21:1-45).**

Under Moses’ leadership the decision had been made that Levites would be given cities throughout the tribal areas of Israel (Num 35:1-8). Chapter 21 relates how each of the three major branches of Levites received by lot its own cities. Thus the Levites occupied their towns by divine appointment.

The Levites approached Eleazer and Joshua at Shiloh to request that they might be given cities in which to settle. Forty-eight cities were assigned to them. Apparently these teachers of the law and religious leaders were to be readily available to all of the people of God. The descendants of Aaron were situated in the tribal areas of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin. Thus the priests were located relatively close to Jerusalem which God later would designate as the site for his temple.

**Chart No. 13**

<b>THE LEVITICAL CITIES</b>		
<b>LEVITICAL CLANS</b>	<b>LEVITICAL CLANS</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>
<b>Family of Aaron</b>	<b>Judah-Simeon</b> <sup>(9)</sup> <b>Benjamin</b> <sup>(4)</sup>	<b>13</b>
<b>Other Kohathites</b>	<b>Ephraim</b> <sup>(4)</sup> <b>Dan</b> <sup>(4)</sup> <b>Manasseh West</b> <sup>(2)</sup>	<b>10</b>
<b>Gershonites</b>	<b>Issachar</b> <sup>(4)</sup> <b>Asher</b> <sup>(4)</sup> <b>Naphtali</b> <sup>(3)</sup> <b>Manasseh East</b> <sup>(2)</sup>	<b>13</b>
<b>Merarites</b>	<b>Zebulun</b> <sup>(4)</sup> <b>Reuben</b> <sup>(4)</sup> <b>Gad</b> <sup>(4)</sup>	<b>12</b>
<b>TOTAL LEVITICAL CITIES</b>		<b>48</b>

## **DISPUTE AMONG THE TRIBES**

### **Joshua 22:1-34**

Chapter 22 indicates how the national unity which Joshua had cultivated during his years of leadership was nearly broken by foolish actions of the tribal leaders.

#### **A. Tribal Unity Praised (Josh 22:1-8).**

After the years of united tribal warfare, Joshua summoned to Shiloh the military contingent from the two and a half Transjordan tribes. This group which crossed the Jordan seven years earlier forty thousand strong had served faithfully. They had honored the word which they had given to Moses about fighting with their brethren. They had obeyed every command which Joshua had issued during the campaign. Now that the Cis-jordan tribes had achieved their “rest” it was time for these valiant soldiers to return to the possession which Moses had appointed them on the other side of the Jordan. Joshua, however, did have a parting admonition for these men. He

urged them carefully to observe the law of Moses. This involved loving the Lord, walking in all his ways, keeping his commandments, holding fast to him and serving him with *“with all your heart and with all your soul.”* Only then would they be able to enjoy their rest in Transjordan (22:1-5).

With these words of commendation and admonition Joshua *“blessed”* the troops and sent them away. The *“blessing”* took the form of an imperative. He encouraged them to share with their tribal brothers all the spoils which they had captured in battle. These spoils are called *“great riches.”* They consisted of livestock, silver, gold, bronze, iron and *“very many clothes”* (22:6-8).

### **B. Tribal Unity Threatened (Josh 22:9-20).**

The Reubenites, Gadites and half-tribe of Manasseh departed for the land of Gilead across the Jordan. In the vicinity of the Jordan they decided to build a large altar. When the other tribes heard of this, they gathered together at Shiloh to go into Gilead and make war against their brethren. From a distance it appeared that the eastern tribes were attempting to introduce an altar to rival the one authorized altar at the Tabernacle. A second place of worship would be a serious violation the law of Moses (22:9-12).

Fortunately cooler heads prevailed. A committee consisting of ten tribal leaders led by Phinehas, the son of the high priest, was dispatched to Transjordan to challenge the construction of the altar. Phinehas' zeal for Yahweh had already been demonstrated in the incident which had taken place at Baal-Peor (Num 25:7).

