

# The Book of Joshua

LESSON  
ONE

## AN INTRODUCTION TO JOSHUA



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# Contents

<b>I. Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II. Authorship and Date.....</b>	<b>1</b>
A. Traditional Outlooks	1
B. Critical Outlooks	3
C. Evangelical Outlooks	3
1. Development	4
2. Completion	4
<b>III. Design and Purpose.....</b>	<b>6</b>
A. Content and Structure	7
1. Victorious Conquest (1–12)	8
2. Tribal Inheritances (13–22)	8
3. Covenant Loyalty (23–24)	8
B. Original Meaning	9
1. Victorious Conquest	11
a. Primeval conflict	11
b. Israel’s special conflict	11
c. Future victory of Israel’s king	13
2. Tribal Inheritances	13
a. Primeval human dominion	13
b. Israel’s special inheritance	13
c. Future inheritance of Israel’s king	14
3. Covenant Loyalty	15
a. Primeval human loyalty	15
b. Israel’s special covenant loyalty	15
c. Future covenant with Israel’s king	15
<b>IV. Christian Application .....</b>	<b>16</b>
A. Inauguration	17
1. Victorious Conquest	17
2. Tribal Inheritances	18
3. Covenant Loyalty	18
B. Continuation	18
1. Victorious Conquest	19
2. Tribal Inheritances	19
3. Covenant Loyalty	19
C. Consummation	20
1. Victorious Conquest	20
2. Tribal Inheritances	21
3. Covenant Loyalty	21
<b>V. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>21</b>

# The Book of Joshua

## Lesson One

### An Introduction to Joshua

#### INTRODUCTION

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It's common for people around the world to delight in the grand events that took place when their nations were founded. But when later generations face challenges, loss and disappointment, it's often necessary to remind them of the significance of those events from long ago. In many ways, this common experience is reflected in the Old Testament book of Joshua. Grand events had taken place when the Israelites first entered their homeland in Canaan. But as later generations faced hardships, it became necessary for them to learn afresh how important those events were.

This is the first lesson in our series on *The Book of Joshua*, and we've entitled it, "An Introduction to Joshua." As we'll see, when we learn what the book of Joshua meant for ancient Israel, we'll be better equipped to see how much it has to offer us in our day as well.

Our introduction to the book of Joshua will divide into three parts. First, we'll explore its authorship and date. Second, we'll introduce an overview of its design and purpose. And third, we'll sketch several broad considerations we need to keep in mind as we make Christian applications of our book. Let's begin with the authorship and date of the book of Joshua.

#### AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

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The Holy Spirit inspired the book of Joshua so that it would give us true historical records. But we also have to remember that the Holy Spirit employed the perspectives and purposes of Scripture's human authors to shape their historical records. So, as with every other portion of the Bible, the more we know about the human author and his times, the better we'll understand the book of Joshua.

We'll briefly sketch three perspectives on the authorship and date of Joshua: first, traditional outlooks; second, modern critical outlooks; and, third, some basic evangelical outlooks that will guide us in this lesson. Let's turn first to ancient, traditional outlooks on the authorship and date of our book.

#### TRADITIONAL OUTLOOKS

The book of Joshua is anonymous. Neither the book itself, nor the rest of Scripture tells us who its final compiler or author was. The title, "The Book of Joshua," that appears in most of our modern Bibles, was added to the book long after it was

written. But the tendencies of traditional ancient Jewish and Christian positions on these matters are nicely summarized in the rabbinical perspectives expressed in the *Talmud*. In a series of questions and answers in the part of the *Talmud* known as *Tractate Baba Bathra 15*, we read:

**[You say that] Joshua wrote his book. But is it not written, “And Joshua son of Nun the servant of the Lord died”? — It was completed by Eleazar. But it is also written in it, “And Eleazar the son of Aaron died” — Phinehas finished it.**

As we see here, leading rabbis identified Joshua himself as the author of the vast majority of our book. But they also acknowledged that certain parts of Joshua had to have been written after Joshua died. They attributed the account of Joshua’s death in 24:29, to the high priest Eleazar. And they assigned the account of Eleazar’s death in 24:33, to Eleazar’s son, Phinehas. From this traditional perspective, the book of Joshua came to be written very early, soon after the events of the book.

In reality, there is little to no evidence to support the specific claims of the *Talmud*. But we should not entirely dismiss the possibility that Joshua, Eleazar and Phinehas contributed to this book of the Bible. As early as Exodus 17:14, we learn that Joshua was involved in the preservation of Israel’s early historical records. Also, Joshua supervised the writing of God’s law for ceremonial use in passages like Joshua 8:32 and 24:26. And along these same lines, priests and Levites like Eleazar and his son Phinehas had important roles in handling and teaching the Scriptures.

In a few moments, we’ll note that the author of Joshua relied on a variety of written sources as he composed his book. And it’s possible that Joshua, Eleazar, Phinehas and others like them, at the very least, indirectly contributed to these sources.

**The book of Joshua gives us some clues as to its writing. In chapter 18 it tells of seven tribes that had not received their allotment, and so they talked with Joshua about this and he commissioned men from those tribes to go into the land and to write a report about what the land looked like and they came back with that report. It seems to me that, probably, that served as the description that’s found in chapters 18–20, when they’re talking about these tribes were allotted their land, it describes the cities that they took and the boundaries of the land. And so, that portion of that three chapters is probably an early writing that the men who sent out to reconnoiter the land came back with that description... Chapter 24 tells us that Joshua wrote in the book of the law, and probably that included at least the covenant that he was making with the children of Israel at that time. That this was probably the same book of the law that Moses had written in is suggested because Joshua will set it up before the Lord — he writes it; he puts it before the Lord — in the same way that the material of Moses was placed before the Lord, apparently in the tabernacle as a sacred deposit. And so, this portion of Joshua is also probably explicitly mentioned in the book of Joshua. If it’s true that we have**

**the description of the land, and we have the account of the covenant that's found at the end of Joshua, then it's probably true that the other accounts having to do with the battles, that contained so much detail, are probably also written very early and by Joshua, for all intents and purposes.**

**— Dr. Chip McDaniel**

With these traditional outlooks on the authorship and date of Joshua in mind, let's consider modern critical outlooks — points of view commonly held by modern scholars who reject the full authority of Scripture.

### **CRITICAL OUTLOOKS**

Most recent critical scholars on Joshua have been deeply influenced by Martin Noth's work, *The Deuteronomistic History*, written in 1943. In brief, Noth's view was that the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings were written during the Babylonian exile by someone usually deemed, "the Deuteronomist." And from this perspective, the entire Deuteronomistic history, including the book of Deuteronomy, was composed from a variety of earlier written sources during the Babylonian exile. The main purpose of these books was to demonstrate that Israel deserved the judgment of defeat and exile that had befallen the northern and southern kingdoms.

Throughout the decades, the majority of critical interpreters have affirmed many of Noth's central perspectives, especially dating the authorship of the book sometime during the Babylonian exile. Still, many critical scholars have rightly argued that Noth failed to identify the unique theological outlooks of the individual books of this portion of the Old Testament. And they've argued that Noth overlooked the positive, hopeful outlooks that also appear in these books.

Having looked at traditional and critical outlooks on the authorship and date of our book, let's consider some modern evangelical outlooks — perspectives held by scholars who affirm the full authority of Scripture. These perspectives will guide our approach to the book of Joshua throughout these lessons.

### **EVANGELICAL OUTLOOKS**

As we've already noted, the book of Joshua is anonymous. And as a result, evangelicals have held to a number of different outlooks on its authorship and date. Still, it will be helpful to make two observations. First, we'll look at what we may call the compositional development of the book. And second, we'll explore the range of possible dates for its completion. Consider first the compositional development of Joshua.

## Development

When we speak of our book's development, we have in mind that, like many other Old Testament authors, the author of Joshua didn't write his history *de novo*, or entirely from scratch. Rather, he compiled a variety of written sources as he formed his book. As we just saw, both the *Talmud* and critical interpreters maintain that our book reflects some kind of compositional development. And, by and large, evangelicals also acknowledge our author's use of sources.

We know for certain that this is true to some degree because, in 10:13, our author quoted directly from what he called, *the Book* — or scroll — *of Jashar*. We don't know much about this book, but clearly the author and his original audience did. Beyond this, as we'll see throughout this series, time and again our author incorporated portions of the Pentateuch as well as extra-biblical texts of various sorts. We can't reconstruct these unidentified sources without straying into a lot of speculation. But knowing that our author used earlier sources, like *the Book of Jashar*, helps us understand why his book feels repetitious and disjointed at times.

This use of earlier sources also helps us avoid a common mistake when identifying the date of our book's final form. On fifteen occasions, the book of Joshua says that this or that circumstance was true "to this day." Naturally, it's easy to think that the phrase "to this day" refers to the time of the author. But, as is clearly the case in passages like 1 Kings 8:8, sometimes the phrase "to this day" may actually refer to the days of earlier sources.

Although evangelicals generally agree that there was some kind of compositional development of the book of Joshua, we're still left asking, when did this book reach its completion? When was it brought together as we have it now in the Bible?

## Completion

As with many Old Testament books, we can't identify precisely when our author brought the book of Joshua to its final form. The evidence only allows us to identify a range of possibilities for the earliest and latest likely dates. But, as we'll see in these lessons, when we keep this full range of possibilities in mind, we gain numerous insights into how our author shaped his book to impact his original audience.

We'll look at this range of time for the completion of the book of Joshua in two steps. First, we'll consider the latest possible date of completion. And second, we'll examine the earliest possible date. Let's start with the latest possible time when Joshua could have been written.

One of the best ways to determine the latest possible date of Joshua's final composition is to look outside of the book itself. There's good evidence that our author consciously contributed to what many scholars today call Israel's Primary History — the history that stretches from Genesis through Kings, excluding Ruth. This perspective is important because these books create a timeline, one after the other, like interlocking links.

Think about it this way: The Pentateuch comes from the days of Moses and comprises the first set of five links in this historical “chain.” Genesis begins with creation and ends with Joseph and his brothers in Egypt. Exodus assumes the existence of Genesis because it picks up the chronology with the death of Joseph and ends with Moses and Israel at Mount Sinai. Leviticus takes us further by reporting events that took place at Mount Sinai. Numbers adds a record of the travels of the Israelites from Mount Sinai to the plains of Moab. And Deuteronomy completes the Pentateuch with Moses’ speeches on the plains of Moab and with Moses’ death.

In a similar way, the book of Joshua is the first link of the subsequent Deuteronomistic portion of the Primary History — the portion that depended heavily on the theological outlooks of the book of Deuteronomy. The author of Joshua began with the death of Moses and continued through Joshua’s death. Judges picks up the history of Israel where the book of Joshua ends. Samuel begins with the rise of Samuel as the last judge of Israel and ends with David’s reign. And Kings forms the last stage of the Primary History by beginning with the death of David and ending with the Babylonian exile. In this sense, the book of Kings flows out of *all* the earlier books of the Deuteronomistic history. And this fact tells us something crucial about the latest likely date for the completion of Joshua: It had to have been completed before the book of Kings was written.

This observation is helpful because we know a lot about when the book of Kings was written. The last event reported in Kings appears in 2 Kings 25:27-30. Here we learn that David’s royal descendent, Jehoiachin, was released from prison in Babylon in the year 561 B.C. For this reason, we can be certain that Kings was not completed before this date. And more than this, the book of Kings stops short of reporting Israel’s all-important release from exile in 538 B.C. It’s unimaginable that the writer of Kings wouldn’t have mentioned Israel’s deliverance from exile if it had occurred by the time he wrote Kings. So, in keeping with the order of Israel’s Primary History, the very latest the book of Joshua could have been completed was during the period of the Babylonian exile.

With this latest possible date in mind, we should look in the other direction. What was the earliest possible date for Joshua’s completion? It isn’t difficult to see that the earliest the book of Joshua could have reached its final form was during the period of the judges, a generation or so after the death of Joshua. Consider what our author wrote near the end of his book in 24:31:

**Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had known all the work that the Lord did for Israel (Joshua 24:31).**

Notice that this passage refers to “the elders who outlived Joshua.” And along these lines, we also read that, “Israel served the Lord” throughout the lifetimes of those who “had known all the work that the Lord did for Israel.” This positive evaluation of Israel’s spiritual condition implies something about our author. He must have been aware that the next generation after Joshua’s death did not continue to serve God faithfully — a fact highlighted in the book of Judges. So, this verse indicates that the earliest possible date for the completion of our book was the period of Israel’s judges.



Other passages in Joshua also reference events that took place during the period of the judges. For example, Joshua 19:47 mentions the migration of the Danites to a new territory in the North. This event took place in the period of the judges, according to Judges 18:27-29. So, it's fair to say that this is the earliest possible date for the book's completion.

Now, we also should mention that many interpreters have argued for a date during the period of the monarchy. For a number of reasons, they've concluded that this is actually the earliest possible date of final composition. And we cannot rule out this possibility. The primary evidence for this outlook appears in Joshua 11:21, where we read these words:

**Joshua came at that time and cut off the Anakim ... from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel (Joshua 11:21).**

As we see here, this verse distinguishes "the hill country of Judah," or the southern kingdom, from "the hill country of Israel," or the northern kingdom.

This distinction between Judah and Israel has suggested to some that our book could not have been written before the kingdom of Israel was divided in approximately 930 B.C. But having said this, it's important to note that at least one version of the Septuagint — the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament — does not make this distinction. And scholars disagree over whether the Hebrew or Greek version represents the better reading. So, while it's *possible* that Joshua 11:21 acknowledges the division of the kingdom, it isn't *certain*.

If we bring all of this evidence together, the very earliest possible date for Joshua's completion was sometime during the period of the judges. But a later date during the period of the monarchy is also possible. And even a date as late as the period of Babylonian exile isn't out of the question. As we'll see in a moment, recognizing this full range of possibilities helps us grasp more fully the kinds of challenges the book of Joshua was designed to address.

Keeping in mind what we've learned about the authorship and date of the book of Joshua, we should now turn to a second introductory consideration: the book's design and purpose. How did our author design his record of the days of Joshua? And why did he design it in this way?

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## DESIGN AND PURPOSE

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Whenever we study a book of biblical history like Joshua, it's always important to remember that the same historical events can be told in many ways without introducing errors. Every biblical book that reports historical events organizes the history it reports in order to accomplish particular purposes and to emphasize certain perspectives for its original audience.

We'll look into these matters in much more detail in later lessons, but at this point we'll sketch the design and purpose of Joshua in two steps. First, we'll introduce its overarching content and structure, the large-scale arrangement of the book. And second, we'll comment on its original meaning, the impact our author hoped to have on his original audience. Consider first the content and structure of Joshua.

## CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

The book of Joshua consists of twenty-four chapters that contain many different types of literature. We find narratives, reports, speeches, as well as lists of people and places that probably came from a variety of sources. Because of this, interpreters have analyzed the structural *details* of Joshua in different ways. But it's not difficult to see how its structure and content work together on a large scale.

**Old Testament scholars have different ways of designating or identifying genre within various books in the Bible, but in general terms, the book of Joshua has three main types of literature within it. It has what we would call narratives or stories, those sorts of things that we would normally understand like the story of the battle of Jericho, those kinds of things. It also has long lists, geographical lists, of places that various tribes inherited that were given to them by God and would list one place after another, after another, after another. And then it also has sections where there is speech, or speeches that are given by a particular person to another group of people. And you can see if you just think about it in those three big categories that those correlate roughly to the first major division and the second major division and a third major division of the book. The first is primarily narrative, the second is primarily geographical lists, and the third is primarily speeches. But the problem comes up in this way, and that is that within those major or umbrella genre designations you also have the other two always sort of seeping in... And so, as we deal with these various sections and these various genres in the book of Joshua, it's very important to keep them in mind and to be able to spot them as you go along. One of the greatest points of confusion that interpreters have, especially new interpreters or new students of the Old Testament, is that they will not recognize these various genres and won't treat them in ways that they need to be treated. And as we approach the book of Joshua, as anyone approaches the book of Joshua, if you don't focus on those various genres and how they're mixed together in different parts of the book, then it will lead to a great deal of confusion.**

— Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

In brief, Joshua has three main divisions. Each division begins with a statement indicating a significant shift in time. The first division, in chapters 1–12, focuses on Israel’s victorious conquest of Canaan — how Joshua led Israel to a decisive victory over the Canaanites. This division begins in 1:1 with the temporal notice that God commissioned Joshua, “After the death of Moses.”

## **Victorious Conquest (1–12)**

These twelve chapters report a number of events that took place during Joshua’s conquest of the land of Canaan. They begin with Israel’s crossing of the Jordan and initial victories at Jericho and Ai. And these victories are followed by a covenant renewal ceremony in the vicinity of Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. The narrative then moves to Joshua’s major campaign against an alliance in the southern regions of the Promised Land. And this record is followed by Joshua’s campaign against an alliance in the northern regions.

## **Tribal Inheritances (13–22)**

The second division of our book, in chapters 13–22, deals with Israel’s tribal inheritances — how the national unity of Israel was maintained as particular inheritances were allotted to the tribes of Israel. This division begins in 13:1 with the temporal statement, “Now Joshua was old and advanced in years.”

This second major division of Joshua first established the extent of territories that God granted to Israel, both in Transjordan — the lands to the east of the Jordan River — and in Cisjordan — the lands to the west of the Jordan River. It goes on to explain in some detail the specific allotments of lands to the tribes who received permission to settle in Transjordan. And it also spells out how God granted large territories west of the Jordan to Judah, Ephraim and Manasseh, as well as lesser territories to the other tribes of Israel. And when conflict arose between the tribes of Cisjordan and Transjordan, we learn how they maintained their national unity as the people of God.

## **Covenant Loyalty (23–24)**

The third major division, in chapters 23, 24, closes our book by giving attention to Israel’s covenant loyalty — how Israel’s loyalty and disloyalty to the terms of God’s covenant would shape their future. It begins in 23:1 with another statement that alerts us to the passage of time. We read, “A long time afterward, when, Joshua was old and well advanced in years.” And this temporal notice is reinforced in verse 14 with Joshua’s words, “I am about to go the way of all the earth.”

These last two chapters of our book focus on two assemblies that Joshua held near the time of his death. The first of these assemblies probably took place in Shiloh, a holy site that played an important role in Joshua’s day and later in the period of the judges.

And it closes with a final assembly at Shechem, the place where Abraham built his first altar in the land of Canaan. All of Israel gathered at these assemblies, and Joshua warned them against flagrant violations of God's covenant. Then the main body of our book closes with Joshua leading the people of Israel in renewing their commitment to be loyal to God alone. They vowed to reject the gods of all other nations and serve the God of their fathers according to the terms of his covenant with them. Following this covenant renewal, the book closes with an afterword that includes Joshua's death and several subsequent events.

We've explored the design and purpose of Joshua by considering the book's content and structure. Now we're in a position to ask how we should summarize the original meaning of Joshua. What was our author's purpose for writing his book?

### ORIGINAL MEANING

In many ways, it's fair to say the author of Joshua wrote with purposes that every biblical author shared. He designed his book to honor God. And he sought to further God's kingdom by applying the principles of God's covenants to the concepts, behaviors and emotions of his original audience. But as we study the book of Joshua, we can also identify the special emphases that our author had for his audience as he wrote his book.

There are many ways to summarize the original meaning of Joshua, but for our purposes, we'll express it along these lines:

**The book of Joshua was written about Israel's victorious conquest, tribal inheritances and covenant loyalty in Joshua's day to address similar challenges facing later generations.**

As we can see, this summary refers to the three main divisions of the book of Joshua: victorious conquest, tribal inheritances and covenant loyalty. But why did our author focus on these matters? As our summary suggests, first, he sought to remind his audience about events in Joshua's day. And second, he wrote to address later generations and the similar challenges they faced. Let's look at both of these purposes, starting with why our author wrote *about* Joshua's day.

Everyone familiar with the book of Joshua knows that it deals most explicitly with events that took place when Joshua led Israel. These include: Israel's victorious conquest of Canaan, Joshua's division of Israel's tribal inheritances and Israel's covenant loyalty to God. So, it's fair to say that one of our author's central purposes was to inform the original audience of what had happened in "that world" — the world of Joshua's time. Many Old Testament passages stress that the Israelites often lost their way because they forgot what God had done for them in the past. Our author hinted that this was a problem for his original audience when, in 24:31, he distinguished himself and his audience from those who "had known all the work that the Lord did for Israel."

The original audience of our book needed to be reminded of what had happened in the days of Joshua, whether they lived in the period of the judges, during the monarchy, or during the Babylonian exile. So, on a basic level, we may say that the

author of Joshua wrote to give his original audience a true record about what had been accomplished in Joshua's day.

In the second place, as our summary suggests, the book of Joshua was also written to address the challenges of later generations. Our author stood, as it were, between two worlds: "that world" — the world of Israel in Joshua's day — and "their world" — the world of the original audience. For this reason, our author didn't simply write a record that was true to historical facts. He also wrote about Israel's victorious conquest, the distribution of tribal inheritances and the call to covenant loyalty to provide meaningful points of contact or connections between "that world" and "their world." Like other biblical authors, he frequently pointed out historical backgrounds that explained the origins of his audience's current privileges and responsibilities. He also presented models for them to emulate or reject. And on a few occasions, he wrote accounts of Joshua's times as foreshadows of his original audience's experiences.