The committee was harshly accusatory with the eastern tribes. They accused their brethren of an *“unfaithful act”*<sup>5</sup> or *“turning away from following Yahweh.”* By building the altar the eastern tribes had committed a trespass of the magnitude of what had transpired at Peor in the last days of Moses. The committee seemed most afraid that the altar transgression would bring God's wrath on the entire nation. The committee reminded the eastern tribes that they were welcome to cross the river and take up residence among the nine and a half tribes. By building the altar, however, they were rebelling both against Yahweh and their brothers. The committee closed its presentation with the ominous reminder of what happened when Achan had acted unfaith-



fully. The entire congregation had been punished for the sin of one man. Thus the other tribes had a legitimate concern about the purpose of this altar near the Jordan (22:13-20).

### **C. Tribal Unity Preserved (Josh 22:21-34).**

The eastern tribes responded to the broadside of the committee of tribal leaders with shock and humility. They had not intended their altar to be an act of rebellion. Their altar was not intended for sacrificial purposes. Rather it was a monument to the unity of the nation. A future generation west of Jordan might wish to disown the eastern tribes and cut them off from participation in Tabernacle worship. In such an event the altar near the Jordan would be a reminder of the fact that the eastern tribes had fought alongside their brothers in the conquest of Canaan. Thus the newly constructed “altar” was really a monument celebrating the spiritual unity which bound the tribes on both sides of the Jordan into one nation. The large altar had even been modeled after the altar of the Tabernacle and thus was another expression of their loyalty to Yahweh. The eastern tribes were horrified at the thought that their actions were misconstrued as rebellion against the Lord (22:21-29).

The response from the Transjordan tribes pleased the investigative committee. A serious threat had been averted. No illegal act had been committed. Therefore there was no reason to think that Israel would experience the hand of divine wrath. God was still in their midst. Phinehas and his ten committee members returned from the land of Gilead in Transjordan and reported their findings. The report pleased the congregation. All talk of war against the eastern tribes ceased (22:34).

Misunderstanding between brethren arises when one group launches into some activity without seeking approval from the congregational leadership and without explaining intentions. Often brothers jump to conclusions about motives without first carefully investigating the situation. Joshua 22 contains several lessons which can be helpful in maintaining the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

This account concludes with a note that the eastern tribes named the Jordan altar “Witness.” The altar was intended to bear witness that Yahweh is God (22:34).

## **JOSHUA'S FAREWELL ADDRESS**

### **Joshua 23:1-16**

Joshua 23–24 contain Joshua's last words to the people he had served throughout his lifetime. The tone of these chapters is hortatory. Thus the Book of Joshua ends as it began with words of exhortation. Though the two chapters have a great deal in common, certain differences are clear. Chapter 23 is oriented toward what God would do in the future, whereas chapter 24 focuses on what God had done in the past. The location of the two meetings probably was different. Also the scope of the assembly in chapter 24 seems to be larger (*"all the tribes of Israel"*) than that in chapter 23.

Joshua's farewell address was delivered when he was *"old and advanced in years."* Since this same language is used in 13:1 at the time of the land apportionment, it is impossible to determine how much time, if any, had elapsed since that event. Joshua summoned all Israel, but to what place is not indicated. The likely possibilities include Shiloh, Shechem and Timnath-serah. *"All Israel"* was represented in the person of its elders, heads, judges and officers. The address consists of three calls to covenant obedience each of which is preceded by a recitation of past favors bestowed by the Lord (23:1-2).

#### **A. A Call to Covenant Faithfulness (Josh 23:3-5).**

Joshua began his speech by calling attention to his great age. He was approaching 110. He apparently intended his words to be regarded as a kind of last will and testament. He spent very little time rehearsing the victories of the Conquest period. He first gave credit to the Lord for what was accomplished on the battlefields of Canaan. He then explained that he had given Israel as an inheritance two kinds of land: the land of nations which had been *"cut off;"* and the land of nations which yet remain. Joshua could make these allocations because he was fully confident that Yahweh would fulfill his promises and drive the remaining nations out of the inheritance he had given to Israel (23:1-5).