These kinds of connections reveal something about our author that we need to keep in view. On the one side, he wanted his audience to remember what had happened in Joshua's day. But on the other side, he didn't want them to return to doing things precisely as Israel had done in Joshua's day. His original audience lived in a different time. And they needed to apply his historical record to their lives in ways that were appropriate for their own day.

**I believe that the original audience of the book of Joshua were greatly impacted by its message... All of the promises that God made, all of them were fulfilled to Israel concerning their coming into the Promised Land. Not one of them failed. And I think this is, at the core, to teach the people, God is faithful; God has been faithful and will remain faithful. And this is especially important in their moving into the time of the judges, because in the time of the judges we see them described as a people who are doing what's right in their own eyes, but what they've been called to is faithfulness to Yahweh. And so, this is a message to them that they see in the life of Joshua and those who were faithful along with Joshua, in light of where they are now, where this generation is not truly following in the footsteps of Joshua. And it is a call to them to repent, really, and come back to who they were called to be.**

**— Dr. T. J. Betts**

Now at times, modern interpreters have difficulty grasping how the original audience was meant to apply this historical record to their lives. After all, our author didn't spell out these matters in his book. But we need to remember some viewpoints that our author and his audience would have learned from the Scriptures available in their day — what we know as the Pentateuch. With these perspectives in mind, the implications of our author's record of "that world" for "their world" are not as difficult to discern as it may first appear.

## Victorious Conquest

Consider how the Pentateuch set the stage for understanding the implications of Israel's victorious conquest for the original audience. This division of our book gave a record of Joshua's great victories. But three basic outlooks on warfare, derived from the Pentateuch, helped them see how to apply this part of Joshua.

***Primeval conflict.*** In the first place, both our author and his original audience knew that they were engaged in a war that was rooted in the primeval conflict between God and Satan. Genesis 3:15 indicates that throughout human history, after the fall into sin, God and Satan have been in conflict. This invisible conflict is visible on earth in the struggle between the seed, or descendants, of the serpent — people who serve satanic powers — and the seed, or descendants, of the woman — people who serve God. This is why the book of Joshua doesn't reduce Israel's conflict to just a physical war. Rather, in Joshua 5:14, our author referred to the angelic "commander of the army of the Lord." This passage indicates that Joshua and the army of Israel were participating in a battle involving God and his angelic army. And, as passages like Joshua 23:16 indicate, our author also recognized that the Canaanite's satanic gods stood alongside the Canaanites in opposition to the people of Israel. Joshua's original audience had much to learn from Israel's conquest because, just like the Israelites in Joshua's day, they knew they were engaged in this ongoing conflict between God and Satan and those who served them.

***Israel's special conflict.*** In the second place, the Pentateuch also made it evident that Joshua's conquest was Israel's special conflict. While the original audience could learn a great deal from Israel's conquest, they, and the generations to come, were not to imitate it in every detail. The Pentateuch made it clear that Joshua's day was extraordinary.

In Genesis 15:13-16, God told Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved in Egypt for a time because "the iniquity of the Amorites" — another name for Canaanites — "[was] not yet complete." But by the time of Joshua's conquest, Canaanite sin had grown so offensive that God called for their total destruction, much like he had called for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Abraham.

This is why our author drew from the vocabulary of the Pentateuch and described Canaan's destruction using the Hebrew verb *charam* (חָרַם) and the noun *cherem* (חֶרֶם). As Joshua 6:17, 19 and 21 illustrate, in the context of Joshua's conquest, these terms didn't mean simply "to destroy." Rather, they meant "to devote wholly to the Lord" or "to destroy in devotion to the Lord." So, when the Israelites made war in Canaan, it was an acknowledgment of God's just judgment against flagrant Canaanite sin. And they destroyed and dedicated everything they conquered as an act of honoring God in worship.

We know that this command for utter destruction and devotion to the Lord in Joshua's day was extraordinary for a number of reasons. For one, in Deuteronomy 20:10-20, Moses directed total destruction for the Canaanites, but he commanded Israel to offer peace treaties to peoples outside the land of Canaan. Joshua himself acknowledged this distinction in Joshua 9 when he made a treaty with the Gibeonites, believing they had come from outside of Canaan.

In addition to this, the extraordinary character of Joshua's conquest becomes evident when we recall how the ongoing conflict between God and Satan took different forms, both before and after Joshua. To mention just a few examples, *before* Joshua, in Genesis 11:1-9, God and his heavenly army went to war against rebellious human beings at the Tower of Babel. But they did this without a human army and simply scattered the people. In Genesis 14:1-24, Abraham fought with God's help, but God didn't order the total destruction of Abraham's enemies. In Exodus 12:12, we learn that God went to war against the Egyptians and their gods during the plagues on Egypt. But Israel was passive, and God didn't kill *every* Egyptian. In Exodus 14, at the Red Sea, Israel followed God obediently in battle formation, but it was God who destroyed Egypt's army.

Similar variety also appears *after* the days of Joshua. As the book of Samuel explains, David fought many of Israel's enemies with God's supernatural help. But God didn't devote *all* of his enemies to utter destruction. The book of Kings indicates that the same was true of many generations of David's royal descendants. And Israel's prophets predicted that the end of Israel's exile would unfold in connection with war through unrivaled, miraculous divine intervention.

As we can see, God's ongoing conflict with evil unfolded in a variety of ways in the Pentateuch and throughout the Old Testament. This alerts us to the fact that Joshua's conquest wasn't the norm for all battles. Of course, the original audience could learn many lessons about warfare in their day from Joshua. But the conquest itself was a time of extraordinary judgment. Unlike many other battles, God determined at that time that the Canaanites — with rare exceptions like Rahab — fully deserved utter destruction.

**The sin of the Canaanites gradually grew over time to be particularly heinous. In the book of Genesis there is an allusion, Genesis 15, I believe, to the sin of the Amorites reaching its full measure. It's not until then that God's people will take possession of the land. So, there is this notion in the Scriptures that God is watching the Canaanite nation as it declines and understands that when their decline reaches a certain point that his justice will be poured out. The instrument of his justice is the nation of Israel, but not because the Israelite nation had great moral rectitude or anything of that sort. They're a very small nation. They're given to great sin, as we've seen even in the generation prior to Joshua coming into that, and even in their conquest there is sin. But the fact of the matter is God, in his grace, has called that nation to himself and is using that nation to exterminate and remove another nation that, if allowed to live there, is going to corrupt them. And that's another reason that God allowed the Israelite nation to go into Canaan, and they were to destroy everyone living there. God didn't want his people to be corrupted by the religious practices, their idolatry, the sin of the people living there, and he didn't want his nation to become patterned after the nations around them. He wanted them to follow him, with him as their king. And so, the Israelite nation went in and, of course, did not complete that task entrusted to them. And so, even within the book of Joshua, we see rumblings of it, what we see in fuller expression in the book**



after — the book of Judges — where the Israelite nation is increasingly corrupt and becomes more and more involved in a spiral of sin and decline, less characteristic of those that are in covenant relationship with God and more like the nations around them, all something that God sought to avoid by commanding the Israelites to go in and remove those living there.

— Rev. Kevin Labby

***Future victory of Israel's king.*** In the third place, our author also knew from the Pentateuch that Joshua's conquest was but one step toward the future victory of Israel's king — the anticipated king who would reign over the whole world forever. Early on, the patriarch Jacob announced, in Genesis 49:10, that the royal family of Judah would receive "the obedience of the peoples." In the period of the judges, this hope in Judah's royal line was acknowledged in the leading role given to the tribe of Judah in Judges 1:1, 2. During the monarchy, the fulfillment of this expectation was identified specifically with the house of David in passages like Psalm 72. And in many passages, Israel's prophets predicted that the exile would end with the victory of David's great son over all nations.

So, like the Israelites in Joshua's day, the original audience knew they were part of something much greater than themselves. And for this reason, they were never simply to go back to what Joshua did. They had to apply what happened in the conquest of Canaan to their own day as God continued to move history toward the future worldwide victory of Israel's king.

## Tribal Inheritances

Our author expected his audience to have similar theological outlooks on the second division of his book concerning Israel's tribal inheritances.

***Primeval human dominion.*** In the first place, he understood from the books of Moses that Israel's possession of Canaan was rooted in God's primeval call for human dominion over the earth. God had ordained from primeval times that the earth would be turned into his kingdom as his faithful images filled and subdued it. This call was first reported in Genesis 1:26-30, and later confirmed in Genesis 9:1-3. So, the record of Israel's tribal inheritances in the book of Joshua was clearly relevant for the original audience. Like the Israelites of Joshua's day, the original audience was also called to participate in God's commission to humanity to have dominion over the earth.

***Israel's special inheritance.*** In the second place, our author rightly understood from the Pentateuch that God had established Israel's special inheritance. And the distribution of lands to Israel in Joshua's day represented the initial fulfillment of this inheritance. For instance, in Genesis 15:18-21, God promised Abraham an inheritance for his descendants that extended from the border of Egypt to the river Euphrates. So, drawing from the



vocabulary of the Pentateuch, the book of Joshua frequently refers to Israel's possession of their land with the Hebrew verb *nachal* (נָחַל) — meaning “to inherit” — and the noun *nachalah* (נַחֲלָה)— meaning “inheritance.” This terminology indicates that Israel's land was an enduring possession from God.

For this reason, the original audience had much to learn from what Joshua had done in distributing their tribal inheritances. In the period of the judges, disharmony among the tribes of Israel and troubles from other peoples disrupted Joshua's successes. During the monarchy, Israel's kings expanded Israel's lands, but they also experienced setbacks and losses. And of course, during the Babylonian exile, only a small remnant of God's people remained in the land. And they remained there only under the tyranny of other nations. So, Joshua's distribution of Israel's tribal inheritances offered the original audience great insight as they sought to live in service to God in their own day.

***Future inheritance of Israel's king.*** In the third place, our author also knew that Israel's inheritance of Canaan was but one step toward the future inheritance of Israel's king. At the appointed time, Israel's great and righteous king would possess every land and nation as he fulfilled humanity's original call to have dominion over the entire earth. As we've mentioned, Genesis 49:10 declares that one day a royal son of Judah will reign until he receives “the obedience of the peoples.” In addition, in Genesis 17:4, God promised Abraham, “You shall be the father of a multitude of nations.” This is why in Psalm 2:8, God said specifically to the house of David, “I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.” Israel's prophets announced many times that the land of David's great son would extend from one end of the earth to the other. And Paul summarized these Old Testament outlooks in Romans 4:13 when he wrote, “The promise to Abraham and his offspring [was] that he would be heir of the world.” The implications for our author's original audience were clear. They were to apply what they read in the book of Joshua to the ways God was leading his people in their times toward the goal of this worldwide inheritance.

**We see in Romans 4 that the apostle Paul interprets the promise of inheritance for Abraham and his offspring to include the whole world. And that may surprise us at first. We think of the Promised Land as only a strip of real estate along the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Sea. But this is really of a piece of the way Paul understands the Abrahamic covenant to be global, to be worldwide. So often he will talk about the seed, the children of Abraham, including not just his biological descendants, but really those who follow in the footsteps of Abraham, that is, the footsteps of faith, who trust in the promises of God. In fact, Paul emphasizes that not only Jew but also Gentile who believe in Christ are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to God's promise — end of Galatians 3. So when Paul says in Romans 4 that the promises that Abraham's children, by faith, will inherit the whole world, he's really just extending that same understanding.**

— Dr. Dennis E. Johnson

## Covenant Loyalty

Just as with the first and second divisions of our book, the author of Joshua expected his original audience to keep certain theological outlooks from the Pentateuch in view as they applied the third division — Israel's call to covenant loyalty.

***Primeval human loyalty.*** In the first place, our author understood from the Pentateuch that covenant loyalty was rooted in the primeval requirement of human loyalty to God. Simply being images of God binds us to God by covenant, and this bond requires loyal service to him. God's covenant with all of humanity in Adam required obedience, as indicated in Genesis 1–3 and Hosea 6:7. And God's covenant in Noah, in Genesis 6, 9, revealed that all human beings are required to serve God by covenant. Because this is true of all people in all times, the original audience could learn much from Joshua's call for covenant loyalty in his day. They, like all other human beings, were obligated to God's loyal service.

***Israel's special covenant loyalty.*** In the second place, the original audience also had to be aware of Israel's special covenant loyalty. Our author was careful to note that, in the time of the conquest, Joshua exhorted the people to remain faithful to God's covenant. And the people vowed to do so.

The original audience would have known of God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17. Here God required circumcision as a commitment to being blameless before him. And the covenant God made in Moses — in Exodus 19–24, and renewed in the book of Deuteronomy — made it clear that Israel was to obey the law of Moses. Now, in the third division of our book, Joshua focused on the trials that would come to Israel if they didn't fulfill these requirements, especially the requirement of rejecting false gods. And he set before them the possibilities of troubles, defeat and exile from the Promised Land if they were unfaithful.

By the time of the book's original audience, these trials had already begun to unfold. In the period of the judges, Israel had entered into cycles of troubles. During the monarchy, more judgments came on Israel because of the repeated idolatry of the people and their kings. And during the Babylonian exile, the threat of losing the Promised Land had become a horrific reality. So, the original audience had to consider Joshua's warnings to Israel in light of God's judgments that they were facing in their own day.

***Future covenant with Israel's king.*** In the third place, what happened in Joshua's day also anticipated that God would make a future covenant with Israel's king. We know that Genesis 49:10 indicates that God had ordained for a king of Judah to reign. And Genesis 17:6 also indicates that Israel would have a king. Although Israel had no legitimate king during the period of the judges, passages like Judges 21:25 and the end of Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2:10 indicate that even during this period, the faithful looked for deliverance through Israel's royal family.

Now, if the book of Joshua was written during Israel's monarchy or during the Babylonian exile, the original audience had to relate Joshua's call to covenant loyalty to God's dynastic covenant with David. In passages like 2 Samuel 7 and Psalms 89, 132, we

see how God's covenant with David focused on the necessity of loyalty. David's royal line had to be loyal to God because they represented the people of Israel before God.

In addition, according to the prophecy of Isaiah 53:11, eternal forgiveness would come in the future because of the substitutionary death of "the righteous one, [the Lord's] servant," Israel's perfectly righteous king. And this great king is none other than Jesus, the Christ who brought the new covenant predicted in Jeremiah 31. This covenant will come in its fullness when Christ returns and makes all things new. As the original audience applied Joshua's call to covenant loyalty to their own times, they had to do so in the light of where they stood in these developments of the covenants God had made with his people.

So, as we seek to understand the original meaning of the book of Joshua, we always have to keep in view that our author wanted his audience to learn what had happened in Joshua's day. But, he also wanted them to apply his record of the victorious conquest, tribal inheritances and the call to covenant loyalty in ways that were appropriate for their own times and circumstances.

So far in our introduction to the book of Joshua we've looked into its authorship and date, as well as its design and original purpose. Now we're in a position to introduce the third main topic of this lesson: Christian application. How should the book of Joshua impact our lives as we follow Christ?

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## CHRISTIAN APPLICATION

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In Hebrew, the name "Jesus" is "Joshua." This simple fact reminds us that, from a Christian perspective, Jesus fulfills, or completes, what began in Joshua's day. And in many respects, applying the book of Joshua to our lives flows out of this fulfillment in Christ. The more we grasp this connection between the book of Joshua and Jesus, the more we can understand the impact this book should have on us as followers of Christ. As we've seen, the author of our book wrote about Israel's victorious conquest, tribal inheritances, and covenant loyalty under Joshua's leadership to guide later generations of Israel. But our author also understood that sometime in the future, a great king of Israel would come, and he would accomplish all of the goals pointed to in the book of Joshua.

**When Joshua was leading the victorious battles, he was leading the nation to conquer the Promised Land. He advocated on behalf of the nation when they failed and sinned. He interceded for the nation and then led the promised nation into the Promised Land. This is all a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ led God's people into their promised inheritance, as it is written in Hebrews 4. He advocates on behalf of God's nation, prays for the nation, and intercedes for the nation, and does the work of the high priest for the New Testament nation, which is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. All of this is a picture meant for the time of the New Testament.**

— Rev. Henryk Turkanik, translation

Broadly speaking, as Israel's Messiah, Jesus fulfills these goals in two main ways. First, when we compare Jesus with the good things Israel accomplished under Joshua — the conquest of Canaan, the initial inheritance of the Promised Land, and Israel's loyal covenant service to God — we can see how Jesus expands and ultimately fulfills each goal. And second, when we contrast Jesus' accomplishments with Israel's failures — their inability to destroy all the Canaanites as commanded, their bickering and arguing over their tribal inheritances, and their failure to remain loyal to God's covenant — we can see that Jesus actually *reverses* all of Israel's failures. And by these means, Jesus wages victorious conquest over the entire earth, he inherits all things, and he establishes covenant loyalty everywhere in the world.

But to understand how to make Christian applications of the book of Joshua today, we need to remember something: God determined that the messianic fulfillment of these goals would unfold *over time*.

On the basis of Old Testament prophecy, many Jews in first century Palestine rightly believed that the Messiah would win a global conquest, inherit the world, and spread covenant loyalty everywhere. But these Jews also believed that he would do this quickly and catastrophically. In contrast, Jesus and the authors of the New Testament explained time and again that the kingdom Jesus established would unfold gradually in three interconnected phases.

We'll gain an orientation toward the Christian application of Joshua by looking at each phase of the kingdom separately.

## INAUGURATION

First, we'll consider how Christ fulfilled the expectations established in the book of Joshua by examining what Jesus accomplished in the inauguration of his kingdom. Second, we'll investigate how he fulfills the book of Joshua during the continuation of the kingdom. And third, we'll explore what Jesus will accomplish during the consummation of the kingdom at his glorious return. Consider first the inauguration of Christ's kingdom.

## Victorious Conquest

The New Testament teaches in many places that Jesus' inauguration of God's kingdom was the initial phase of his glorious worldwide victorious conquest. But when we compare Israel's victorious conquest in the book of Joshua with Jesus' first advent, we see a distinct difference. Rather than taking up a physical sword as Joshua did, Jesus followed a twofold strategy: He began the ultimate defeat of Satan and his demons. And he also proclaimed the gospel, or "good news" of the kingdom, to human beings by warning them of judgment to come and offering them God's mercy.

In John 12:31, 32, Jesus described this twofold strategy when he said: "The ruler of this world [will] be cast out. And I ... will draw all people to myself." This is why, in

Colossians 2:15, the apostle Paul described Jesus' death as the time when, "He disarmed the rulers and authorities ... by triumphing over them." And it's why Paul also said, in Ephesians 4:8, that "when [Christ] ascended on high he led a host of captives," from among people who served the kingdom of Satan, "and he gave [them as] gifts to men."

## **Tribal Inheritances**

The New Testament also emphasizes two perspectives on how the inauguration of Christ's kingdom fulfilled the hope of a worldwide inheritance for God's people. On the one side, Hebrews 1:2 explains that "[God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things." In Matthew 28:18, Jesus told his disciples that he had received this inheritance when he said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

On the other side, the New Testament also stresses that Jesus distributed a foretaste of his worldwide inheritance when he poured out the Holy Spirit on his church. As prophecies like Isaiah 44:3, 4 indicate, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit will one day renew the entire creation. So, in Ephesians 1:14, Paul spoke of the Holy Spirit poured out on the church as "the guarantee of our inheritance." And, as he put it in 2 Corinthians 1:22 and 5:5, the Spirit is "a guarantee" of what is to come — our future inheritance in the new heaven and new earth.

## **Covenant Loyalty**

In addition, the New Testament announces that Christ's inauguration of the kingdom emphasized covenant loyalty when he ushered in the new covenant age. Alluding to the prophecy of a new covenant in Jeremiah 31, Jesus told his disciples in Luke 22:20, "This cup ... is the new covenant in my blood." And New Testament authors made it clear that Jesus bore the eternal judgment of God on the cross as the final atonement for true believers.

But we must remember that Jesus did not bring the fullness of the new covenant to the earth in his first advent. So, he and his apostles and prophets still instructed even true believers to be faithful to God because we are not fully sanctified. And more than this, there are "false brothers" among us, as Paul called them in 2 Corinthians 11:26 and Galatians 2:4. The call to covenant loyalty still goes forth because we wait for the new covenant to be completely fulfilled.

## **CONTINUATION**

In many respects, our Christian applications of the book of Joshua in regard to the inauguration parallel what the New Testament also teaches about the continuation of Christ's kingdom.

## Victorious Conquest

The New Testament describes the continuation of Jesus' kingdom as a time in which his victorious conquest expands across the globe through his Spirit at work in the church. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:25, "[Christ] must reign [in heaven] until he has put all his enemies under his feet." But in our mission as the church, we don't take up physical arms any more than Jesus and his apostles and prophets did. Instead, we continue with the twofold strategy that Jesus established in his first advent.

On the one side, we further the defeat of Satan and evil spirits in more and more parts of the world. As Ephesians 6:12 tells us, "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against ... the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." And on the other side, we represent Christ in the world today by proclaiming the good news that warns human beings of God's coming judgment and offers them the mercy of forgiveness and eternal life. In the words of 2 Corinthians 5:20, "We are ambassadors for Christ... We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

## Tribal Inheritances

We also see that our anticipation of a worldwide inheritance for God's people is furthered throughout the continuation of his kingdom in church history. The fact that Jesus is God's appointed heir of all things has become more and more evident as people everywhere embrace him as Lord. And Christ continues to distribute the down payment of the Holy Spirit to more and more people throughout the world. As passages like Galatians 3:29 tell us, "If you are Christ's, then you are ... heirs according to promise." In the words of Romans 8:16, 17, "We are ... heirs — heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ."