Joshua urged these leaders of Israel to *"be very firm"* (lit., be strong) to observe the commandments of Moses. Specifically, Joshua was referring to the Mosaic commands regarding absolute separation

between the people of God and the peoples remaining in the land. Israel was not to “associate” with them. To do so would result in gradually making mention of the names of their gods. This certainly would include prayer to those gods.<sup>6</sup> That in turn would lead to taking oaths in the names of their gods, and even worse, the worship of those nonexistent deities. To be successful in their inheritance Israel needed to continue to “cling”<sup>7</sup> to Yahweh (23:6-8).

### **B. Second Call for Covenant Faithfulness (Josh 23:9-13).**

Based on their recent experience there was every reason to remain faithful to Yahweh. The Lord had driven out mighty nations before Israel. No man had been able to stand before their armies. Because the Lord fought for Israel, one Israelite soldier had been able to put to flight a thousand of the enemy. The Lord had kept his word in a marvelous way (23:8-10).

Israel must not assume that such divine aid as they had recently experienced would automatically continue. The Lord’s help was conditional. Israel must continue to love Yahweh, and love for him was an exclusive thing. In Canaan they would be constantly tempted to “go back” (i.e., commit apostasy) and “cling” to surrounding nations. They would be tempted to give the same kind of loyalty to these pagans that they should have been giving to the Lord. Intermarriage is one example of what Joshua meant by clinging to the nations. In the event of such apostasy, God would abandon Israel. No longer would he drive out those nations before Israel. Those heathen nations would become a snare and a trap. They would torment Israel producing pain like that of a whip upon the back or thorns poking into an eye. Ultimately the heathen influence would cause Israel to “perish from off this good land” which they had just received from the Lord (23:11-13).

### **C. Third Call for Covenant Faithfulness (Josh 23:14-16).**

Joshua reminded his audience of his impending death: “*I am going the way of all the earth.*” Both Joshua and these leaders had observed that every promise which God had made had been fulfilled. Not one word of promise had failed. The same God who kept his positive promises to Israel would also keep his threats. He would in

fact destroy them from off that land if they did not continue to cling to him. Faithfulness to the covenant was the key. If Israel began to take up with other gods, the Lord would “*burn*” against them. Israel would then “*quickly perish*” off the good land which their God had just given them (23:14-16).

## COVENANT RENEWAL

### Joshua 24:1-28

Because of its ancient Patriarchal connections, Joshua chose Shechem<sup>8</sup> as the site for the final covenant renewal ceremony of his life. “*All the tribes*” were present, at least in the person of their representatives. The elders, heads, officers and judges presented themselves “*before God*.”<sup>9</sup> Joshua then addressed the assembly (24:1).

#### A. The Basis of the Appeal (Josh 24:2-13).

Joshua began his covenant renewal speech by reviewing the history of God’s dealings with Israel, beginning with Abraham.<sup>10</sup> He mentions Abraham’s journey to Canaan, the birth of Isaac, the descent of Jacob and his sons into Egypt. He speaks of the plagues against Egypt, the crossing of the sea, the destruction of the Egyptian army and the preservation of Israel in the wilderness “*for a long time*.” Most of this would be ancient history for the audience of Joshua (24:2-7).

Joshua then began to speak of events with which his audience would have been personally acquainted. He mentioned the defeat of the Transjordan Amorites, and the reversal of the curses of Balaam (Num 22-24). He reminded them of the battle at Jericho and the long campaign against all the ethnic groups which inhabited the land of Canaan. God sent “*the hornet*”<sup>11</sup> before Israel which drove out “*the two kings of the Amorites*.” At this very moment, because of God’s unspeakable blessing, Israel was living in cities which they had not built, and eating from vineyards and groves which they had not planted (24:8-13).