## Covenant Loyalty

In many ways, we can also see how Joshua's emphasis on covenant loyalty remains true during the continuation of Christ's kingdom. As the church spreads throughout the world, the full atonement of the blood of the new covenant still covers the sins of all who have saving faith. Those who are in Christ are destined to be entirely free from eternal judgment. But it's still important for the church throughout the ages to be called to covenant loyalty.

On the one side, true believers still need to grow in their devotion to God. They need to take to heart the warnings of passages like Hebrews 12:14 where it says, "Strive for peace ... and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord." And on the other side, false brothers still among us need to be warned so that they will repent and be saved. As Hebrews 10:26, 27 puts it, "If we go on sinning deliberately ... there no longer



remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume [God's] adversaries."

**The theme of covenant loyalty and renewal is one of the important topics in the book of Joshua. After almost every war where Joshua led the people in the book of Joshua, we see that there is a ceremony for renewing the covenant and loyalty to the Lord within the context of the covenant... This theme is very important to us as Christians because we too are in a covenant with the Lord — the new covenant that Christ made with us by his blood. The theme of covenant loyalty is related to something the Lord did, to the benevolence of the Lord and the Lord's grace. So, as the Lord showed kindness to Israel and fulfilled his promises to them, it was important for Joshua to remind the people of the importance of being loyal and faithful to the Lord within the covenant. The same exact thing is applicable to us too. The Lord showed us kindness in Christ, and we receive salvation through the work of his grace. As a result, we are to be faithful to the Lord, and this should be shown in our obedience, that is, in obeying the Lord's commands and statutes. When we live the life of obedience, faithfulness and loyalty, we express our thankfulness to what the Lord has done for us from the beginning. The Lord is the one who takes the initiative in the covenant by giving blessings and benevolences to us, and we respond to these blessings and benevolences by our obedience and loyalty within the context of the covenant.**

— Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation

## CONSUMMATION

Having seen how Christian application of the book of Joshua appears in the inauguration and continuation of the unfolding kingdom of Christ, we should turn briefly to the consummation of the kingdom. How should we apply our hope in Christ's future and final fulfillment in light of the book of Joshua?

### Victorious Conquest

Without question, the New Testament indicates that the consummation of Christ's kingdom will be the grand finale of his worldwide victorious conquest. He will complete the defeat of Satan and evil spirits. And when Jesus returns in glory, the time of God's mercy toward unbelievers will end. At that time, God's judgment against Canaan in Joshua's day will seem small compared to the judgment that Jesus will bring against every human enemy of God. As we read in Revelation 19:14, 15, "The armies of heaven

... [will follow] him... From his mouth [will come] a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations.”

## **Tribal Inheritances**

Of course, when Christ returns at the consummation of his kingdom, his worldwide inheritance — his right as heir of all things — will be fully realized. As we read in Revelation 11:15, “The kingdom of the world [will] become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.” And this worldwide kingdom will be distributed to all who follow Christ. According to Matthew 25:34, on the day of final judgment, “the King will say to those [who believe in Christ], ‘Come ... inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”

## **Covenant Loyalty**

And only in the consummation of Christ’s kingdom will the warnings calling God’s people to covenant loyalty end. When Christ returns, those who haven’t come to him in saving faith will come under God’s eternal judgment. And all who are true believers will enter the new creation where the blessings of the new covenant will be received in their fullness. As Revelation 22:3 tells us, at that time, “No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in [the city], and his servants will worship him.”

In effect, the New Testament calls us to remember how Christ fulfills the themes of Joshua in the inauguration, continuation and consummation of his kingdom. When we do, Israel’s conquest, inheritance and covenant loyalty in Joshua’s day enrich our awareness of the wonder of what Christ established in his first advent. They teach us how we are to live in service to God every day of our lives. And they point us toward the grand finale of history when the conquest will be completed, the inheritance of the new creation will be ours, and we will be vindicated as God’s loyal covenant people in Christ.

## **CONCLUSION**

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In our “Introduction to Joshua,” we presented three crucial issues. First, we touched on the authorship and date of the book, including the traditional, critical and evangelical outlooks on these matters. Second, we examined the design and purpose of Joshua by considering the content and structure of the book, as well as its original meaning. And third, we explored some Christian applications that can be drawn from the book by looking at how Christ, in the inauguration, continuation and consummation of God’s glorious kingdom, fulfills the expectations established in Joshua.

The book of Joshua reminded ancient Israelites of what God had accomplished for them through the life of Joshua as they faced challenges in their day. And in many ways,



we face similar challenges in our lives today. But as we'll see in this series, the book of Joshua offered Israel opportunities to renew their zeal for what God was doing in their day. And it offers you and me opportunities for renewal as well. As we learn more about this book, we'll not only grow in our awareness of what God did through Joshua in the Old Testament, but we'll also grow in our awareness of all that God has accomplished, is accomplishing and will accomplish through our greater Joshua, Jesus our Savior.

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# The Book of Joshua

LESSON  
ONE

## An Introduction to Joshua Faculty Forum



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# Contents

<b>Question 1:</b>	What are some evangelical positions on the authorship of the book of Joshua? .....	1
<b>Question 2:</b>	What is your evaluation of Martin Noth’s theory of the Deuteronomist and the so-called Deuteronomistic History? .....	2
<b>Question 3:</b>	When did the book of Joshua reach its completion?.....	3
<b>Question 4:</b>	What genres of writing can be found within the story of Joshua?.....	5
<b>Question 5:</b>	What is the overall literary structure of the book of Joshua? .....	6
<b>Question 6:</b>	How might the book of Joshua have impacted the original audience of the book? .....	8
<b>Question 7:</b>	Why did God command the destruction of the Canaanites in the book of Joshua? .....	9
<b>Question 8:</b>	How does the New Testament apply the imagery of warfare in the Old Testament to its original audiences and to believers today? .....	12
<b>Question 9:</b>	What are some ways that the theme of victorious conquest in Joshua applies to present-day Christians? .....	14
<b>Question 10:</b>	How does Jesus fulfill the theme of warfare against evil in the inauguration, continuation and consummation of his kingdom? .....	16
<b>Question 11:</b>	In what ways does the Holy Spirit empower us for spiritual warfare? .....	17

# The Book of Joshua

## Lesson One: An Introduction to Joshua

### Faculty Forum

With

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Dr. P. J. Buys  
Rev. Sherif Gendy  
Dr. James M. Hamilton  
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Rev. Dr. John W. Yates

### Question 1:

**What are some evangelical positions on the authorship of the book of Joshua?**

#### **Dr. Tom Petter**

Well, the question about who wrote the book of Joshua and the traditional answer tying the story of Joshua to Joshua himself is an ancient tradition, and I think we need to respect that ancient tradition. Especially in tribal societies of the ancient past, but also tribal societies all the way up to today, the tribal elders have tremendous authority, and they have tremendous respect, and their traditions, whether oral traditions or written traditions, carry a lot of weight. And so, we need to be respectful of that, both in the ancient context and in the modern context. So, when a text like the book of Joshua has a lot of firsthand accounts with Joshua at the center of the story, we have to pay careful consideration to that. I mean, that's "history writing 101," since Herodotus. Herodotus listens to the accounts of other people, and he says this is what they say about their history. And he's not making a value judgment at times, but he's at least respecting the ancient record of the people and how they view their own history. So, here is ancient Israelite history with a prominent, prominent figure, one who walked alongside *the* covenant mediator for Old Testament times, Moses. He is Moses' right-hand man, and so when he writes down what he has lived out in his whole life — the conquest of the land in Canaan — that carries a huge amount of weight. And so, very early the traditions gelled around the person of Joshua. Sure, there's editorial things going on. Subsequent writers, maybe Samuel — another prominent figure in Israelite history — might have come along and touched up some of the things about Joshua's death. But when there is the covenant renewal at the end of Joshua, Joshua is there. So, why assign the authorship, the composition of these texts, to someone removed so far down the line, like during the Babylonian exile. This casts a great shadow of doubt, and it actually is anachronistic. It doesn't fit with tribal history writing, as we know it.

**Dr. Chip Hardy**

Concerning who wrote the book of Joshua, we have to realize that the book is anonymous first of all, first and foremost. Beyond that, we can see writing that's actually going on in the book. So, we see writing on the stones; we see writing in the book of the law; we see writing of land surveys, even, in the book. So, we see writing happening during the time of Joshua, but there's nothing that absolutely makes us believe that Joshua himself was sitting down writing the book of Joshua... But we do want to take seriously the claims of the book and the claims of the writing in the book and say that where things are being written that they're actually being written.

**Question 2:****What is your evaluation of Martin Noth's theory of the Deuteronomist and the so-called Deuteronomistic History?****Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.**

Martin Noth's theory about the Deuteronomistic History is just that — it's a theory, which means that it is not absolutely certain, and people will disagree with it, as they have, and they'll modify it, as they have ever since the time he first enunciated it. But, in effect, most evangelicals are right to say that this part of the Bible, that we call often "the Deuteronomistic History," is in fact a unity, but the nature of that unity is very difficult to put your finger on or identify specifically. So, evangelicals had different views of what the unity of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings actually is. It's clear that all of these books depend heavily on the language of the book of Deuteronomy. That's a unifying factor. They draw from it. In fact, they actually quote it from time to time. It's also clear that the theological emphases of the book of Deuteronomy are also evident in those books as well. And so, I often think of the Deuteronomic or the Deuteronomistic History as more or less sort of like a denomination in Israel, sort of like a part of the body there in Israel, where they had a way of speaking, a way of looking at things, a way of talking about things that were definitely oriented toward the book of Deuteronomy. Now, in Martin Noth's view, the book of Deuteronomy itself was actually completed long after the time of Moses — in the exile, as a matter of fact. But the reality is that, as evangelicals, we should not believe that. We should believe that Deuteronomy is the Mosaic basis of this prophetic history that we call the Deuteronomistic History. We call it "prophetic" because it does apply the criteria of the book of Deuteronomy to the historical events that it reports in Joshua and Judges and Samuel and Kings. Now, it applies those theological evaluations in different ways, to be sure, but each of those books relies heavily on Deuteronomy, and in that sense, they have a great deal of unity.

**Dr. James M. Hamilton**

So, scholars have looked at Deuteronomy through Kings and they've seen something that's really there. They've seen that a lot of the phrases that start occurring in Deuteronomy are reused all through Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. There's just a load of language, terminology, concepts, a fund of sort of stock imagery and stock

phrases that gets used and reused across these books. That's really there. The question is how do we explain it? And there's a strain of, I would say, unbelieving scholarship that looks at this and they explain it essentially as propaganda. Their view is that at the time of Josiah's reformation, or renewal, or however we want to describe what King Josiah did, that Josiah got people onto this program and then essentially he invented holy books, or someone working for him invented a whole set of holy books that served as propaganda because they lent ancient, legitimating authority to Josiah's program. And these are people that would think that the book of Deuteronomy ought to be dated to that period, and then, that Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings, they were all produced essentially around the time of Josiah in pursuit of his program. That way of looking at the material is basically claiming that the story that is told on the surface of the text is not the real story. The real story is in back of the surface of the text, and the surface of the text is just propaganda. And I think that's a skeptical and uncharitable way to approach this material. A better... A way to approach the material that actually abides by and holds to what the texts themselves claim for themselves would be to look at this material and say, well, the book of Deuteronomy claims, at a number of places, that Moses was responsible for this material, and then these other texts, they all attest to the profound significance of Moses. So, I don't think it should surprise us when we find Moses using all this language in Deuteronomy, and then we find these later authors who come after Moses picking up the language and the concepts that they learn from Deuteronomy and essentially describing the world through what we might call the lens that is ground in the book of Deuteronomy. So, that's the way that I would explain this material. I think there's a better, more biblical way to account for all of this language and imagery that derives from Deuteronomy than the Deuteronomistic hypothesis. I think, more likely, Moses had the profound impact that the texts indicate he had and then later biblical authors were deeply influenced by the way that he described things.

### Question 3:

#### When did the book of Joshua reach its completion?

##### Dr. Chip Hardy

The date of the writing of the book is difficult to determine. We see ... that there is evidence in the book of writing during the time of Joshua. However, we also see that there is evidence in the book, internal evidence to the book, which gives some time-depth to the writing. So, the book talks about how "this has been written," and it's that way "until this day," and so we see some evidence of some type of the events happening in the past and the writing about the events at a later point in time. So, if we look at something like the story of Jericho, we see, "it's like that to this day" is there in that story, and so that helps us sort of locate what's going on and what has it been like "to this day." Or talking about the conquest of the Jebusites and saying that "the Jebusites are there *to this day*." And so, I think we can locate the time frame of the writing of the book possibly later, even into the times of the kings, based on what



we know about when the Jebusite city of Jerusalem was conquered. And so, that's some internal evidence to the book. We also see external evidence as well, and that is the linguistic makeup of the book. And so, we see that the writing of the book, the actual written words, don't look a whole lot like the Hebrew we have that we oftentimes call early biblical Hebrew, like from the Song of the Sea, Moses' Song of the Sea, or the Song of Deborah. But we see the writing much more fits into the broader writing that we see in the Old Testament that we oftentimes refer to as the Deuteronomist history... And again, those books we believe are typically dated to around the time of the kings in what we call the Iron Age II time or sometime between 900 and 600 B.C.

**Dr. Chip McDaniel**

Critics have wanted to assign the writing of the book of Joshua very late in Israel's history, in fact, all of the Old Testament written late in Israel's history, because they would base this on an evolutionary view of the development of Israel's religion... When Israel is developing from a paganism, to their idolatry, to polytheism, and then to worship of one god above other gods, and then finally to monotheism, the worship of only one God, they would say that evolved over time. They do so in part because they deny the miraculous; that is, that they would argue no person can know the future. And that's true — no person on earth can predict the future. But there is a God in heaven who is bringing about the future, and he is the one who can tell certain prophets what will happen in the future. And so, just to say that it cannot be written early because of an anti-supernatural bias seems to me to violate what the Scripture says about itself. When we come to the book of Joshua, we see that when we back up and we ask, what age might have produced this particular book, I think that there are a couple of possibilities before the exile. Israel's golden age was the age of David and Solomon. The silver age was the age from Uzziah to Josiah. And during those times you had relative peace, and you had prosperity flowing into the nation. We know that from, for example, the description of Solomon's temple and the wealth that that brought into the nation. We also know that from Hosea and Amos who talk about the lavish lifestyle of the nation of Israel. So, it's a time of peace and prosperity, and it's during these times that you would more likely have the opportunity to give over to contemplation and to writing rather than fighting all kinds of wars. And I don't think it's a coincidence, I think it's probable that during this time of this early golden age we would see a flurry of literary activity. And so, David is writing the Psalms. Psalm 72 ends with the notion that the prayers of David, son of Jesse, are ended. Probably this was an addition of the psalter, a portion of the psalter that was edited and came out near his death or shortly after his death. We also have Solomon, who is writing, according to the superscriptions, is writing the proverbs of Solomon in 1:1 and more proverbs of Solomon in 10:1. That we might have in the time of Hezekiah another burst of literary activity is suggested in the Proverbs where it says in 25:1 that these are the proverbs of Solomon that Hezekiah's men transcribed. And so, that fits within the idea that we would have an early period of peace and prosperity where writing would be done. We would have a time, perhaps later, before the captivity, when this writing also would be done, and then we know that we had literary activity after the captivity... Of course, there would have been editorial activity in the more than 800

years between Moses and Jeremiah or the 300 years between David and Josiah, because in the course of the development of the language, you've got certain features that have to change. No one today in English literature reads *Beowulf* in the original. In fact, we would even have difficulty reading the authorized version of 1611 in the original script. Styles change. The formation of words change. And sometimes in the Scripture there seems to be evidence of little editorial notes that are put in, and so, we wouldn't want to discount the idea that there would be a prophetic editor, a prophetically inspired editor, who would add certain notes in order to update the material for the people... We might even be able to suggest for the book of Joshua something a little earlier, because in the account of Joshua, it says that the Jebusite was not driven out of Jerusalem and unto this day still remains in the city of Jerusalem. This would have been at a time before David drove out the Jebusite and established it as his capital. So, what we're suggesting is that these earlier books of the Old Testament probably were achieving their final form during the time of the early monarchy as the time of peace and prosperity would have allowed.

### **Question 4:**

#### **What genres of writing can be found within the story of Joshua?**

#### **Dr. Seth Tarrer**

The question of genre in Joshua is one that has excited a lot of people because when we necessarily ask the question of genre we're asking, "What kind of writing are we reading? What does this thing purport to be? How does it want us to read it?" Which then leads us to, "What kind of questions should we put to the text?" When we look at the text of Joshua, we initially see a narrative that is fast-paced — conquest, destruction, success, failure, intervention by God, miraculous events — in the first twelve chapters of Joshua. Then the text seems to shift gear. It doesn't shift out of narrative genre; however, the narrative becomes much slower paced. We see a lot of lists, we see administrative language and rhetoric, and we see what appears to be an accounting of the people of Israel as they moved into this new, previously unheld land of Canaan... So, the question of genre, then, has been answered by several as being, the book of Joshua's primary genre is something called the "conquest account," a genre that comes to us from the ancient Near Eastern world, a genre in which a charismatic leader leads a people to take possession of a previously unheld land, and under the helm, or under the leadership of a deity. While this is helpful heuristically, I think in seeing some of these similarities, three major differences appear when we compare Joshua to these other ancient Near Eastern accounts, conquest accounts that come to us from the ancient world. The first is that the siege account that we have in ... Joshua chapter 6 of Jericho is unlike anything that's come to us from the past before. So, in some ways, to say that this necessary component of siege is in Joshua; therefore, it's similar to everything that's come before, Joshua 6's siege is intended to display the mighty power of God, not the siege brilliance of the army... The second major difference that sets Joshua apart from other ancient Near Eastern accounts is the use of this word "*cherem*," the word for "ban," the ban that

God has placed over and against the Canaanites, that they would be consecrated to utter destruction. This word *cherem* appears in very little literature outside of the Old Testament anywhere from the ancient Near Eastern world. It appears in a ninth century Moabite inscription called the *Mesha Stele*, or the *Mesha Inscription*, in which the Moabite king, with the power of his god Chemosh, puts Israel to the ban. It also appears in a Ugaritic infertility incantation, which obviously doesn't carry the same resonance as it does in the book of Joshua. And then it appears in a Sebaean text whose date is under question. And so, the term itself is not clearly comparable. Thirdly, or finally, in ancient Near Eastern accounts of conquest accounts, the genre of conquest accounts, there's almost a Quentin-Tarantino-esque level of violence and slaughter in which the protagonists revel in the destruction, the blood, the body count, the skulls piled up. And we don't find that in the book of Joshua. Instead, what we see is a modest account of the destruction of a city and its inhabitants and its possessions to the Lord.

### **Rev. Kevin Labby**

When you read through Joshua you'll see a few different genres of writing. The first one is really historical narrative. It's an exciting book to read as we read God's unfolding work in allowing his people to take possession of the Promised Land. There are conquests, there are battles, there are tensions within the camp as God's people struggle with sin and its consequences and then are reassured of God's restoring work through repentance. In the middle of the book of Joshua, we see the distribution of the land, beginning and then continuing to the end as God's people lay hold of the land and then distribute it among the various tribes of the nation of Israel. A final aspect of the book of Joshua, might be described as genre, is that of speeches. As Moses left God's people with speeches to remind them of his faithfulness — his desire for them in the future, their past waywardness and how God's grace met them in their sin — Joshua has that speech element as well in which he calls God's people to remember that it's by grace that they've been chosen, and it's through obedience, grace-born, love-born obedience, that they've been able to accomplish what they have accomplished to date, but that more of the task remains in the future, and so, a call to future obedience and future trust in the Lord.

## **Question 5:**

### **What is the overall literary structure of the book of Joshua?**

### **Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.**

Old Testament books that are primarily narrative will indicate how they're to be divided by interpreters in a variety of ways. Sometimes it has to do with major shifts in the characters of the story. Now, when you think about the book of Joshua, that's really not a major issue there, because Joshua is the main character throughout, from chapter 1 all the way to the end. Sometimes you'll have major shifts in setting, and you have some of that in the book of Joshua, to be sure. But another way in which books will often show how they're to be divided as we interpret them is by major

temporal gaps or shifts in time, and that's more of the clue that we find in the book of Joshua, because the book of Joshua has several places where it says, now there is a significant temporal reorientation I want you to have here. And so, when you take that approach to the book of Joshua, you find that the first twelve chapters are more or less within one basic frame of reference or one basic time period, and that's when Joshua has inherited the mantle from Moses and is leading the people of Israel into battle. But in 13:1, we find that the text gives us a statement about the fact that Joshua's very old now, which is a major temporal break. And so, chapters 13–22 are oriented toward that timeframe within Joshua's life — a temporal change that takes place in the book... And then 23:1 also refers to a temporal gap. It speaks in terms of "after a long time had passed and Joshua was very old." This, too, then indicates that we're in another part of the book of Joshua, a later time than the second part. So, when you think about how the book of Joshua is divided up into its major sections, it has primarily to do with these kinds of temporal notices that appear in 13:1 and in 23:1.

**Dr. T. J. Betts**

The overall structure of the book of Joshua is pretty simple, actually. From chapters 1–5 we see them entering into the land. From chapters 6–12 we see the actual conquest of the land. And then from chapters 13–22 we see the allocation of the land, where the different tribes are divided up and people receive their inheritance. Then we have an epilogue at the end where we have chapters 23 and 24, where Joshua gives his farewell speech and really exhorts the people to be faithful to the Lord.

**Dr. Greg Perry**

At the opening of the book of Joshua we have this wonderful affirmation of Joshua's leadership. God tells Joshua that he will be with him just as he was with Moses before him. And this serves as a wonderful table of contents, really, for the entire structure of the book. So, in verses 2-5, where he says, "Every place where you set your foot I will give to you, just as I promised before," that story is told in chapters 1–12 about the conquest of the land, how they go in and they win the battle for Jericho and Ai in the center. And then they move to the south and then to the north and they take the land. And just like God promised that he would give the land to Abraham's descendants, he does so. And then in verse 6, at the beginning, he says that "You'll lead the people to inherit the land," and that is really about the story that's told in chapters 13–22 where, just as the Lord had legislated in the book of Numbers, he's going to give certain portions of the land to each clan, to each tribe. And then at the end of that opening encounter between the Lord and Joshua, he says, "Don't let the book of the law depart from you, but meditate in it day in and day out. Be strong and courageous and I will be with you just as I was with Moses." Well, this gets at something very crucial for the ability of God's people to remain in the land, and that is that they must be faithful to the covenant, to the Lord who brought them out of Egypt and who gave them the land. And so, those last two chapters, chapters 23 and 24, are really a story of covenant renewal where Joshua leads God's people to renew the promises that they have made to the Lord based on the promises that God has now kept to them by giving them the land.

**Question 6:****How might the book of Joshua have impacted the original audience of the book?****Rev. Kevin Labby**

The original audience of the book of Joshua would have been greatly encouraged on the one hand to know that God's plans and purposes for his people had been accomplished in such stunning way, that God had been faithful to them in the past and would have been, perhaps, challenged to see his past faithfulness as a pledge of his future grace. That would certainly have been one of the intended purposes of Joshua in writing. But another aspect of Joshua's blessing to the original audience would have been the reminder that all that Joshua's generation enjoyed came through obedience, and that as they stumbled along the way, God was faithful to forgive, but that God was using their obedience as a means by which they would lay hold of the promises that he had for them by grace. And so, I think the original audience would have been greatly challenged by that in the face of their struggle to obey and would have seen, as the nation of Israel declined, an increasingly starker comparison between the generation in which they lived and the generation of Joshua before them. Hopefully, that would have been a call to obedience and repentance. Sadly, we know, looking at the book of Judges that it wasn't, at least right away.

**Dr. Chip Hardy**

On a fundamental level, the impact of the book of Joshua on the audience would be for them to see the holiness of God, the character of God rightly. And then secondarily from that they would be able to see what their relationship to God would be and how would they live in light of that relationship.

**Dr. Tom Petter**

Well, the original audience of Joshua would have been impacted by the materials in a number of ways, but it's not just the original audience. There is a timelessness to what Joshua teaches, the book. But the original audience, of course, is tied to the time of writing, the composition question. So, of course, some people would throw that all during the Babylonian period or even later, exilic/post-exilic period... I think it makes a lot more sense to have an audience to the book of Joshua that is connected to the time, first the account by Joshua himself, maybe the editorial hand during the early monarchy... This seems to be the best way of looking at this text because it's a statement of Yahweh's faithfulness. And it's also an exhortation to finish the job that even Joshua himself could not finish. The conquest is incomplete and certainly Judges alludes to that all over. And so, when you put the context during the time of the early Iron Age, at the time of the transition to the monarchy, early monarchy, the exhortation is, "Look what Yahweh has done. He was faithful to his promise." Joshua 23 ... where it says very clearly that Yahweh was faithful to all the promises made to Abraham, that he gave them the land, but the people were unfaithful. They were kind of sleeping on the job and not fulfilling what Yahweh said they should do. So, it's an exhortation to finish the job to the audience, and I think maybe to the early kings, you

know, it might not have been lost. We don't know that, but David certainly took that to heart because what's the conquest of the land if you can't conquer the place of Yahweh's inheritance, like Exodus 15 says? And the place of Yahweh, where he is going to dwell with his people in this sacred space, the Holy Land, is the hill of Jerusalem ... not Mount Sinai; it's Mount Zion. And so, here you have all this conquest of the land, but the prize is not taken. So, I think Joshua, the book, really serves to the Yahwists, the precious few during the time of the Judges, to say, "Hey, we've got to finish the job." And then of course, the whole covenantal faithfulness — "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord" — that's the ongoing challenge that Joshua presents to all the Yahwists, including the New Testament Yahwists, that we ought to put Yahweh first, Jesus first — covenantal loyalty.

### Question 7:

### Why did God command the destruction of the Canaanites in the book of Joshua?

#### Rev. Dr. John W. Yates

One of the most difficult questions in reading the Old Testament is the question of why God commands Israel to destroy the Canaanites... It's one of the great mysteries of Scripture *why* God does something like this. But I do think there are certain principles within Scripture leading up to the early stages of the book of Joshua that give us some ideas of why God does command the destruction of these peoples. And the first is just the true deep consequences of the Fall and of sin, that when Adam and Eve are ejected from the Garden, part of the curse is death. Death is God's judgment on those who sin and rebel and reject him. So, death is a necessary requirement of judgment. And when we come to the flood in Genesis 6, there's a sense in which the flood is the necessary normal outworking of God's judgment on humankind, so that when we consider the life that we have, life is a grace, and life is a gift. In a fallen, broken, sinful, rebellious world, the ability and the freedom to continue living is a gift of God's mercy. So, we come to the beginning of Joshua and the conquest of the Promised Land and God commands, or demands, the death and destruction of all living creatures in the land of Canaan. And on the one hand, this is a stunning, shocking move by God. On the other, it's the natural, necessary outworking of the rebellion of humanity against God. So, death is a necessity for justice. That's one way in which I can begin to understand what's going on there. Another thing that I find helpful is that if you think of the people of Israel as a young, tender plant, and they're being transplanted out of one country into another. And the Canaanites were famous for their idolatry, for their pagan superstition, and for the recklessness of their religion. And I think, in one sense, what God is doing is he's clearing the land of brambles and briars, and he's creating a fertile space for his people, his covenant people to be transplanted and to grow. And we see this in the later history of Israel as they do plant themselves in this land, and they don't obey God's command to destroy the inhabitants. The idolatry of the people infects the people of Israel like a virus, and

so, you have Israel turning to the idolatries of the Canaanites in large part due to their disobedience in refusing to clear the land.

**Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation**

The question of why God commanded Israel to destroy the people of Canaan in the book of Joshua can be summarized in the following points: War against Canaan was God's judgment over these peoples because God told Abraham in the book of Genesis 15 that "the iniquity of the Amorites [was] not yet complete." The "Amorites" is an expression used in the Old Testament for all the peoples who were living in Canaan, and here God was revealing his intention to judge these nations. Another important point is that it was to protect Israel from mixing with these nations and worshipping their idols. It was also to cleanse the land from which Israel would become the light to the nations. One more important point is that the command to destroy the Canaanites was only related to the nations within Canaan. Regarding the nations outside of Canaan, there are very clear instructions that Joshua should not fight against them, but rather offer them peace. We read about this, for example, in Deuteronomy 20... Another important point is that the wars against Canaan and the destruction of the Canaanites was not an authorization for jihad. This was not for all times and places. On the contrary, these were very specific commands related to a specific time during the history of redemption. We have to understand the role of these wars in the context of God's revelation of the history of redemption, which reaches its climax in the person and work of Christ. This war played a role in preparing for the work of Christ in the unfolding of the history of redemption. So, it's not a license to wage wars of total destruction against unbelievers for all times and locations. Also, these wars were not repeated, not afterward in the history of Israel or even before these wars. God never repeated his command for Israel to completely destroy certain people or certain nations. It was only for the days that Israel was to conquer the land and settle in it during Joshua's time. The last point is that in this war — in the destruction of the Canaanites — the Canaanites were evil, so it was a small picture of God's greatest judgment, which will be in the last days. God will execute his just judgment on all the people and nations that rejected salvation through Christ. So, this war was like a small picture or type of a more horrific war that God will accomplish over the evil angels and the evil people who rejected salvation through Christ.

**Dr. Tom Petter**

Well, the question why God called Joshua to destroy the Canaanites in the book of Joshua is probably one of the most difficult questions in all of the Old Testament for people to answer because, if you put it this way, it's like this: It's Yahweh talking to Joshua — and Yahweh is, of course, the incarnate Jesus, and you probably had a quiet time with him this morning — and so, the same God said, "I want you to go destroy men, women, children, chickens, goats, sheep, everything," let's just say with the town of Jericho. There are other towns, but complete destruction. And the word, the technical word is "devoted to destruction," right? Devote this city to destruction. And there's a Hebrew word tied to that. It's called *cherem* ... that is probably always the biggest question that we have when we read Joshua. It's like, wow, this is intense,

and it was the will of God, and all that. And I think that the way to answer that is to go back to the basics of the land belongs to Yahweh... Yahweh has a universal claim on the land. It belongs to him, like the whole earth. It is a universal claim. And Yahweh is holy. But Yahweh wants to dwell with his people because he wants to redeem them from their unholiness, but he has to dwell with them. That's his desire, to be among his people. So, you see the clash — the holiness of Yahweh versus the unholiness of the people. And in this case it's the Canaanites. But you've got to set that story over a larger backdrop... Is it just the Canaanites who are unholy? No. It's everybody. From Genesis, we know that the Fall affected everybody. All the descendants of Adam and Eve have been impacted. And to this day, this continues; the unholiness that we carry in the face of a holy God is a perennial problem. So, we shouldn't single out the Canaanites because we're all unholy. And it's very clear in the book of Joshua that holiness is something that Yahweh has, and if someone is on his side, they're going to be on his side because they have become holy themselves, by Yahweh's means. By Yahweh's means. You look at the conquest of Jericho; what is the conquest of Jericho... It's just a ritual. There's no warfare there. They're just sanctifying themselves by walking around the city with the priests, the trumpet and the ark, and so they're sanctifying the site because it's preparing for Yahweh's holiness to come down. And Yahweh's holiness is not arbitrary, because he is making that message of judgment known in advance to the Canaanites inside Jericho. They have a chance to be saved from Yahweh establishing his holiness. They have ample times. They have the whole time from the time they leave Egypt for forty years and then the conquest in Transjordan of Heshbon, the city of Heshbon. They have heard all of it. How do we know that? Because of that woman prostitute that says that; "We have heard. We know what's coming." But she's the only one in her family that responds to that call to repent. So, Yahweh, the "unfairness" of Yahweh, it has to be mitigated. Actually, there is no unfairness because they've had the call to turn from unholiness to holiness and they have chosen not to take it, except for that one person in the city of Jericho. And that one person is actually saved. And so, yeah, the destruction of the Canaanites, it's the death and violence caused by sin. It's the extent of how our sinfulness has impacted the world. It's very, very sad. And let's finish with one more point on this, because that's the main point. Don't assign blame to Yahweh, because Yahweh himself took that death and violence on himself at the cross. He took that *cherem* upon him. He became *cherem* for us so we wouldn't have to face that destruction, those of us who have put our faith in Jesus. So, the claim of unfairness by God? No, he took that upon himself so we wouldn't have to be *cherem* and devoted to destruction ourselves. And when that hits home and you realize, I'm a Canaanite. If it wasn't for the grace of God, I am a Canaanite devoted for destruction, and it was only by the grace of God and the mercy of God in Christ that I've been spared. And our message is to proclaim that message of salvation, that the whole world is *cherem*, the whole world is unholy, and we go and proclaim a message of salvation, and we hope we're going to have a whole bunch of Rahabs responding to the message.



**Dr. Carol Kaminski**

Well, the destruction of the Canaanites is a really difficult issue in the book of Joshua, and I think a lot of people have problems with this in the Old Testament. I think it's got to start with understanding that we worship a holy God. And we see this certainly in the flood story where God is the judge of the whole earth and he is a holy, righteous God, so that's got to be the beginning of it. And it's very interesting, when you look at God giving the land to the Israelites, what you do see is he gives, of course, the laws in the book of Exodus and talks about his holiness, but what you find in Leviticus 18, 20 in particular, is there are a series of laws to do with issues of sexuality and issues of idolatry, and God tells the Israelites, "You're not to do this." And then he says, "because people of the land have been doing these abominations," and God actually spews them out of the land, which is really strong language, but it's underscoring his holiness. So, that's an important background. And then if you also look at the book of Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy then says, "When you go into the land" — of course, they're at Moab, they're about to enter into the land — and says, "there are seven nations that you are to destroy." Deuteronomy 7, Deuteronomy 20 talks about laws of warfare. And really, the issue is that the Israelites are about to enter into the land, and the problem is if they worship the idols of the land. The Canaanites, of course, are worshipping idols, there is sexual immorality going on, all these kind of things, and so there is a lot at stake for God's people. And so, one of the pieces is, as they enter into the land, they have to destroy these seven nations. That's part of the warfare as they enter into the land.

**Question 8:**

**How does the New Testament apply the imagery of warfare in the Old Testament to its original audiences and to believers today?**

**Dr. P. J. Buys**

The New Testament mainly sees the battles and the wars of the Old Testament as part of the massive battle between God and Satan and between God's people and Satan trying to destroy God's plan. So then, it is also applied to Christians nowadays who are, in the same way, part of the same battle, if you think of Ephesians 6, that your struggle is against the evil forces of Satan, and that Christians must put on the full armor of God to be able to stand firm in this battle.

**Dr. Stephen J. Wellum**

The theme of warfare is important in Scripture, but it's often controversial in our day. You have to very carefully think through how the Bible applies warfare imagery both in the Old Testament era and the New Testament era. As we think of the whole counsel of God, and as specifically how the New Testament authors look back on the Old Testament, and think through how the warfare now applies to us as believers, it does so in light of the fulfillment that has come in Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, under the old covenant, it's important to see that Israel is a theocracy. They're given a specific land, a specific role to play in the nations. As they go into the Promised

Land, God commands them to engage in warfare, to execute God's judgment, to remove the nations from the land. That is for a specific purpose — to create a holy people, to allow for the coming of Messiah, to execute God's judgment upon sin — I mean, a whole variety of purposes that are given to us. As we come to fulfillment in the New Testament, the church isn't exactly the same as Israel. It doesn't function like a theocracy in exactly the same way. We don't have a certain geography and a piece of real estate that we are controlling and having geographical borders and this type of thing. We are a spiritual people. We're part of God's kingdom that is international. His kingdom has broken into this world in Jesus Christ. We are people of that kingdom, yet we don't engage in the warfare in exactly the same way that it is under the old covenant. Yet, the New Testament does apply warfare imagery to us. It first applies warfare imagery in Christ. Christ is the one who is *true* Israel. He is the one who takes Israel's role and fulfills that. He is the one, in his coming, that defeats the powers. He engages in warfare against Satan. You see that in his life and ministry. On the cross, he defeats the power, Satan, sin, death — a number of ways that the warfare imagery is applied. It then comes over to us in and through to him. We are to engage against the principalities and powers with spiritual weaponry, not arms and this type of thing that you would have, say, as maybe tied to Israel of old. We are to put on the whole armor of God — Ephesians 6. We are to engage in warfare under the role of our king, our Lord Jesus Christ. Warfare imagery will be picked up when Christ comes again. He will execute judgment. We aren't to do that; he will do that for us. But we then live as his people in between the times waiting for that second coming. So that, as you think of warfare imagery from the Old Testament to us, it has to be very, very carefully applied. For the most part, it's christologically defined. He is the one who takes up that war. He is the one that defeats our enemies. He, on his cross, wins victory, and we then live in light of that victory. We put Satan under our feet. We engage in spiritual warfare. We do not pick up the weapons of this world, say, 2 Corinthians 10, where Paul says we don't engage in that kind of warfare, but we fight against Satan and all of his sinful and evil deeds as we await the coming of the Lord Jesus who will finally, in judgment, put sin and death down, defeat Satan, as he has done, and it'll be consummated, and we will then have the victory with him.

**Dr. Chip McDaniel**

The New Testament reminds us that, as New Testament believers, there is a horrible judgment that's going to take place in the future that involves God judging all the peoples of the earth. In language, this is very reminiscent of the book of Joshua. God is going to judge eternally those who do not accept the Lord Jesus Christ. But, as believers, we're also told that our struggle is not against flesh and blood. It is not a physical battle; it is a spiritual battle. And so, in Ephesians 6, we have the whole armor of God to do spiritual tasks such as taking the gospel to other nations. Our feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. We also have 2 Corinthians that tells us that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal; they're not physical. They are spiritual, to the pulling down of strongholds, and in the context those strongholds are those teachings that run counter to the teachings of the word of God so that the proper proclamation of the Word of God and our own personal piety are the spiritual warfare in which we're to engage in the New Testament era.

**Question 9:****What are some ways that the theme of victorious conquest in Joshua applies to present-day Christians?****Dr. Greg Perry**

At the time of Joshua, the church and the nation, the state, were together in the people of Israel. What we see in the New Testament when Jesus commissions his witnesses to go out among all the nations is that now God's people are distributed among every nation. Now, Paul tells us in Ephesians 6 that we're engaged in this spiritual battle against principalities and powers and rulers and authorities, and that to engage this battle, we'll need to put on Christ, put on the full armor of God. But he reminds us in 2 Corinthians 10 that our weapons are not fleshly, they're not carnal, but they're spiritual; they're mighty through God. And so, just as God's people in the Old Testament were engaging spiritual powers that were behind these nations, God's people still engage spiritual powers, but the weapons of our warfare are the means of grace, the Word of God, and walking in the Spirit as we evangelize and tell the story of the good news to all the nations.

**Dr. Tom Petter**

Well, the theme or themes of victorious conquest in the book of Joshua and the application to the Christian life are so deep. They run so deep throughout the book of Joshua on so many levels. But I think that the primary one, the principal one is, of course, the theme of victory and the theme of territorial expansion, territorial hegemony — that means “control” — the sense that “the earth is the Lord's and everything in it,” like the psalm says. And so, the theme of spiritual warfare from a new covenant perspective, it is so strong because, of course, in the new covenant we don't go about with swords in hand, destroying those who don't follow Yahweh. We don't do that. But we do have a mandate from Matthew 28 to go into the whole world and establish, or proclaim the gospel, the good news that Jesus saves us from all sin, from the premise that the whole world belongs to him. So, it becomes a nice connection with Habakkuk 2 where it says that the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea — so this multi-territorial expansion, the establishment of Yahweh's ownership of the land, because that's the theme of Joshua. See, the Canaanites think the land belonged to them. It doesn't belong to them; it belongs to Yahweh. Yahweh has a legal right to that land. It doesn't even belong to the Israelites; it belongs to Yahweh. And Yahweh is holy. If we had time we could talk about Joshua 5. Right before they go into Jericho, that mighty angel commander appears to Joshua, and what does he say? “This land is holy. Take off your sandals.” It belongs to Yahweh. It doesn't belong to you; it doesn't belong to the Canaanite. It belongs to Yahweh. And so, you're a steward of my holiness as you take the land from the unholy Canaanites. And then, of course, the shoe is on the other foot, or the sandal is on the other foot, because when the Israelites turn unholy, then Yahweh will also push them out. But, of course, in the new covenant, this sense of the holiness of the land is carried out through us who are filled with the Spirit, filled with the holiness of God *in Christ*, and then we go out, and we proclaim the holiness of God in

Christ, all because of Jesus' holiness, not ours. It's all of this wonder of the gospel that, left to ourselves, we're not holy, but we are holy in Christ, and so that territorial conquest, now we have ambulant holiness vessels, all of us individuals and as the church, and we spread throughout the land throughout the world now. The land is no longer the eastern Mediterranean seaboard; it's the whole world. It is a beautiful model of conquest, but it's a conquest no longer through violence and death because that was fulfilled when Christ died at the cross. It's conquest with service and sacrifice, and that's what we're called to do.

**Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation**

The theme of victorious conquest over the land of Canaan in the book of Joshua is very important to us as Christians today for several reasons. First, conquering the land was a fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham in the context of the covenant. God fulfilled these promises by his mighty hand through Joshua and the army of the people of Israel. But the other important thing for us as Christians is that, in the victory of Israel over the people of the land of Canaan, we see the faithfulness of God in fulfilling his covenant, and we see God's hand going before Joshua and the army in triumphing and winning over the people. For us, this means an important thing, because, in Christ, we always walk in Christ's triumphal procession. God leads us in this triumph. Just as Joshua led the people in their war against the Canaanites, who exemplified the ungodly on earth at that time, Christ did the same thing on the cross. He triumphed over his enemies — Satan and his followers — over evil and over sin. This gives us, his followers, the privilege to walk, always, in Christ's triumphal procession.

**Rev. Kevin Labby**

The theme of victorious conquest in the book of Joshua applies to Christians in a couple of different ways. One is we need to remember that everything happening in the book of Joshua is according to promises made by God to his people centuries before, and everything happening in our life today is according to promises that have been uttered by God in times past. And so, what we see at work in our lives today is according to God's plan and purposes, rooted, even, in eternity past if we remember the words of Paul in Ephesians when he speaks about God loving us from before the foundation of the world. So, what we do need to see in our lives is God's plans and purposes being worked out. The second thing we could say is that there's an assurance that even though these promises and laying hold of them is conditional, that God takes the conditionality upon himself. In the book of Joshua, we see a pattern of foreshadowing, a type of the kind of obedience necessary to take possession of the land that God has promised, to take possession of the inheritance. It's absolute obedience that God desires and demands of his people. Now, of course, that creates a tension for us as Christians because we know that we don't have perfect performance before God. But thankfully, our "Joshua," Jesus Christ, fulfills for us the law's righteous demands. He fulfills the conditions, and so, he is the one that leads us into the inheritance that he deserves. We, of course, by God's grace are co-heirs in Christ. We have been reckoned with him, his righteousness imputed to us, our sin removed

by his atoning sacrifice at the cross, and so what he has secured through his obedience is now ours by grace through faith.