#### B. Exhortation and Response (Josh 24:14-24).

All that he had been saying was building up to a challenge. “*Now*

*therefore, fear Yahweh and serve him in sincerity and truth.*" This would entail two specific actions, one negative and the other positive. (1) They must put away the gods which their fathers served beyond the Euphrates river and in Egypt;<sup>12</sup> and (2) they must serve Yahweh. Service (i.e., worship) to Yahweh must be exclusive. If they did not wish to serve Yahweh, then they should choose which gods they would serve, either the old gods of Mesopotamia or the newer gods which they had encountered in Canaan. In any case, Joshua let the assembly know what his choice would be: "*As for me and my house, we will serve Yahweh*" (24:14-15).

The assembly responded in a forceful way. To forsake Yahweh and serve other gods would be a horrifying thought. After all, it was Yahweh who brought up "*us*" and "*our fathers*" out of the "*house of bondage*," i.e., Egypt. Yahweh is the God who performed great signs in "*our sight*." Yahweh had preserved this people in whatever hostile circumstances they had found themselves over the years. He had driven out the Amorites, i.e., inhabitants of Canaan before Israel. Since Yahweh had demonstrated himself to be their God, the Israelites formally committed themselves anew to serving him (24:16-18).

Joshua then raised the bar of commitment to a higher level. He reminded his audience that Yahweh was a holy God. Yahweh was "*a jealous*"<sup>13</sup> God who would not merely ignore their dalliance with "*strange*" deities. If they turned from serving Yahweh to serve the foreign gods, Yahweh would turn against them and consume them as a nation. Disobedience turns covenant blessings into covenant curses (24:19-20).

Once again, and doubtless even more vociferously, the people declared their intention to serve Yahweh. Then Joshua coaxed yet another statement of commitment from them. They declared that they were witnesses against themselves that they had chosen to serve Yahweh in full knowledge of what the consequences would be if they lapsed into pagan religion. The people affirmed: "*We are witnesses*" (24:21-22). By setting forth the voluntary acceptance of covenant obligation on the part of Israel, the author is making clear that any later calamities which befell Israel for covenant unfaithfulness cannot be blamed upon God.

After these several verbal declarations of devotion to Yahweh, Joshua put the people to the true test of sincerity. *"Put away the foreign gods which are in your midst."*<sup>14</sup> Such an act would demonstrate that their hearts were inclined to Yahweh. For the fourth time the people declared their intention to serve Yahweh. They add, *"And we will obey his voice."* Presumably they were referring to the commandments regarding recognizing other gods or making graven images (24:24-25).

### **C. Covenant Documentation (Josh 24:25-28).**

All which had just transpired is described as *"a covenant."* That covenant became the law of the land. Joshua wrote down these words in the Book of the law of God. Presumably the reference is to the writings of Moses. What Joshua wrote was the nucleus of the present Book of Joshua. The fact that Joshua was permitted to add words of any kind to the book already deemed sacred indicates that the people regarded him as a prophet inspired of God. That which Joshua wrote was immediately regarded as Scripture (24:25-26a).

To mark the spot of this covenant renewal, Joshua erected a large stone and set it under the oak that was *"near the holy place of Yahweh"* (NIV). The sanctity of that spot near Shechem went back to the time of Abraham (Gen 12:6). The stone had been a silent witness to the words of the Lord which Joshua had just spoken. The gracious acts of the Lord which Joshua had rehearsed before Israel at Shechem would testify against them should they ever be unfaithful to the covenant. Having made provision for the stone of witness, Joshua dismissed the tribes, each to its own inheritance (24:26b-28).

## **EPILOGUE**

### **Joshua 24:29-33**

The Book of Joshua concludes with four notes of historical interest. First, it reports that Joshua died at the age of 110 (c. 1387 BC). His age at death was the same as that of Joseph whose final burial is mentioned in the following verses. In this concluding note about him Joshua is given for the first time the title Moses had worn: *"servant*

of *Yahweh*.” Joshua was buried in his own inheritance of Timnath-serah in the hill country of Ephraim (24:29-30).

Second, the sacred historian reports that Israel served *Yahweh* all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua. This probably represents a period of seven years or so. By that time most if not all of the elders who had seen the mighty acts of God in the wilderness and in Canaan would have passed from the scene (24:31).