### **Question 10:**

**How does Jesus fulfill the theme of warfare against evil in the inauguration, continuation and consummation of his kingdom?**

#### **Dr. Philip Ryken**

If you read through the story of the Old Testament people of God, time and time again they needed a warrior to defend them, and the greatest warrior of the people of God is God himself. And so, when you have the coming of Jesus Christ as the Messiah, he is the victor over the Devil and over all his works. And you see that in so many ways in the Gospels. You see it, first of all, just in the ministry that Jesus had of power over the demons who were opposing the work of the kingdom of God and the way that he was able to cast out those demons and put them in their place. Or perhaps most supremely, the fight that Jesus engaged with the Devil himself in the wilderness in resisting all of his temptations. But all of that was only a prelude to the cross itself. And the Scripture is very clear that the works of the Devil are put to death through the cross so that that is the place where Jesus Christ worked out his ultimate victory over the Evil One and all his works — the cross, of course, with the resurrection, which proved that the saving work of Jesus was accepted by the Father. And the Devil ultimately will be fully defeated, but the victory of Jesus Christ is already won through the cross and the empty tomb.

#### **Dr. Stephen J. Wellum**

The church has an important role in warfare in terms of the application of Christ's work. As we think of it, we just have to put a few pieces in place before we get to the point of how we actually do that. The first thing that must be said, just as the basic foundation, is that anything we talk about in terms of our engaging with warfare, sin and evil, Satan himself, is only because of what Christ has done. He comes as the one who wins the war. He's the one who defeats sin. He's the one who defeats death and the Evil One. Now, by virtue of our relationship to him — so, as we are brought into faith union with him by the Spirit — we are transferred from the kingdom of the Evil One to the kingdom of the Son, already in us. Warfare has been won by Christ, and the power of the Evil One, his rule and domain over us, has been defeated. So that, in becoming Christians, there already is an engagement with the Evil One, *in Christ*, and all that he has done. Now, as we then live for him, as we then take the gospel to the nations, the gospel proclamation, as the Spirit of God takes what we say and applies it to people's lives, spiritual warfare is engaged so that, as people become believers, as the Spirit of God brings new life, as they are brought to faith union in Christ, sin and death is defeated in them. The Evil One's power over them is defeated. Habits that we have tied to our fallenness, lifestyles, ways of thinking, ways of living, that is defeated. There is ongoing growth in our Christian lives in terms of sanctification. All of that is seen as part of the defeat of sin and evil, and it's a warfare that goes on in

our Christian lives. As we then take the gospel to the nations, we not only see people become believers, but we see, then, the effects of the church as we live our lives, pushing back the borders of evil and sin, having an impact as salt and light in the world, that, in some sense — tied to God's common grace as well as saving grace, particularly common grace — sin is restrained, and Satan's work is restrained. All of that comes through the work of the church, the preaching of the gospel, taking the gospel to the nations as we see men and women and boys and girls delivered from sin and death, coming to faith in Christ, lives changed, Satan's power broken. That is part of the ongoing ministry of the church through the preaching and teaching of the gospel.

**Dr. Miles Van Pelt**

The topic of warfare in the Bible, perhaps especially in the Old Testament, and God's judgment and his wrath and how that's going to unfold and what it's going to look like in the end times is a big topic... But in the New Testament, we have two different ways in which this theme is developed. The first is with Jesus. He comes as a divine warrior to wage war on sin, but this time not on the sinner but on sin itself. He is, in some sense, the victim here. He becomes the one who receives the full wrath of God rather than the one who brings wrath. Now, sinners escape the wrath of God at the end by hiding themselves or being united to Christ as those who have experienced that judgment in Christ. So, when Christ comes, he's going to come with his people, and he's going to come and wage war on those that have not repented, are not united to him in faith. And so we get these pictures of warfare, in some sense, at the flood, with Israel and the Promised Land, even with Assyria and Babylon waging war on Israel, as pictures of this eschatological judgment. But they're all pictures of, really, what Christ has undergone for us as well. So, there are two pictures: One, God's grace — that he has undergone that warfare and wrath and experienced its curse for us. But also, there's God's justice. He's coming back, and any of those who aren't united to him will experience that same judgment.

**Question 11:**

**In what ways does the Holy Spirit empower us for spiritual warfare?**

**Dr. K. Erik Thoennes**

I think the first thing the Holy Spirit does to empower us for spiritual warfare is to make us aware of the spiritual realm. We tend to gravitate toward just what we can see and feel. But to become aware that there is a spiritual realm that we engage in and have a battle within is so important. So, he makes us aware of the spiritual realm in the first place. He gives us conviction of sin. As we overcome sin in our lives, the first thing is to be aware of that sin, and then he empowers us to overcome sin. Also, to lead us to prayer and engage the battle at that front is vital in his role in our lives.

**Dr. Glen G. Scorgie**

The Holy Spirit plays a very vital role in the Christian's engagement in spiritual warfare. One of the texts of the New Testament relevant to this is the one that says that God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power, love and self-control. This is a very profound and succinct insight, I believe, into the ministry of the Holy Spirit, because anyone who is engaged in ... spiritual warfare will attest that the immediate emotional response is often fear — fear of peril, fear of intimidation, fear of defeat, a strong sense of discomfort and vulnerability. That's where the Holy Spirit comes in, because to counter that, there is a spirit who brings to us a divine authority and a power that is actually not of us but more than equal to face the challenge. So, having done all, to stand. Often, when we feel threatened, we become very un-Christ-like. When we're under threat, we snarl like an animal trapped. And I don't think it's any accident that there's a necessary ministry of the Holy Spirit to sustain a gracious tone of equipoise when you're dealing with spiritual warfare and some of the nasty opponents that you will encounter... To be able to navigate that kind of challenge without anger and wrath and mean-spirited speech, is a work of the Spirit who is a spirit of power and love. But I love that last little insightful addition; he is also a Spirit of self-control, because under the duress of spiritual warfare, the great temptation is not to fight always, but to flight, to flee, to run away, to cut and run, and to lose it in every sense of concentration on the truth, emotionally; and the Spirit comes alongside as the spirit of self-control. Now, there are many other functions of the Holy Spirit, vital functions in spiritual warfare like purging us of the sin that leaves us vulnerable so that we can go into it holy, put the armor on, so to speak, a spirit of discernment and all that. But that simple little verse, "God has not given us a spirit of fear but a spirit of power and love throughout, and a sound mind," not going to give way to frightening and ridiculous speculations but rooted in anchored in the truth. Sound mind, self-control, beautiful.

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# The Book of Joshua

LESSON  
TWO

## VICTORIOUS CONQUEST



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# Contents

<b>I. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II. Preparations for Victory .....</b>	<b>1</b>
A. Structure and Content	2
1. God's Commands	2
2. Joshua's Commands	2
3. Israel's Obedience	2
B. Original Meaning	2
1. Divine Authority	3
2. God's Covenant	3
3. Standard of Moses' Law	3
4. God's Supernatural Power	4
5. All Israel	4
<b>III. Victories over Two Cities .....</b>	<b>5</b>
A. Structure and Content	5
1. City of Jericho	5
a. Joshua's Spies & Rahab	5
b. Miraculous Crossing of the Jordan	6
c. Miraculous Fall of Jericho	6
2. City of Ai	7
a. Israel's Defeat	7
b. Israel's Repentance	7
c. Israel's Victory	8
3. Covenant Renewal	8
B. Original Meaning	8
1. Divine Authority	8
2. God's Covenant	9
3. Standard of Moses's Law	9
4. God's Supernatural Power	10
5. All Israel	11
<b>IV. Victories over Two Alliances .....</b>	<b>11</b>
A. Structure and Content	11
1. Overview of Alliances	12
2. Overview of Victories	12
3. Victories over Southern Alliance	12
4. Victories over Northern Alliance	12
B. Original Meaning	13
1. Divine Authority	13
2. Standard of Moses's Law	13
3. God's Supernatural Power	14
4. All Israel	15
<b>V. Christian Application .....</b>	<b>15</b>
A. Inauguration	16
B. Continuation	17
C. Consummation	18
<b>VI. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>19</b>

# The Book of Joshua

## Lesson Two

### Victorious Conquest

#### INTRODUCTION

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If there's one portion of the Old Testament that troubles most modern Christians more than any other, it has to be the chapters of the book of Joshua that describe Israel's conquest of the Promised Land. We wonder how the loving, merciful God we know in Christ could have tolerated Israel's attempt to destroy the inhabitants of Canaan. But, contrary to our modern inclinations, the book of Joshua actually honors God, not for tolerating, but for commanding, leading and empowering Israel's conquest. And as Christ's followers, we are called to embrace this outlook as well.

This is the second lesson in our series on *The Book of Joshua*. And we've entitled it, Israel's "Victorious Conquest." In this lesson, we'll deal with the first major division of the book, Joshua 1–12.

In our preceding lesson, we summarized the original meaning of the book of Joshua in this way:

**The book of Joshua was written about Israel's victorious conquest, tribal inheritances and covenant loyalty in Joshua's day to address similar challenges facing later generations.**

As we've learned, Joshua was originally written for Israelites who lived either in the period of the judges, during the monarchy, or as late as the Babylonian exile. And the book was designed to guide these Old Testament Israelites as they continued to face the challenges of pursuing their victorious conquest, securing their tribal inheritances and renewing their covenant loyalty.

The first major division, in chapters 1–12, addresses the original audience's challenges associated with warfare. It does this by drawing attention to Israel's extensive victorious conquest over the land of Canaan. These chapters divide into three main sections: Israel's preparations for victory in chapter 1; Israel's initial victories over two cities in chapters 2–8; and Israel's later victories over two alliances in chapters 9–12.

Our lesson on Israel's victorious conquest will look at each of these three sections. Then we'll close with some comments on Christian application. Let's look first at Israel's preparations for victory.

#### PREPARATIONS FOR VICTORY

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Time will only permit us to look briefly at two aspects of Israel's preparations for victory: first the structure and content of this portion of our book, and then some aspects of its original meaning. Let's begin with an overview of its structure and content.

## STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

The book of Joshua opens with Israel on the plains of Moab, east of the Jordan River, an area often called Transjordan, meaning “across the Jordan.” These territories were so bountiful that, according to Numbers 32, the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh asked for, and received, Moses’ permission to settle there. But in the opening of our book, God commanded Joshua to prepare to lead Israel westward into victory over the land of Canaan. This area is sometimes called Cisjordan, meaning “beside the Jordan.”

This section on Israel’s preparations for victory divides into three steps that introduce the appropriate chain of command for every upcoming battle in our book.

### God’s Commands

We first read God’s commands to Joshua in 1:1-9. In verse 2, God told Joshua, “Arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people.” He then told Joshua three times in verses 6, 7 and 9, “Be strong and courageous.”

### Joshua’s Commands

Next, our author introduced Joshua’s commands in response to God’s directives. In 1:10-15, Joshua commanded Israel to prepare themselves. In verse 11, he ordered his officers to tell the Israelites, “Prepare your provisions.” And in verse 14, he specifically commanded the tribes of Transjordan, “All the men of valor ... shall pass over.”

### Israel’s Obedience

Lastly, our author reported Israel’s obedience to Joshua in 1:16-18. In verse 16, the tribes unanimously committed themselves to loyal service, saying to Joshua, “Wherever you send us we will go.”

Keeping in mind the threefold structure and content of Israel’s preparations for victory, we should comment on the original meaning. Why did our author begin his book in this way?

## ORIGINAL MEANING

It isn’t difficult to see that the book of Joshua opens with a very positive portrait of Israel’s preparations for the conquest of Canaan. God’s command was direct and reassuring. Joshua called all the tribes to comply. And there’s no hint of hesitation from a single Israelite regarding the call to move forward into battle. Clearly, as Joshua’s

original audience faced various foes standing against them, they were to emulate this ideal account of how Joshua and Israel responded to God's command.

## Divine Authority

When we look more closely at this chapter, we find that our author's positive portrait introduced five themes that appear time and again throughout his book. In the first place, in his account of preparations for victory in chapter 1, he stressed the divine authority behind Israel's preparations. The opening scene of God's commands begins in verse 1 with the words, "the Lord said to Joshua." This phrase established that God was the authority behind Joshua's commands. Along these same lines, God himself authorized Joshua as Moses' successor when he said in verse 5, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you." We also see this theme highlighted in Israel's obedience when the people of Israel responded in verse 17, "Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you." The original audience was to take Israel's preparations for victory to heart because God and Joshua, Moses' divinely ordained successor, had directed these events.

## God's Covenant

In the second place, Joshua's preparations for victory also highlighted the importance of God's covenant. In the opening scene of God's commands, God told Joshua, in verse 6, "You shall cause this people to inherit the land I swore to their fathers to give them." This passage alludes to God's covenant with Israel in two ways. First, Israel was not simply to receive Canaan, but to "inherit" it — from the Hebrew verb *nachal* (נָחַל). The land of Canaan is described as Israel's enduring "inheritance" nearly thirty times in the book of Deuteronomy, and more than forty times in the book of Joshua. And second, in this same verse we read that God "swore to their fathers" to give them the land. This refers to Genesis 15 where God made a covenant with Abraham — or "Abram" at that time — to give Canaan to his descendants. God's covenant with Israel's ancestors established that Canaan belonged, by divine covenant, not only to Israel in Joshua's day, but also to the original Israelite audience of our book. And for this reason, they could move forward in their day with strength and courage, just as God had commanded Joshua.

## Standard of Moses' Law

In the third place, the author made it clear that observing the standard of Moses' law was necessary for every generation of Israel to have victory in warfare and to possess the Promised Land. In verse 7 of the opening scene, God commanded Joshua: "[Be] careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you... that you may have good success." As the story of Joshua's conquest illustrates time and again, the

original audience of our book had to grasp a crucial perspective on the conflicts they faced: obedience to Moses' law would lead to victory; disobedience would lead to defeat.

## God's Supernatural Power

In the fourth place, Joshua's preparations for victory point out that God's supernatural power made the conquest of Canaan possible. The opening scene of God's commands highlights this point of view when God told Joshua in verse 5: "I will be with you." And this theme is repeated in verse 9 where God told Joshua, "The Lord your God is with you wherever you go." As passages like 2 Chronicles 20:17 indicate, to speak of God being "with" his people in the context of battle meant that God would fight *alongside* and *for* them with supernatural power. And in a similar way, in the scene of Israel's obedience in Joshua 1:17, the tribes of Israel responded enthusiastically to Joshua, "May the Lord your God be with you, as he was with Moses!" In effect, Israel's conquest was no mere human affair. No generation of Israel was to enter into battle in its own strength. It was only if God fought alongside and for Israel that they could hope to succeed.

**In Joshua 1:5, God promises through Joshua that he would be with Israel as they went in to conquer the land. And, of course, the obvious thing is God's presence is meaningful no matter in what form or manner; it's always a good thing to have God with you. But there's more going on there because this is the language of holy war and the divine warrior. I'm one of those Old Testament scholars who understands Exodus 3 and Exodus 6 to be teaching that the name "Yahweh" is actually a shorthand for "Yahweh who is the Lord of Hosts." So, this very name Yahweh, this Old Testament name for God, connotes his character as the God who fights for his people. And so, "Emmanuel" is picking up on that motif, I think, that God is not just present to help them or encourage them, but God is present with them as the God who will lead the armies of heaven, so that all Joshua and Israel will need to do is to follow in God's lead, and he will fight for them, which is a prominent theme, again, throughout the book of Joshua. So, in essence, it's a promise, not just that God will be with them, but that God will fight for them.**

— Rev. Michael J. Glodo

## All Israel

In the fifth place, the opening chapter of Joshua introduces the importance of the participation of all Israel. As we've mentioned before, Joshua's commands directly addressed the tribes of Transjordan in verse 14, telling them, "All the men of valor ... shall pass over." And the participation of all Israel in the conquest reappears in the scene

of Israel's obedience. In verse 18, the Israelites replied to Joshua, "Whoever rebels against your commandment . . . shall be put to death." As we'll see, throughout his book, the author presented his original audience with the ideal that, if they hoped to have full success in the conflicts they faced in their day, all of Israel must stand as one people.

After introducing the victorious conquest of Joshua's day with an ideal presentation of Israel's preparations for victory, the author of our book then turned to Israel's initial victories over two cities, the cities of Jericho and Ai.

## VICTORIES OVER TWO CITIES

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At this point, our book describes the first phase of Joshua's conquest of Canaan. Joshua led the twelve tribes of Israel across the Jordan where they encamped at Gilgal. From Gilgal, Joshua led Israel to the city of Jericho. And after defeating Jericho, they pressed on to the city of Ai. After conquering Ai, the tribes of Israel proceeded into the very heart of the Promised Land, to Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, where they celebrated these initial successes by renewing their covenant with God.

We'll look at this record of Israel's victories over two cities in two steps. First, we'll sketch its structure and content and then we'll summarize its original meaning. Let's begin with the structure and content.

### STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

On the whole, the well-known accounts of the battles for Jericho and Ai are a lesson in contrasts. And this lesson was so important to our author that it takes up over a quarter of his book. As we'll see, Joshua led Israel to victory over both cities, but the paths to victory were very different. Every aspect of the battle for Jericho was ideal and wonderfully blessed by God. But victory over Ai was accomplished only after Israel had repented of serious disloyalty to God.

### City of Jericho

The account of Israel's victories over two cities, in chapters 2–8, divides into three parts: the city of Jericho in 2:1–6:27, the city of Ai in 7:1–8:29, and a closing covenant renewal in 8:30–35. Let's look first at the account of Israel's victory at Jericho.

***Joshua's Spies & Rahab.*** The story of Jericho consists of four major episodes. It begins in 2:1–24 with Joshua's spies and Rahab. In this episode Joshua sent spies to investigate the city. They encountered Rahab who turned to Israel's God, protected the spies and received a solemn promise of safety. Then the spies returned to Joshua with confidence that God was going to give Israel victory.



Balancing with this beginning, the fourth and final episode closes the story of Jericho. In 6:22-27, the narrative returns to Joshua's spies and Rahab. In this episode, Joshua ordered the spies to honor their oath of protection for Rahab, and she and her family were adopted into Israel. By starting and ending with Rahab and the spies, our author portrayed everything that occurred in chapters 2–6 as part of the battle for Jericho.

Now, Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25 remind us that we should celebrate how Rahab's faith, expressed in her obedience, delivered her from God's judgment. But, when we set this episode in its larger context, we can see that our author emphasized other matters as well for his original audience.

***Miraculous Crossing of the Jordan.*** Two episodes of astonishingly miraculous events appear between these bookends. On the one side, we find Israel's miraculous crossing of the Jordan River in 3:1–5:12. These chapters begin with Israel's ceremonial preparations on the eastern shore, highlighting their devotion to God and God's approval. Then the priests, carrying the ark of the covenant, stepped into the river, and the Jordan parted. Halfway across, twelve men piled twelve stones next to the priests, and the people passed by. As the crossing ended, they moved the stones to the western shore, the river closed, and the twelve stones were erected as a memorial at Gilgal.

In balance with the ceremonial beginnings of this episode, our author reported how Joshua then consecrated the Israelites through circumcision. And four days later, Israel observed Passover and ate the produce of Canaan, instead of Manna, for the first time.

***Miraculous Fall of Jericho.*** This brings us to the third episode: the miraculous fall of Jericho in 5:13–6:21. To introduce this battle, our author began with a mysterious vignette that explained Joshua's extraordinary upcoming victory. As Joshua approached Jericho, he met an angelic figure and, in 5:13, Joshua asked him a crucial question: "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" In verse 14, the angel answered, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come." When Joshua humbled himself, the angel called for Joshua to remove his sandals because he stood on holy ground. And with this act, the angel assured him of the support of heaven's army.

Following this vignette, God gave instructions for the attack on Jericho — an attack that depended entirely on the support of heaven's army. The Israelites were to march once around the city for six consecutive days, with the priests in front carrying the ark of the covenant. On the seventh day, they were to march around the city seven times. The priests were to blow their trumpets, calling the angelic armies to battle. And the people were to shout and move in only after the miraculous fall of the city walls. Israel obeyed all of God's directives.

It's important to mention a feature of this story that appears time and again in Joshua's conquest. According to 6:17, Joshua ordered that "the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the Lord for destruction." The expression "to be devoted" translates the Hebrew verb *charam* (חָרַם). As we mentioned in an earlier lesson, this term, along with the corresponding noun *cherem* (חֵרֶם), has connotations of an act of worship. Outside the context of war, in places like Leviticus 27:28, this same terminology is used to refer to the permanent dedication of people, animals, or land to services of worship.

But in the context of war, such as in Joshua, it refers to killing animals and people and devoting select precious metals and the like to the Tabernacle.

To understand how these were acts of worship, we need to remember that ordinarily armies — including the armies of Israel — enriched themselves with the plunder and slaves they acquired in battle. But in passages like Deuteronomy 20:16, God ordered that, with rare exceptions like Rahab, the inhabitants of Canaan were to be devoted to him as an act of worship. By doing so, Israel gratefully acknowledged that the victory was actually God's victory.

## City of Ai

After the victory at Jericho, our author turned to Israel's victory at the city of Ai in 7:1–8:29.

***Israel's Defeat.*** The episode of Ai unfolds in three steps. First, we find a brief description of Israel's defeat at Ai in 7:1-5. In this story, spies wrongly advised Joshua that Ai would be an easy victory. So, he only sent some of his army to attack. We also learn that a man named Achan had secretly kept some plunder from Jericho, rather than devoting it to God. So, under God's judgment, some thirty-six Israelites were killed at Ai and the rest were routed.

***Israel's Repentance.*** In the second step, in 7:6-26, we read of Israel's repentance. Joshua lamented to God, and God revealed the reason for Israel's defeat. According to 7:11, Achan's sin was so egregious that God announced, "Israel has ... transgressed my covenant." God gave instructions for finding Achan. And when Achan confessed his sin, he, his family and all that he had were "devoted to destruction," just as God had commanded. The same destruction that was ordered for the Canaanites because of their terrible sins was also carried out on this Israelite family.

**Achan's sin was very devastating, and the reason why is because God had called the children of Israel, when they defeated Jericho, conquered Jericho, to devote everything to the Lord... And so, what he did is he took what not only didn't belong to him, but what belonged to God, and it was just a terrible thing that he did. Now, it's so tragic, also, because the covenant that God makes is not an individual covenant with Israel... We're so individualistic in our thinking. It's hard for us to understand that we are all responsible for one another. But when Achan sins, it is not just his sin, but it's a sin that affects the whole nation because he is a part of that community of faith. And I think this is not just an Old Testament thing, but something that's New Testament, when we understand that we are all connected together, and what one person does affects the whole body. And that is certainly what happened with Achan, with his sin.**

— Dr. T. J. Betts

***Israel's Victory.*** The third step, in 8:1-29, shows the result of Israel's repentance: Israel's victory over Ai. We find a familiar pattern. God instructed Joshua to set up an ambush. Joshua commanded the people accordingly. The people obeyed. And as the battle ensued, God gave Israel victory through supernatural intervention.

## Covenant Renewal

After the successes at Jericho and Ai, the account of Israel's victories over two cities closes with covenant renewal in 8:30-35. In obedience to Moses' command in Deuteronomy 11:29, Israel celebrated the completion of the first segment of the conquest by travelling to the heart of the Promised Land, to Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. All of Moses' law was read, and the entire nation renewed their commitment to obey God's covenant.

With the structure and content of Israel's victories over two cities in mind, we're in a position to comment on the original meaning of these chapters.

## ORIGINAL MEANING

Although the original audience faced different circumstances than those Joshua faced, the author of Joshua held Jericho up as an ideal that they were to imitate in ways that were appropriate for their day. He also presented Ai as a lesson on what to do when they failed in battle because they'd violated the commands of God. And the grand celebration of covenant renewal confirmed that God's mercies in battle should move the original audience to celebrate their successes in battle by renewing their commitments to God's covenant.

## Divine Authority

To impact his audience in these ways, our author, once again, highlighted the five main themes in his account of Israel's victories over two cities. In the first place, he emphasized the divine authority behind these events. In the account of crossing the Jordan, we read these words in 3:7: "the Lord said to Joshua." Just as before, this phrase established God's authority over everything Joshua commanded the people to do. And in the miraculous fall of Jericho, in 6:2, we again find the phrase, "the Lord said to Joshua."

To stress divine authority, our author also pointed out that Joshua was Moses' successor. In the miraculous crossing of the Jordan, in 4:14, Israel stood in awe of Joshua, "just as they had stood in awe of Moses." In 4:23, we read that "God dried up the waters of the Jordan ... [just as] God did to the Red Sea." And in the miraculous fall of Jericho, in 5:15, the angel commanded Joshua to, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy" — much like God commanded Moses in Exodus 3:5.

Now, in the account of the city of Ai, Israel initially failed to serve God faithfully. But with Israel's repentance, we read in 7:10, "the Lord said to Joshua." The phrase "the Lord said to Joshua" also appears in Israel's victory over Ai in 8:1, 18. Once again, our author stressed that these events were to guide his audience because they were directed by God himself, and by Joshua, Moses' successor.

## God's Covenant

In the second place, the account of Israel's victories over two cities also reinforced that God's covenant established Canaan as Israel's homeland. In the ceremonial celebration after crossing the Jordan, in 5:6, Canaan is referred to as, "the land that the Lord had sworn to their fathers to give to [them]." And along these lines, in the story of Joshua's spies, Rahab confessed, in 2:9, "The Lord has given you the land." The spies also returned to Joshua in 2:24 with confidence, saying, "Truly the Lord has given all the land into our hands." Along these same lines, in 6:16, in the fall of Jericho, Joshua commanded the army of Israel, "Shout, for the Lord has given you the city." These references to God's covenant were designed to assure the original audience of their divine right to the Promised Land, despite the circumstances they faced.

## Standard of Moses' Law

In the third place, Israel's victories over two cities also highlighted that obedience to the standard of Moses' law was necessary for Israel to have victory in battle. The account of crossing the Jordan, in 4:10 tells us that the priests led Israel "according to all that Moses had commanded." Joshua 4:12 reports that the tribes also arranged themselves "as Moses had told them." In 5:2, Joshua circumcised the Israelites in accordance with Moses' law. In 5:10, Israel kept Passover on the day that Moses had ordained. Along these same lines, in the closing account of Joshua's spies and Rahab, in 6:22, Joshua ordered the spies to treat Rahab "as you swore to her" — a standard established by Moses' law. And in 6:24, the author pointed out that Israel "burned the city [of Jericho] with fire, and everything in it," as Moses had commanded in Deuteronomy.

Similarly, disobedience to Moses' law explained the defeat at Ai. In 7:1, we learn that "the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things," directly defying Moses' law. And in 7:15, Joshua led Israel's repentance by insisting that Achan had "transgressed the covenant of the Lord." God himself declared the result of this disobedience in 7:13 when he said that Israel could not stand against its enemies until Achan's sin was rectified. This point is so important that the author returned to it in 22:20. He explained that God's wrath came on the entire nation of Israel because, "Achan ... [broke] faith in the matter of the devoted things." Of course, as soon as Israel dealt with Achan's violation, defeat turned to victory.

This outlook is emphasized again in Israel's covenant renewal after Israel's victories. In 8:31, Israel prepared "just as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded," and they built an altar "as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses."

In 8:32, Joshua wrote a copy of Moses' law on stones. And according to 8:33, they arranged the people "just as Moses ... had commanded at the first." This focus on the law of Moses vividly demonstrated that victories and defeats for the original audience would result from obedience and disobedience to Moses' law.

**The whole book of Joshua has a really strong teaching about obeying the law of God, or the law of Moses. From beginning to end, the whole book is a call to obedience, and it shows what comes from obeying God. That's why, from its very foundation in 1:8, we see that ... "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success."**

— Pastor Ornan Cruz, translation

## God's Supernatural Power

In the fourth place, Israel's victories over two cities also highlighted God's supernatural power. This theme appears repeatedly in the chapters leading up to the fall of Jericho. In the first episode involving Joshua's spies and Rahab, Rahab acknowledged in 2:9 that, "The fear of [Israel] has fallen upon us." And in 2:24, the spies confirmed that, "all the inhabitants of the land melt away [in fear] because of us." Passages such as Deuteronomy 11:22-25 indicate that God often displayed supernatural power against Israel's enemies by striking fear into their hearts.

Beyond this, when crossing the Jordan, God declared to Joshua, in 3:7, "I will be with you." As we mentioned earlier, this expression indicated that God was fighting with supernatural power for Israel. In 3:10, Joshua declared God's words to the Israelites, saying again, "The living God is among" — or with — "you." And in 5:1, we see God at work when the Canaanites' hearts melted in fear.

Nearly every dimension of the fall of Jericho illustrates this theme. It's especially evident in 6:20 when "the wall [of Jericho] fell down flat" by God's supernatural power. And it's no wonder that our author closed his account of Joshua's spies and Rahab in 6:27 by saying, "So the Lord was with Joshua."

As we might expect, supernatural power isn't seen in the early stage of Israel's defeat at Ai. Rather, in 7:5, we read that "the hearts of the [Israelites]" — rather than the Canaanites — "melted" in fear. And when God called for Israel's repentance in 7:12, God told Joshua, "I will be with you no more" until they rectified Achan's sin. But after the Israelites dealt with Achan, God displayed his supernatural power once again in the victory at Ai. In 8:18, God commanded Joshua, "Stretch out the javelin that is in your hand toward Ai," and the battle was won.

Throughout these chapters, our author used Joshua's initial victories over two cities to point out that his original audience could not win their battles in human strength. Victory came only through the supernatural power of God.

## All Israel

In the fifth place, Israel's victories over two cities emphasized the importance of the participation of all Israel in the conquest. In the episode of Israel's crossing the Jordan, 3:1, 17 tell us that *all the Israelites* crossed with Joshua. In 4:14, "The Lord exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel." And of course, the "twelve men" in 4:4 and the "twelve stones" in 4:8, 9 and 20 represented the twelve tribes of Israel. Beyond this, according to 5:8 the "whole nation" of Israel was circumcised at Gilgal. And at the fall of Jericho, God commanded, in 6:3, that Joshua march with "all the men of war" around the city.

Once again, we see a striking contrast in Israel's defeat at Ai. In 7:3, the spies told Joshua "Do not have all the people go up." It was not until Israel repented that the author mentioned the participation of "all the people of Israel," in 7:23. And in 7:24, 25, "all Israel" participated together in the judgment against Achan.

As we should expect by now, in the covenant renewal, in 8:33, "all Israel" stood before God. Our author drew attention to the participation of all Israel in this part of his book to leave no doubt that every generation of Israel's tribes must be ready to engage in battle together.

Having seen how the account of Israel's victorious conquest begins with preparations for victory and moves to Israel's victories over two cities, we now come to Israel's later victories over two alliances.

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## VICTORIES OVER TWO ALLIANCES

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The author of Joshua could have outlined the rest of Joshua's conquest of the Promised Land in many different ways. But he chose instead to concentrate on how Joshua's conquest extended from two cities to two regions, the southern and northern regions of the Promised Land. As we'll see, this portion of his book was particularly relevant to the needs of his original audience because it displayed that Joshua's conquest reached the full extent of the land God had promised to Israel.

Prior to this point in our book, Israel's conquest had taken them from Transjordan, to Jericho, to Ai, and to Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. But in this section, our author introduced the idea that alliances formed against Joshua from all over Canaan, first in the south and then in the north.

As we survey Israel's victories over two alliances, we'll once again briefly look at this section's structure and content and then at its original meaning. Let's start with an overview of the structure and content.

## STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

Israel's victories over two alliances, in chapters 9–12, can be confusing because these chapters contain a lot of diverse material. But it helps if we realize that this section divides into four main parts.



## Overview of Alliances

The first part, in 9:1, 2, gives a short overview of the alliances that stood against Israel. This briefly introduces what happens in the next chapters. As these verses tell us, “all the kings who were beyond the Jordan ... gathered together as one to fight against Joshua and Israel.”

## Overview of Victories

The fourth and final part of the account of alliances, in 11:16–12:24, balances with this opening introduction by giving a twofold overview of Israel’s victories. To start, 11:16, 23 calls attention to the full range of victories in southern and northern Cisjordan. This report stresses that Joshua destroyed all that God had commanded him to destroy. And it concludes in verse 23 with these words: “And the land had rest from war.” Following this, in 12:1-24, our author ended this division of the book with a list of kings and lands that Israel had acquired through victories, both in Transjordan and Cisjordan.

## Victories over Southern Alliance

Between these bookends, we find two main sections. The first is in 9:3–10:43 where our author reported Israel’s victories over a southern alliance. These chapters begin with the problematic Gibeonite treaty in 9:3-27. The Gibeonites, who lived in the heart of Canaan, deceived Israel into making a peace treaty with them by claiming that they had come from outside of Canaan. And this treaty prompted a large-scale conflict in the southern region of the Promised Land.

This large-scale conflict, in 10:1-15, led to an initial southern victory for Israel. In these verses, the king of Jerusalem formed an alliance of five southern kings and attacked the Gibeonites, who then appealed to Joshua for help. Because of their treaty, Israel was obligated to help the Gibeonites. And God gave Joshua a miraculous victory in this initial southern battle. And then, in Joshua 10:16-43, the author added a brief record of Joshua’s widespread southern victories, his victories in various places over the entire southern alliance. As our author noted in 10:40, “Joshua struck the whole land.”

## Victories over Northern Alliance

The next main section in this part of the book is in 11:1-15. Here, our author turned to Israel’s victories over a northern alliance. This section has a similar pattern to Joshua’s victories in the south, but the record is much shorter. In verses 1-11, the king of Hazor formed an alliance against Israel. We read in 11:4 that this alliance consisted of “a great horde, in number like the sand that is on the seashore.” But God gave Israel victory over this northern alliance as well. So, in 11:12-15 we find a summary of Joshua’s decisive victory throughout the northern region.

With the structure and content of Israel's victories over two alliances in mind, we should reflect for a moment on the original meaning of these chapters.

## ORIGINAL MEANING

As we've seen, Israel's battles against the cities of Jericho and Ai had much to teach the original audience. But our author knew that his audience living in later generations could easily dismiss these examples. These were only single cities with relatively small numbers of enemies, and his audience faced enemies who represented strong alliances with sizable armies. So, to encourage his original audience in these circumstances, our author also drew attention to the large-scale victories Joshua had against alliances in his day.

The account of Israel's victories over two alliances highlighted four of the five themes we've seen in earlier chapters.

### Divine Authority

First, we see the divine authority undergirding these events. For example, in the initial victory in the south, we read in 10:8 that, "The Lord said to Joshua ... 'I have given them into your hands.'" As just one other example, 11:9 tells us, during his victories in the north, Joshua carried out all of these actions "as the Lord said to him." Time and again, these chapters stress Joshua's divinely-authorized leadership of Israel. This was so that the original audience would understand how Joshua's great victories over alliances offered them guidance as they faced conflicts in their own day.

### Standard of Moses' Law

Second, Israel's victories over two alliances also emphasized the standard of Moses' law. For example, in the story of the Gibeonite treaty we read, in 9:14, that the Israelites were deceived because they "did not ask counsel from the Lord." They demonstrated disloyalty to God by not seeking guidance from the priests as Moses had directed in passages like Deuteronomy 17:9. But, in Joshua 9:20, Joshua followed Moses' law by upholding "the oath that we swore to [the Gibeonites]."

Additionally, in the summary of Joshua's widespread southern victories, we read in 10:40 that Joshua obeyed Moses' commands when he devoted to destruction all that breathed, "just as the Lord God of Israel commanded." In a similar way, during his victories in the north, in 11:12, Joshua "[devoted] them to destruction, just as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded." In 11:15, Joshua "left nothing undone of all that the Lord had commanded Moses." And in the concluding overview of Joshua's victories in Canaan, in 11:20, Joshua did "just as the Lord commanded Moses."

This theme is highlighted because Israelites in every generation needed to be reminded that victories would be theirs only when they were faithful to the law of Moses.



Obedience to the Law was the key to victory in their day, as it had been in the days of Joshua.

## God's Supernatural Power

Third, we learn again that Israel's victories over two alliances resulted from God's supernatural power. In the initial southern victory, 10:10 points out that God himself "threw [the alliance] into a panic before Israel." In verse 11, "The Lord threw down large stones from heaven on them." And in verse 13, "The sun stood still" so that Israel could win the battle. These supernatural interventions led the author to comment with amazement in verse 14, "The Lord fought for Israel." And as Israel's widespread victories in the south continued, according to 10:21, God's power spread so much fear that, "Not a man moved his tongue against any of the people of Israel." Joshua boldly predicted in 10:25, "thus the Lord will do to all your enemies." And the author closed his summary in 10:42, saying, "The Lord God of Israel fought for Israel."

The theme of God's supernatural power also appears in Israel's northern victories. For instance, God assured Joshua in 11:6, "I will give over all of them, slain, to Israel." Then, in the final overview of the victories against alliances, we read in 11:20 that "It was the Lord's doing to harden their hearts" so that Israel's enemies would be defeated.

Our author's repetition of this theme was designed to confirm over and over that his original audience should never rely on their own power in conflict. Their hope for victory against their foes was that God would intervene on their behalf with supernatural power.

**The Lord achieved victory for Joshua and Israel by his authority and supernatural power. The expression that the Lord has "given the land," or "handed the land," is the same verb in Hebrew, and is repeated several times in the book of Joshua. The Lord is the one who has given the enemies into Joshua's hand. He is the one who has given the land to Israel. This is repeated to assert that the Lord is almighty, the one who defeats the enemies... When the kings of the Amorites gathered against the men of Gibeon, and the men of Gibeon asked for Joshua's help in facing these kings, we read in Joshua 10:11:**

**As they fled before Israel, while they were going down the ascent of Beth-horon, the Lord threw down large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died. There were more who died because of the hailstones than the sons of Israel killed with the sword (Joshua 10:11).**

**The emphasis presented here is on the Lord's authority. He revealed his authority through this event — he threw stones, hailstones, on the enemies, and more of them died due to the Lord's direct interference than those who were killed by Israel's swords... So, the victory here is**

**absolutely a supernatural victory due to the direct interference of the Lord in the events. This teaches us a marvelous thing about our Almighty God who has the absolute power and authority over everything and all circumstances.**

— Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation

## **All Israel**

Throughout his account of Israel's victories over two alliances, our author also stressed a fourth theme: the participation of all Israel. In the initial southern victory near Gibeon, in 10:7, Joshua moved forward with "all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valor." And in 10:15, we learn that "all Israel" returned from battle with Joshua. In the record of widespread southern victories, 10:21 mentions that "all the people" were with Joshua. And in 10:24, Joshua summoned "all the men of Israel." We also see the importance of this theme in 10:29-38. There, our author repeated five times, "Then Joshua and all Israel ..." did this and that. And this entire section closes with "all Israel" returning with Joshua in 10:43. Finally, in Israel's northern victories, our author noted in 11:7 that "Joshua and all his warriors" were together.

The author of Joshua knew that the tribes of Israel often failed to stand as one people. So, he stressed the blessings that came to Israel in Joshua's day when they were united. This called the original audience of his book to stand together as they faced the enemies of their day.

Having seen how the account of Israel's victorious conquest includes their preparations for victory, victories over two cities and victories over two alliances, let's turn to our last consideration in this lesson, the Christian application of this record of Israel's conquest.

## **CHRISTIAN APPLICATION**

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Throughout history, well-meaning followers of Christ have often gone to extremes as they've approached this portion of Joshua. Some have simply rejected it as a part of Old Testament faith that has nothing to do with us. Others have used it to justify taking up arms in the cause of Christ. But when we keep in view what the New Testament teaches about Jesus' fulfillment of Israel's conquest, we find a proper orientation toward Christian application of this portion of Joshua.

We'll walk through this orientation toward Christian application by building on what we learned in the last lesson: Christ fulfilled Israel's conquest in the inauguration of his kingdom. He is fulfilling it in the continuation of his kingdom. And he will fulfill it completely in the consummation of his kingdom. Let's look first at what this means for the inauguration of Christ's kingdom.

## INAUGURATION

On the whole, Israel's conquest in Joshua's day represented a significant advancement in God's ongoing conflict against Satan and those who followed him. But with Jesus' first advent, he and his first century apostles and prophets accomplished even more in the inauguration of the kingdom. The Gospels and the book of Acts teach that Jesus and his apostles directly confronted and overcame Satan and evil spirits. As Jesus exclaimed, in Luke 10:18, when his disciples returned from casting out demons, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." And more than this, passages like Colossians 2:15, Hebrews 2:14, 15 and Ephesians 4:8 teach that Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension defeated Satan and evil spirits. Jesus also went further than Joshua by opening the way for his apostles to pursue the battle against Satan in the lands of Gentiles as well.

But, unlike Joshua, when Jesus came to this earth it was not God's time for him to take up arms against sinful *human beings*. In fact, in John 18:11, Jesus rebuked Peter for his physical aggression. Instead, Jesus extended God's victory over Satan and those who followed him by preaching two sides of his gospel or "good news" of the kingdom. He strongly warned of God's coming judgment, and he offered mercy to all who were willing to surrender to God. The first century apostles and prophets did much the same as they extended this initial phase of Christ's worldwide conquest. They never called for physical attacks on people. Instead, like Jesus, they spread the gospel message of judgment and salvation.

Now, the New Testament frequently warns unbelievers outside the church of God's coming judgment. But, it also warns of God's judgment against "false brothers," or unbelievers *within the church*. Passages like 1 Corinthians 16:22 and Galatians 1:8, warn of curses — *anathema* (ἀνάθεμα) in Greek — on false brothers in the church. These curses remind us of the judgment against the Israelite Achan who was "devoted to destruction." And this connection is strengthened by the fact that, in the Septuagint version of Joshua — the ancient Greek translation — forms of the word *anathema* translate the Hebrew words *charam* (חָרַם) and *cherem* (חֵרֶם), meaning, "devoted to destruction". But even as the apostles and prophets delivered warnings of God's judgment on those inside and outside the church, they also called everyone to repentance so that they could escape God's coming wrath.