Third, the Israelites buried the bones of Joseph which they had brought up from the land of Egypt. The burial plot was a piece of ground which Jacob had purchased from the local inhabitants some five centuries earlier (Gen 33:19). That piece of ground had now at long last become part of the inheritance of the sons of Joseph. This had probably been done on the first visit to the vicinity of Shechem early in the Conquest (Josh 8:30-35). The report is delayed until this point in order to serve as a kind of climax to the book. Before Joseph died he had expressed his faith in the fulfillment of God’s land promise (Gen 50:25). Now Joseph’s faith in God’s promise had been vindicated (24:32).

The book concludes with a note on the passing of Eleazar the son of Aaron who was Joshua’s lieutenant during the Conquest. The author may be suggesting that Eleazar’s death (c. 1380 BC) marked the end of the period of the elders who outlived Joshua (24:33).

## ENDNOTES

1. These Geshurites are not to be confused with a people by the same name which occupied an area in the vicinity of the Sea of Galilee (Josh 13:11,13; Deut 3:14).

2. The relationship between Othniel and Caleb is disputed. Othniel was the son of Kenaz. If Kenaz was the brother of Caleb, then Othniel would be his nephew. Jewish tradition takes Kenaz to be the father of both Caleb and Othniel.

3. In 20:1 the Hebrew uses the verb *dibber* (“spoke”) rather than *’amar* (“said”) which was used in the previous instances of direct divine communication to Joshua. For this reason Jewish tradition regards this as merely passing on to Israel what the Lord had previously said to Moses. See H. Freedman, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth*, Soncino Books of the Bible (London: Soncino, 1950), p. 120.

4. Scriptures do not state why the death of the high priest would mean release for the manslayer. These theories have been offered: (1) the death of the high priest had a kind of atoning effect since he had been anointed with oil. (2) Since the high priest was the head of the tribe of Levi, his death released the hold of the Levitical city (city of refuge) over the manslayer. (3) The death of the high priest signaled the end of an era and thus a general amnesty was declared.

5. The same Hebrew word (*ma'al*) is used of the offense committed by Achan (Josh 7:1; 22:20). The word basically refers to a breach of trust or unfaithfulness.

6. "*Making mention of their names*" might also refer to using the names of pagan gods as part of their personal names. Later in the family of Saul two sons had names which included the name of the god Baal. See 1 Chr 8:33; 9:39.

7. "*Cling*" (*dabhaq*) is the same verb used of the husband-wife relationship in Gen 2:24.

8. Shechem is specifically mentioned in the book only in 24:1. The city had special meaning to the Israelites. Here Abraham built his first altar in Canaan (Gen 12:6f.) and Jacob purchased a parcel of ground from the local inhabitants (Gen 33:18-20).

9. The expression "*before God*" suggests, but does not require, that the ark had been brought from Shiloh for this solemn service.

10. Here Joshua reveals that Israel's forefathers "*beyond the river*" in Mesopotamia had served other gods. The language is not clear as to whether Abraham himself was involved in this idolatry before God called him. Most likely he was.

11. The hornet (*tsir'ah*) is difficult to identify. Is a plague of insects intended? Others have taken the "*hornet*" to be a symbol for the stinging, paralyzing fear which seized the Canaanites before the arrival of Israel (cf. 2:9; 5:1). Garstang thought that the reference is to Palestinian campaigns of certain Pharaohs one of whose symbol was a bee or hornet.

12. The fact that Israel was serving idols in Egypt at the time of the Exodus is also emphasized by Ezekiel (20:7; 23:3,8).

13. God's jealousy is his zeal for the maintenance of his honor. This zeal can be shown in acts of punishment against those who have violated his holiness or in acts of vindication on behalf of his people who have been wronged by unbelievers (cf. Exod 20:5; 34:14; Deut 5:9).

14. The text does not record how this command was actually carried out. Some believe that Joshua is speaking of idolatry of the heart. Others think he is referring to the idols of the pagan nations living in the land.