**In the book of Joshua, people are accursed. They are put under the ban, and they are totally wiped out for not honoring God as God, and for not embracing God's commandments, for not walking as God has commanded them to walk. And from the perspective of the biblical authors, that is a good and just and righteous thing because it upholds God's righteous character, it upholds God's promises to his people, and it shows us that God himself is actually trustworthy... And what Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians 16:22 and Galatians 1:8, on the one hand, if you don't love the Lord, on the other hand if you don't preach this gospel, well, God's justice is on you. And what Paul is doing is he's agreeing with the goodness of God's justice when he says, "Let them be accursed." And that's anticipating this final coming of the Lord Jesus when he will put all his enemies under the ban, and he**

**will bring God's righteousness to bear, and he will uphold the truth of God's promises. And people that love the Lord, they want to see God's justice magnified and glorified, and they want to see God show forth the truthfulness of his word.**

**— Dr. James M. Hamilton**

When we keep these basic ideas in mind, we have ample opportunities to see how the five main themes of this division of Joshua were fulfilled in the inauguration of Christ's kingdom. As Joshua's conquest was led by divine authority, the victories of Jesus and his apostles and prophets were led by divine authority as well. As the conquest of Israel in Joshua's day was rooted in God's covenant, the victories of Jesus and his apostles were rooted in the new covenant. As obedience to the standard of Moses' law was the key to Joshua's successes, the successes of Jesus and his apostles were dependent on their obedience to Moses and God's fuller revelation after Moses. As Joshua and Israel depended on God's supernatural power, the victories of Jesus and his apostles were dependent on the supernatural power of God. And as Joshua's conquest was to include all Israel, Jesus called people throughout Israel to join with him. On the Day of Pentecost, Jews from all over the world joined with him in his battle against evil. And Jesus' apostles and prophets added large numbers of Gentiles to the ranks of the early church as well.

Having mentioned how Christian application of Israel's victorious conquest was fulfilled in the inauguration of Christ's kingdom, we should turn next to its ongoing fulfillment in Christ during the continuation of his kingdom.

### **CONTINUATION**

According to 1 Corinthians 15:25 Jesus will reign in heaven "until he has put all his enemies under his feet." And over the last two thousand years he has successfully advanced his worldwide conquest through the ministry of his church to nearly every nation on earth. But, at the same time, the church has also experienced countless setbacks when it has neglected repentance, covenant renewal and the means of grace. So, the New Testament calls on us to advance the cause of Christ in the power of his Spirit day by day.

On the one side, we are to continue in spiritual warfare by fully engaging Satan and evil spirits, much like Jesus and his apostles and prophets did. According to Ephesians 6:13-18, we are to "take up the whole armor of God ... the belt of truth ... the breastplate of righteousness ... the gospel of peace... the shield of faith ... the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit ... praying at all times in the Spirit." We must rightly prepare for spiritual warfare much like Israel had to prepare properly for the conquest of Canaan.

On the other side, we are to continue to engage human beings as Jesus and his apostles did. We oppose those who resist the ways of Christ, but not with physical attacks. Instead, we proclaim the judgment and mercy of the Christian gospel. We warn of God's judgment that is coming to the unbelieving world. And we warn false brothers

in the church of God's coming judgment, much like Joshua forewarned the Israelite Achan when he violated God's covenant. In 2 Corinthians 10:5, Paul spoke of his own ministry as destroying "every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God." But we also proclaim the hope of salvation to all who repent and surrender to Christ.

This orientation toward the continuation of Christ's kingdom opens the way for us to apply the record of Joshua's conquest to our daily lives. As Israel was led by divine authority, you and I are to be led by divine authority as we advance Christ's kingdom. As Israel's confidence for victory was based on God's covenant, we can have even more confidence because of the new covenant in Christ. As Israel's success in battle depended on their submission to the standard of Moses' law, success in our Christian battles depends on our submission to the standard of *all* of Scripture, both the Old and New Testaments. As Israel's conquest was won by God's supernatural power, our victories today come only through the supernatural power of God's Spirit at work. And just as all Israel was to participate in the conquest in Joshua's day, we are to fight our battles today as one people from every tribe and language and nation.

Christian application of Israel's conquest not only entails awareness of what Christ did in the inauguration of his kingdom and of what he does now during the continuation of his kingdom. We also apply the record of Joshua as it strengthens our hopes for the day when Christ returns at the consummation of his kingdom.

## CONSUMMATION

The New Testament tells us in no uncertain terms that when Jesus returns, he will come back as a victorious king. In John's vision in Revelation 19:11, he saw Jesus as the one who "judges and makes war." And on that day, Jesus' final victory will bring to fruition the ultimate hope of Christ's worldwide conquest. Jesus will supersede every act of destruction in Joshua's day. And he will supersede every positive benefit Joshua brought to the people of Israel in his day.

On the one side, when Christ returns, Satan will be utterly defeated. He'll have no power to deceive or harm us anymore. As the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 16:20, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." And on the other side, God's mercy toward rebellious humans will end. As Jesus himself said in Revelation 21:8, "their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur." And with those who serve Satan eliminated from the earth, every human being who has surrendered to Christ will enjoy the glorious victory of eternal salvation in the new heaven and new earth.

**We live in the midst of great conflict and tension, suffering, persecution, and so it's a natural question for us to ask, how will that change? We want to affirm that Jesus' return will be different than his first coming, that his return brings closure, brings finality to the questions of justice, that everything will be put right. In part, we trust that, though we do not see that. We trust it because God is God, that he will, at the "end of time," so to speak, that is, at the end of creaturely experience of time in its corrupted state, God will bring perfect justice; God will execute judgment perfectly. He will not judge**

**harshly. He will judge in accordance with the standards of justice. So, all of death itself will be defeated. All of our own idolatries will be defeated. Everything will be put right. And there is no greater yearning in the human heart for that reality, and it is no mistake that we yearn for it because it shall come to pass as God so designs.**

— Dr. Richard Lints

Just as divine authority directed Joshua's actions, God's authority will direct the great and terrible day of Jesus' return. As Joshua's victory was rooted in God's covenant with Israel, the final victory of Christ is certain because of God's solemn vow in the new covenant. As Israel's success depended on compliance with the standard of Moses' law, Jesus' final victory will succeed because he is without flaw. As Joshua's conquest resulted from God's supernatural power, Jesus' return will be the greatest display of God's supernatural power that the world has ever seen. And as Joshua's conquest held up the ideal of all Israel's participation, when Christ returns, the people of God from every tribe and nation on earth will be one in celebration of his great victory.

## CONCLUSION

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In this lesson, we've explored how the first major division of the book of Joshua focuses on Israel's victorious conquest. We've seen how the author of Joshua presented Israel's preparations for victory, how he contrasted Israel's victories over the two cities of Jericho and Ai, and how he portrayed Israel's extensive victories over powerful alliances in both the southern and northern regions of the Promised Land. And we've touched on some of the ways we can discern Christian applications of this first major division of our book.

The book of Joshua provided crucial perspectives for the original audience as they faced the challenges of warfare in their day by reminding them of what happened in Israel's victorious conquest in the Promised Land. And this record also guides us as we participate in Christ's grand fulfillment of what Israel accomplished in Joshua's day. It calls on us to trust in what Christ has already accomplished. It calls on us to follow him into battle day by day. And it assures us that despite the challenges we face today, Christ will return and complete his victorious conquest over evil and its effects throughout creation.

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# The Book of Joshua

LESSON  
TWO

## Victorious Conquest Faculty Forum



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# Contents

<b>Question 1:</b>	How could a loving God command Joshua to completely destroy the inhabitants of Canaan? .....	1
<b>Question 2:</b>	How do we know that God’s call to destroy the Canaanites was not just a call for ethnic cleansing? .....	4
<b>Question 3:</b>	What does Joshua 1:5 mean when God promises, “I will be with you?” .....	5
<b>Question 4:</b>	What was Achan’s sin, and why was it so terrible? .....	7
<b>Question 5:</b>	What does the book of Joshua teach us about God’s character as a warrior for his people? .....	9
<b>Question 6:</b>	How does the book of Joshua emphasize God’s supernatural power to defeat his enemies? .....	11
<b>Question 7:</b>	How was Jesus victorious over the enemies of God’s kingdom in the inauguration of God’s kingdom? .....	13
<b>Question 8:</b>	How should Christians interpret Old Testament commands for Israel to engage in divinely-sanctioned holy war? .....	16
<b>Question 9:</b>	How will Jesus’ victory over his enemies and deliverance of his followers be complete when he returns? .....	18

# The Book of Joshua

## Lesson Two: Victorious Conquest

### Faculty Forum

With

Dr. T. J. Betts  
Dr. Constantine Campbell  
Dr. D.A. Carson  
Pastor Ornan Cruz  
Rev. Sherif Gendy  
Rev. Michael J. Glodo  
Dr. James M. Hamilton

Dr. Carol Kaminski  
Dr. Craig S. Keener  
Rev. Kevin Labby  
Dr. Dan Lacich  
Rev. Bin Li  
Dr. Chip McDaniel  
Dr. Sean McDonough

Dr. Jeffrey J. Niehaus  
Dr. Tom Petter  
Dr. Glen G. Scorgie  
Dr. Imad Shehadeh  
Dr. Seth Tarrer  
Dr. Stephen J. Wellum

### Question 1:

**How could a loving God command Joshua to completely destroy the inhabitants of Canaan?**

#### **Dr. Craig S. Keener**

In Joshua, God commands the destruction of the Canaanites, not because it's the ideal. I mean, the ideal is love your enemies and win them to Christ, but obviously that wasn't an option available in the time of Joshua. If they didn't destroy their enemies, they were going to be infiltrated by pagan customs — for example, the killing of babies who were then often sacrificed and buried in urns and so on. We've found the remains of where Canaanites have done that. Also, anything less than total war would not have eliminated them, which is what we see happening. They didn't have total war, they didn't eliminate them, the Canaanites didn't flee, and so those influences did infiltrate Israel... In Genesis 15, God said that this wouldn't happen, the conquest of Canaan wouldn't happen, until the Amorites had become wicked enough for it to happen. At this point it's kind of like a corporate capital punishment that God is executing on this society.

#### **Dr. Imad Shehadeh, translation**

There is a very important question, a very, very important and sensitive question that asks, how should we as believers understand the genocides in the Old Testament... First, for the sake of argument, let's say that the God of the universe has the right to destroy all people. Because all have sinned against God, he has the right, with full justice and without blame, to destroy us. Without exception, there is no one among us who does not deserve condemnation. He has the right to condemn... However, towards evil, he has always been patient. In other words, he waited patiently until the sin of the Amorites was complete. Or to put it another way, if God had punished them before the allotted time, that would have been wrong, or after the time, it would have been wrong. But he is always on time to fulfill his promise to condemn sin and evil... But there is another thing Scripture reveals. The same Holy Scripture that gives us an image in the Old Testament about God's justice and holiness, this same God took on

a human nature and hung on the cross, so that he would, in himself, experience the same punishment that he inflicted on the people of Canaan. He took it by himself, on himself. He is the same God, the same, totally the same... There is a former terrorist who told me this phrase — he came to believe in Christ and told me this phrase — he said, “Terrorists claim that we die for the sake of God, while the message of the gospel is the opposite: God died for us. The situation is quite different.” So, the genocide in the Old Testament is an image of God’s holiness. It only occurred once and allowed us to understand the suffering that he endured, so that this doesn’t happen again, so there will be everlasting life. It’s an image about love, about how much God loves us. He showed us the suffering he experienced in order that we would be saved forever. The wrath was absorbed. The revealed wrath became absorbed wrath through Jesus Christ. Hallelujah!

### **Dr. Jeffrey J. Niehaus**

The conquest was a judgment. One can look at those commands, you know, leave no survivors — women and children — show them no mercy. On the human plane that can look like genocide. But the root of that, I think, is to be found in Genesis 15 ... when the Lord promises Abram that in the fourth generation his descendants are going to come back and have this land because the sinfulness of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure. The point there is, then, that the Lord is going to allow the Canaanites to continue to have their life, have their culture, have their distorted religion worshiping Baal and the fertility cult and all the rest of it. The time would come when they were so far gone in sin that they would not respond to God no matter how attractive he made himself to appear, or how clearly it was from what he had revealed that he’s the God you ought to worship. The proof of this is found in Rahab because she can say to the spies, “We all know what Yahweh your God has done to the Egyptians and to Sihon and Og, the Amorite kings.” Well, if they all know that, why don’t they show up in Hebrews 11 as she does on the honor roll of faith? And so, it makes the point that they’re so far gone in sin that their reaction to the Lord will not... I mean, it’s a no-brainer that they ought to affiliate with him. Instead, they’re afraid and they resist, and that’s a sign that their consciences are seared, if I could put it that way. Jesus makes the same point in Luke... He says, “When the Son of Man returns, will he find faith on the earth?” And the answer implicitly is “no.” And so, faith is the criterion. When faith is no longer possible, the complete judgment is justified. That was true in the conquest. It will be true at the end of the age. And, as for the women and children and especially, perhaps, you might look at the infants and say, “Well, how can that be right?” We have to agree, I think, with Abraham before Sodom and Gomorrah when he asked the question in Genesis 18:25, “Will not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?” And the answer is “yes.” God knew what those children would have grown up to be if they had been allowed to live. And, of course, the fact that the Israelites did let some of them live and they continued to be a thorn in their sides shows that this was true.

### **Dr. Chip McDaniel**

The question of genocide and the account of Joshua is troubling to many Christians because it appears to be, and it is, in fact, condoning the killing of masses of people,

entire wiping away of an entire race within a land. It's probably nowhere better stated or seen in the book of Joshua than in 11:20 where it says,

**The Lord hardened their hearts, that they would come out against Israel in battle in order that he might utterly destroy them and that they might receive no mercy, but that he might destroy them as the Lord had commanded Moses (Joshua 11:20, NKJV).**

And so, it sounds like a very brutal annihilation of an entire group. The judgment on Canaan was already anticipated in the book of Genesis. In Genesis 9, we have the curse upon the son of Ham, who is Canaan, and he would become ... the father of the Canaanites. We're not sure what that sin was. It appears to be sexual in some way, but there was a curse that was placed upon Canaan. When we fast forward to the time of Abraham we see that God told him that his descendants would own that land, but it wouldn't be given to him or his descendants right away. They would have to go into captivity. They would come out after four generations. Abraham was a hundred years old at the time. Four generations would be four hundred years. Israel was in Egypt, apparently, four hundred years. But the reason that it was going to be delayed is because God said the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full; it's not yet complete. God would allow a time of relative laxness and then at a point in time would judge the Canaanite — another word for that would be Amorite. So, the question isn't, "How can God condone a genocide?" The question is, can the moral governor of the universe — which God is presented as such — does the moral God of the universe have the prerogative to judge sin in a time, and a place, and a manner of his own choosing? We also look to the book of Joshua and we see that there are certain mitigating factors that are a help to us, I think. The first thing to consider about the book of Joshua is that some could have come out and joined the Israelite camp and become true followers of the Lord. They knew what God had done for his people in bringing them out of Egypt. They had the report of the battles on the other side of Jordan. Some of them could have left and joined themselves to Israel, had they wanted to. We also suspect that those who were living in the areas on the outskirts of the cities would have just fled. They would have gone to Assyria; they would have gone to Egypt, some place that would have been regarded as safe. Perhaps Edom might have received them as well. And so, the average, everyday person would be the one who would probably try to flee with his or her family. Those that remained were trusting in their political system. They were trusting in their kings to save them, and these were to be completely destroyed. A further factor, theologically, is that God had determined that the second member of the Trinity would become man, that God would take on flesh, and that has to be through a family. And in order to be the type of family to whom God would display his grace and bring about what we know to be the Messiah, there had to be a separation of these people from all of the other peoples, and so theologically, it makes sense that God would try to eradicate all of the people in the area in order that his people might be a distinct people. Israel sits in a land bridge between Africa, Europe and Asia, and anyone doing business between those entities would have come through or near the Holy Land. They were to be a contrast society. They were to show the glories of their God, and they would serve as the

family through whom God would send the Messiah. And so, God does have the prerogative to choose to judge people. He also wanted theologically to have a people through whom the Messiah would be born.

### **Question 2:**

**How do we know that God's call to destroy the Canaanites was not just a call for ethnic cleansing?**

#### **Dr. Craig S. Keener**

Sometimes people today accuse the book of Joshua of supporting genocide, of wiping out a people as if it were an ethnic cleansing, an ethnic war. But that's not the case at all. You have contrasted in the book of Joshua particularly two figures. You have Rahab who betrayed her people, betrayed Jericho, came over to the side of God's people. She hid the spies on her roof. In contrast with that you have Achan who betrayed God's people, taking the loot from Jericho. In contrast to hiding spies on his roof, he hid the loot under his tent. Rahab saved her whole family. Achan destroyed his whole family because, obviously, he couldn't have hid this under the tent without them knowing and participating in the subterfuge. So, the point is that it wasn't just a matter of ethnicity; it was a matter of loyalty to Israel's true God. Now, Achan becomes, in a sense, a model for what brings judgment among God's people. God's people were holy; they were devoted to the Lord, and when Achan took some of this loot that was spiritually polluted, he brought judgment and others died because of his sin. You see something in Acts 5 where Ananias and Sapphira do something similar and God cuts it off right there. God judges them right there for the sake of his people.

#### **Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation**

God doesn't exhibit favoritism to the Israelites over the Canaanites. The evidence for this is Rahab the prostitute. She was one of the people of Canaan, but she received faith and acknowledged the God of Israel. As a result, she and her family were saved from the destruction. At the same time, Achan, the son of Carmi, who broke faith in regard to the devoted things, was a member of the covenant community, a member of the people of Israel, and eventually he received God's just judgment for what he did. Throughout the history of Israel, we see how God punishes Israel many times for rebelling against and disobeying the Lord. So, they received various kinds of God's punishments, either during the Assyrian or the Babylonian exiles.

#### **Dr. Seth Tarrer**

When we look at the Canaanite religion and what was going on, on the ground, so to speak, there are numerous things that we would describe as wicked, things that the Old Testament, things that Israelite ethics and morals would call wrong. Fertility cults were rampant; sexual immorality was common; child sacrifice was common. And underneath all of this, we see there is a resistance to the will of the Lord, a resistance to God as Creator. And so, *cherem* is tied to this notion of creation. The Lord is the creator of all lands, not just the people of Israel and the land that they inhabit at the

time; the Lord is the creator of all lands, and he has designated the ways in which they are to live, the ways in which they can bring peace and justice and righteousness to one another, and the actions of the Canaanites are inhibiting this. There is a resistance to the will of the Lord as Creator. And finally, an interesting point brought up by John Goldingay recently is that the Lord is not so much asking Israel to destroy the Canaanites because the Canaanites have the wrong religion. No, the question is, again, is moral and ethical in nature. What the Canaanites are doing is abhorrent to the Lord. The question of religion has almost always missed the mark because religion, be it Israelite or whomever, has never saved. Religion does not save. It does not now; it hasn't ever. The proper religion was not what caused Rahab to suddenly change her mind. Rahab did not say to the spies, "Oh, your mode of thinking, your theological categories are better than mine. I'm going to convert." It wasn't religion; it was response. The proper response was one of faith. When one looked at what was going on around them, and then one heard the stories that Joshua and the spies told — this is the hand of the Lord, the Lord is the one doing these things — the response of Rahab was one of faith and obedience. This is the response that Israel has always been called to and the response that the world, through Israel, is called to take part in as well.

### Question 3:

**What does Joshua 1:5 mean when God promises, "I will be with you?"**

#### **Dr. Carol Kaminski**

You know, right at the beginning of the book of Joshua, as he's now taking over new leadership for Moses, you have this wonderful promise being given that God promises his presence, and it says, "as he had been with Moses." And this picks up a really central theme in the Old Testament, beginning, I guess the background really is the loss of the divine presence in the Garden of Eden and they're banished from Eden. And so, you start to have this promise being given to the patriarchs: "I'm going to" — Abraham, Isaac and Jacob — "I'm going to be with you." And of course, if you look at the background with Moses, the divine presence, tabernacle, absolutely central to the whole book and the whole narrative. And especially you see this in the golden calf story when they build the idol and Moses is interceding and the people have been, you know, worshiping this idol. And God says, "Look, I'm just going to destroy you." Moses intercedes and says, "Please, if you don't go with us it's all over." And he says, "Look, okay, I won't destroy you, but I'm going to send my angel." And then Moses says, "No, no. If you're not with us, we may as well not go out from here." So, and of course, God in his grace and mercy promises to be with them, and this then picks up that underlying theme that God had been with Moses in terms of leading the Israelites, and so you have divine presence with Joshua as a leader. And what immediately follows after that is this emphasis on obeying the commandments of the Lord, which really is, they're kind of working in together, that God promises "I'll be with you" — he's going to give them victory — but they need to be following God's law. That's central to entrance into the land and to conquering the land.

**Rev. Kevin Labby**

“I will be with you” is one of the great promises of God to his people, and of course means that close proximity, that he will be their God, and they will be his people, that he’ll be with them, never leaving them, never forsaking them, that he’ll be working for them. Oftentimes, I think when we hear that, what we’re drawn to is the comfort that, even in the face of our sins and our struggles, God will remain steadfast, even when we’re not. But in this particular context as God’s people were getting ready to take possession of the Promised Land and go up against the Canaanite people — a strong and powerful people characterized by deep generational sin, a group of people that would have been terrifying to many outside that land as they looked in upon it — what God is really promising is that he won’t only be with them, be faithful and steadfast for them, but that he’ll fight for them, and he’ll fight with them. And, of course, we see that in just a couple of chapters as the angel of the Lord appears to Joshua and reminds him that this is not purely an earthly battle between Joshua and the armies of Israel, it’s the Lord of Hosts who is fighting with them and for them and is ultimately going to determine their success. So, it’s meant to be a wonderful reassurance in many ways, but a chief way in which God is reassuring his people in the book of Joshua is that he will fight for them, and in fact, has been fighting for them.

**Dr. James M. Hamilton**

One of the things that we always want to bear in mind as we think about what the Bible means is it’s a good thing to read the surrounding context. And in the immediate context, the Lord had said, “As I was with Moses, so I will be with you.” And I think what’s happening in part here is, back in Deuteronomy 18, the Lord had instructed Israel — he said to them, “When you go into this land...” — essentially what he’s saying is, these other peoples, when they look for supernatural guidance, they seek mediums. They seek necromancers. They have all these means of divination, all these ways of getting supernatural guidance. And the Lord says you’re not to follow any of those practices, but “I’m going to raise up a prophet like you,” the Lord says to Moses, “from among your brothers.” And, in one sense, there’s not a prophet like Moses, Deuteronomy 34 tells us, until Jesus comes. But in another sense, all of the prophets that follow Moses are prophets like Moses. In some cases, they have experiences very much like Moses’ experience when the Lord called him. And that’s the case with Joshua. So, I think, in part, what the Lord is saying is, “Joshua, as I was with Moses, and as I led him, and as I gave revelation to him for the people of Israel, so I’m going to be with you. And as I gave him authenticating signs, so I will be with you.” And then, Joshua has very similar experiences to the one that Moses had at the burning bush at Mount Sinai when he’s told to take off his sandals for the place on which he stands is holy ground. And so, I think the key thing here is that the Lord is continuing the work that he had been doing in Israel through Moses, now through Joshua.

**Rev. Bin Li, translation**

In Joshua 1:5, God said to Joshua: “I will be with you.” This is a great encouragement... He didn’t just face pressure from external circumstances, but from



internal conflicts as well. He had doubts; “Can I really lead these people?” ... So, when God said to Joshua: “Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you,” God had already been showing Joshua how Moses had experienced God’s being with him and how to lead the Israelites to run toward their goal. This gave Joshua the confidence to believe that he could continue leading. This message is a great encouragement to me as well. Every time I’m weak, external circumstances are stressful, or when I’m in conflict with those in ministry with me or with the congregation, I think on this Scripture and realize that God’s will for his church is to head toward his mission. This is in his will. So, when I obey him, I will be full of strength. When I believe that God is with me, I can remove a lot of fear and discouragement from within me.

### Question 4:

### What was Achan’s sin, and why was it so terrible?

#### Rev. Michael J. Glodo

We read in Joshua about Achan’s sin, holding back some of the spoils of the victory at Ai, and as a result, Israel fails in their next battle because it displeases God so much. So, what was the severe offence that Achan committed that would cause God to be willing to let his people suffer defeat? Well, if we go back to Deuteronomy, and we see in Deuteronomy 13, we see the idolatrous city among Israel in the future, if they follow after other gods, they are to be offered as a burnt offering. And the word for holy war, *cherem*, is used there. So, what holy war is, or what *cherem* warfare is, is a war that is not for the enrichment of the victors as is common state war, but holy war is a type of final judgment that prefigures the final judgment of God in the new heavens and earth wherein those who are not holy and right before God are totally consumed as burnt offerings to him. And so, when Achan held back from the spoils of the battle, he was actually holding back something that belonged to God. He was stealing from God to enrich himself, which is the exact opposite of righteousness. The righteous man gives to God and trusts God to provide for, sustain and support him. Now, what is remarkable about the Achan episode is that it’s repeated in a manner in the book of Acts with Ananias and Sapphira. Scholars have noticed a number of parallels between Achan’s sin and what Ananias and Sapphira did, which tells us this, that a lack of generosity, not being generous to God’s purposes in the Christian community, is tantamount to the kind of thing that Achan did back in the book of Joshua.

#### Dr. James M. Hamilton

Achan’s sin was that he took forbidden things. He took things that were placed under the ban. And this is one of the disturbing things for people as they read the book of Joshua. They ask themselves, how could it be so bad for him to take this 200 shekels of silver and a bar of gold and a beautiful cloak from Shinar? Why is that such a grave sin? And I think in answering that question, what the issue is, is simply, is God who he claims to be? If the God of the Bible is the Lord of the universe, and if he is more valuable than life itself, then to transgress his commandments is a heinous crime

whose penalty is infinite in magnitude. And I think that this is what we're seeing both in the punishment of Achan and in the putting of the Canaanites under the ban itself. In this, Achan's calculation is something like, "These things matter more to me than the God who has placed them under this prohibition." And for the Canaanites, the sins in which they indulged, they were making a calculation that said, "Our consciences may be bearing us witness — as the law of God is written on our hearts as these Gentiles — but our enjoyment of these things is more significant to us than any pang of conscience that might woo us away from this or any qualms we might have about any of these perversities." And in that calculation they are choosing God's gifts over the giver himself, and that is a crime that is worthy of God's punishment.

### **Dr. Tom Petter**

Achan's sin in Joshua 7 is a big question. Why was it *so* bad? What was it that happened there? And the facts of the case are simple. In chapter 7, Achan got greedy in the fight for Jericho, and then he grabbed a few things for himself, hid it in his tent, and then Yahweh had specifically commanded, don't take any booty for yourself. So, Achan is a tribal leader of the tribe of Judah, which I think bears significance because, of course, Judah is the lineage of David and Jesus. And so, he's a prominent leader in the community. And of course, what happens because of Achan's sin, the whole idea of creating holiness within the Israelite camp — because without holiness there's no victory; It's about holiness, it's about being devoted to Yahweh — and so, when they go onto the next campaign against Ai, they fail. And so, Joshua very quickly realizes, there is what we call "sin in the camp," and that's what prevented them to secure victory like they did with Jericho. And so, they have a system of finding out who it was, and it goes through the tribes, and then the clans, and then the families, and then it comes down to the "*bayith ab*" in Hebrew, which is "house of the father," and it's Achan's house that's being singled out. And then finally Achan fesses up, and then they take a very drastic measure of committing Achan and his family to destruction, *literal* destruction — *cherem*, that word — "committed" devoted to destruction." So, here is the contrasting picture. You have chapter 6 of Joshua where a Canaanite prostitute and her household is saved from *cherem*, saved from destruction, and then, the prominent leader of the tribe of Judah and his household are committed to destruction. And the lesson is a *powerful* one. Very early holiness and *cherem* are two-way streets. It doesn't matter, you could have all the right pedigree being a member of the tribe of Judah. It didn't protect; that didn't protect him. What he needed to be... On whose side are you, holiness or unholiness? So, a person with zero credentials like Rahab, and then a person with full credentials within Israel like Achan, and then who gets saved and who doesn't has everything to do with holiness.

### Question 5:

### What does the book of Joshua teach us about God's character as a warrior for his people?

#### Dr. Seth Tarrer

By the time we get to the part of the Old Testament in which we read about Samuel and the crowning of King Saul and King David, a common title for the Lord is “*Adonai Sabaoth*,” or the “Lord of Hosts,” or the “Lord of Armies.” However, backing up to the book of Joshua, we get to witness narratively in the text how the Lord earns this name. He’s brought Israel out of Egypt, and now he engages with Israel as an active combatant on the side of righteousness in the purification of the land of Canaan. In 5:13-15 in the book of Joshua, Joshua meets this mysterious figure, this figure known as “the commander of the Lord,” and when Joshua encounters this figure, this figure has a drawn sword. This is an interesting component of the story because, in other ancient Near Eastern accounts of encounters with divine hosts, swords are also raised. There is an account from the *Annals of Ashurbanipal* in which Ishtar is met with a raised sword, and the raised sword is interpreted as a sign of encouragement, encouragement that, “I am with you, and I will fight on your side.” However, the response of the mysterious character, this commander of the armies of the Lord, is puzzling because when Joshua asks on whose side this commander fights, a third option is given: “I don’t fight exclusively for you, nor do I fight for your enemies. I fight on the side of the Lord.” Now, this is an example in which God, as warrior in the book of Joshua, poses to us — the reader in the modern world — a very pertinent and timely question. And Douglas Earl has helpfully described the ways in which three perspectives are maintained in the book of Joshua. There are the side of the Canaanites, there is the side of the Israelites, and then there is a distinct third perspective — this is the side of the Lord; this is perfect justice and righteousness. However, we’re apt to conflate us as being on the side of the Lord, over and against them, that is, the “enemy.” And so, Joshua is continually at pains to require us to properly realign ourselves with the right side, the side of the Lord, the side of justice and righteousness. And so, when we talk about God as warrior, God was never straightforwardly for Israel on Israel’s terms. God was for Israel on *his* terms. And God was never unreservedly against the Canaanites — witness the salvation of Rahab and her family. God was against the Canaanites in the degree that they were continuing in willful resistance to his will, oppression and immorality... We push this question even further to the final book of the New Testament. We read in Revelation 19:11:

**Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war (Revelation 19:11).**

So, this image of God as warrior fighting on behalf of his people is now brought to its completion in the book of Revelation where Jesus comes, eschatologically, on a white horse, fighting injustice the same way that the Lord refused to fight for Israel on

Israel's terms. He always fought on terms of justice and righteousness. And then in chapter 21, we witness the inheritance that we receive as God's people. The inheritance of Israel was the Promised Land. However, in the New Testament this is again taken up in another register. The inheritance is no "thing" to be attained. It is Jesus. The warrior becomes the inheritance. Our warrior king is in fact our inheritance, and in him we enjoy renewed heaven and earth and a heavenly city.

**Dr. Sherif Gendy, translation**

Asking about how to learn or what to learn about God's character as a warrior for his people in the book of Joshua is an important question because from the beginning of the book, in chapter 1, we see God giving instructions to Joshua to prepare for the war and prepare the people for the war. Here we see God as the military leader, the commander-in-chief of the army, the marshal who lays out the strategies for his people. Not only this, we also see through the entire book and through the wars in which Joshua led the people, we see God's authority and sovereignty over the events. And we see that every step the people took was by an order and clear instruction from the Lord. So, not only did the Lord call Joshua to prepare the people, but he also was the one who laid out the plan and instructed the people on how to move. Additionally, we see the Lord himself fighting for his people. The Lord is the military leader, the warrior who leads his people in victory, because he has the mighty hand over all the events. Victory was related to the obedience of the people. When the people disobeyed the Lord — like what happened with Achan the son of Carmi — we see that there is punishment and condemnation because of disobedience. It's important to the Lord, as a fighting warrior, that his people be committed and consistent in their obedience, loyalty, and faithfulness to him. So, because God is the leader and Lord over events, victory is guaranteed, even if the people disobey, because the Lord corrects this disobedience. Once more, he comes to assert victory, and victory, as I said, is related to the obedience of the people and their faithfulness and loyalty to the Lord. The image of God's character as a mighty warrior is repeated in various places in the Bible. One of the best and most magnificent texts, or the most comprehensive text that shows the image of God as a warrior, is found in Revelation, the book of Revelation, when it talks about Christ who is sitting on a white horse. In his second coming, he is coming to launch a war against the ungodly, among either angels or human beings, and he will accomplish the victory he inaugurated on the cross, and he will provide this victory to all his faithful followers who faithfully obeyed his commands. As a result, because the Lord is a warrior, he is just, he never oppresses, and victory is always guaranteed through the Lord, because he is the military leader who puts strategies in place and accomplishes them by his mighty hand, which has the absolute authority.

**Dr. Tom Petter**

In the book of Joshua, God's character is manifested in many ways, and one of the traits of God, as a warrior, is a wonderful lesson for all of us — for the people then and for us — that God is characterized as a divine warrior. And of course, Joshua, you have to read Joshua in light of the exodus, and what happens during the exodus. And what happens during the exodus is that Yahweh manifests himself as the divine

warrior. It's in Exodus 15 when he has conquered all the armies of Egypt through their passing through the waters there, it says, "Yahweh is a man of war." So, that's one of his titles as divine warrior. And so, that's picked up in the book of Joshua. But how does he wage warfare? That's the key to not just exodus and the book of Joshua but throughout Israelite history, the high points being David and the Philistine, Goliath. How does Yahweh wage warfare for his people? And it's always through unconventional means. And so, this, of course, prepares us for the way Jesus, the divine warrior — the manifestation of Yahweh on earth as the divine warrior — how does he wage warfare, and how does he conquer the mightiest of his enemies: Satan, sin and death? Right? The three: Satan, sin and death? How does he conquer the mightiest of his enemies? It makes Pharaoh look like a small insignificant opponent compared to Satan, death and sin. And just like Pharaoh was conquered through unconventional warfare means, it's not like the Israelites came up with twelve hundred chariots, so a massive main battle tank of the ancient world — six hundred chariotry of Pharaoh versus twelve hundred of the Israelites. That's not how the victory was secured. It was a mighty act of Yahweh, God's intervention, that a bunch of slaves defeated the most powerful army of the ancient world. David, same thing, he shows up in the field of battle, he's just a shepherd boy with a stick and a couple of stones and a sling, and he defeats the mighty Philistine completely adorned in full battleware, invincible, giant. And Jesus does the same thing. He's going to conquer by being a servant unto death. And boy, is there is a lesson there for us. In the time of Joshua, the conquest was all by God's hand — walking around the city seven times; what is that going to do? This is not warfare; this is worship to Yahweh. And that's how we wage warfare today. So, when Paul says in Ephesians 6, we don't wage warfare through conventional means of flesh and blood but spiritual means. This is not just a New Testament idea. This goes right back to the exodus, Joshua, the rise of David, and then throughout the time of the monarchy. And then, of course, this speaks to us. How do we wage warfare? We don't wage warfare through the sword. We secure God's victory and God's kingdom through spiritual means.

### **Question 6:**

**How does the book of Joshua emphasize God's supernatural power to defeat his enemies?**

#### **Dr. James M. Hamilton**

The book of Joshua emphasizes God's power to defeat his enemies by showing the fulfillment of many of the promises that God made to Abraham. For instance, right at the opening statements of the book, in Joshua 1:3, the Lord says to Joshua:

**Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given ... you (Joshua 1:3).**

And this is reminiscent of the way that the Lord told Abraham to walk through the length and the breadth of the land. And then there's a statement in Deuteronomy 11

where the Lord basically makes that promise to the people, that “Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I will give to you.” And so, there’s this reality in Deuteronomy 7 where the Lord tells Israel that they are going into the land, and there are these seven nations in the land, all greater and stronger than Israel. So, you’ve got this one little nation, Israel, and they’re going to enter this land inhabited by these seven different people groups, all of whom individually outnumber Israel. And Israel is going to conquer them all. So, you have that reality, which comes to pass; this is exactly what happens in the book of Joshua. And then you also have things like what happens at Jericho where, by obeying the Lord’s instructions and encircling the city, the walls of the city fall down, and the people are put to rout. And the point being made in the book of Joshua is the same point that was being made at the exodus, and in many ways it’s the same point made at the anointing of David as king and in the way that God chooses people even down to this day. And that point is that God chooses the weak things of the world and the things that are not, to bring to nothing the things that are... So, at the exodus, you have this one little nation that’s enslaved, and God humbles the superpower of the day, he brings Pharaoh to his knees, and he liberates the people of Israel from Egypt. And then when Samuel goes to anoint one of the sons of Jesse king, Jesse so disregards the possibility that David might be the anointed that he doesn’t even bring him in from the pasture. And all the sons of Jesse pass before Samuel, and Samuel is forced to say, “The Lord hasn’t chosen any of these. Do you have any more sons?” And of course, David is out in the pasture and they send for him. And in the same way today, the Lord is choosing the weak things of the world. And this is what’s happening in the book of Joshua as this one small nation, outnumbered by all her foes, is brought into the land and conquers them all, subdues all the lands.

**Pastor Ornan Cruz, translation**

In the book of Joshua, God fights the battles. God is the one who defends his people. God is the one who fights the enemies. Just looking at the battle of Jericho is enough because this was no ordinary battle. It wasn’t being fought in the common patterns of war. In fact, lots of people who saw the Israelites walk might have thought that they were ridiculous. We, on the other hand, can talk about faith and obedience, and about Joshua who obeyed God and a people that followed God in obedience. In effect, Joshua had to go to the battlefield, and the people had to go to the battlefield, but it was demonstrated on that day, and for the future, that God is the one who gives victory. God is the one who fights for his people, who made the walls fall down, who handed his enemies into the hands of those who saw them as so great and powerful that they thought they couldn’t face them, the ones that, years before, the spies had said, “We are like grasshoppers compared to them.” In 5:13, Joshua has the opportunity to see a sensational scene of a man with a drawn sword. He asks him, “Are you for us or for our enemies?” And the answer is magnificent. He said he had come as a prince of Yahweh to fight. Joshua knelt down and worshiped. He was seeing a revelation of Christ himself in the New Testament. It was being demonstrated that God is the one who fights for his people. In 23:8-11, when Joshua is reminding the people about the things God had done, he’s telling them that there will be such a blessing from God that, “One man of you puts to flight a thousand

[enemies],” because God is with you and, just as he said, he will fight for you. The whole book, from beginning to end is talking about a people who obey, a people who need to follow God, but a God who fights, a God who gives victory.

**Dr. T. J. Betts**

The book of Joshua has a wonderful way of showing God’s power and his giving victory to his people. I think that it’s actually seen before any fighting takes place as they, at least, go into the Promised Land. If you remember, when the spies went to Jericho and they met with Rahab, Rahab says that all of the people in Jericho, their hearts had melted. They were afraid because they had already heard of how God had been giving victory to the children of Israel. So, God’s reputation, in and of itself, was bringing about victory by his own power apart from anything that Israel had done yet. And this also comes to place when the children of Israel cross the Jordan River. When they cross the Jordan River, once again, they get across and the text says that the Canaanites heard of their crossing the Jordan River on dry ground and again their hearts melted. And this is all God’s work before any shot was fired in the Promised Land. And then, of course, I think what’s most clear, and we see this elsewhere, but especially in the aspect of Jericho, that they march around the city several times and then blow their horns and the walls come down. Again, this shows a work of God, a miracle of God, that God, the angel of the Lord himself, has gone before them, is fighting for them, and the Lord gives them victory. And this victory, though, is based upon their obedience to him. And so, when they get to Ai, we realize Achan has sinned against God, and God sees this disobedience, and so they lose at Ai, which tells me that it’s not really Israel that’s winning this victory, but it’s the Lord who is doing this, and as long as they’re obedient, the Lord is giving them victory. When they’re disobedient, he’s not. So, it’s really God’s power that is doing this.

**Question 7:**

**How was Jesus victorious over the enemies of God’s kingdom in the inauguration of God’s kingdom?**

**Dr. D.A. Carson**

Well, first of all, the most crucial victory is in the cross itself so that he defeats Satan. The accuser of the brethren, as it were, cannot come along and say, “Oh God, you can’t possibly put up with that miserable lot. You say you’re so holy and yet you’re having dealings with creeps like them who are idolaters and inconsistent and self-lovers, and they don’t love you with heart and soul and mind and strength, their neighbors as themselves. You really must condemn them all, blot them all out.” But, in fact, Satan is silenced because Christ has paid for the sins of his own people. In that sense, the crucial battle has been fought and won. And that’s why, for example, in Revelation 12, the saints respond to the accuser of the brethren, they overcome him by the blood of the Lamb. They overcome Satan — described metaphorically in Revelation 12 — they overcome him by the blood of the Lamb. And, so, that battle has already been won. But, like Hitler toward the end of World War II, when he could

see that the war was over, he didn't quit. He was filled with fury because he knew his time was short. That's what is said of Satan. So, Satan is more virulent now, and every time the gospel advances, more people are converted, righteousness is established in individual lives, in the local church, in any sort of subculture, that is already an ongoing defeat of Satan and of all those who love darkness. And the ultimate trajectory toward the ultimate victory is when the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ, and he will reign forever. And that's the way the Bible ends up in Revelation 19–22. Yet, at the same time, this is also a victory over evil people who want to undermine the kingdom of God, or overthrow the moral order, or disdain Christ, and so on. The point is that the trajectory has been set in place so that, as Philippians 2 puts it, every knee *will* bow, every tongue *will* confess that Jesus is Lord, and the fundamental victory has been won. That's still got to be worked out in some respects. It's being worked out in the lives of many who do, joyfully, by the power of the Spirit, bend the knee. But everyone will bend the knee on the last day. So, the gospel of the kingdom is already demonstrating its transforming power in overcoming the hosts of darkness, the darkness of the human heart ... in anticipation of what is yet to come.

### **Dr. Constantine Campbell**

God is victorious over his enemies through the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. In the death of Christ, by dealing with human sin and paying the penalty for sin, he has overpowered sin and, therefore, the power that sin might have over us. Once sin is dealt with, then the power of death is conquered because sin and death work together. Sin is kind of like the stinger that death has, and once it stings you with sin, once you sin, then you are subjected to death, and you belong to death. But if you break that stinger, as Jesus did on the cross, then death can no longer hold you. It's like a toothless viper, or a spider whose fangs have been broken off. And so, what follows after the death of Jesus is the resurrection of Jesus, which is the vindication of his right standing with God and that sin has been conquered. And his ascension to God's right hand is described in the New Testament as the final sign that he is victorious over his enemies, not only sin and death, but the authorities, powers and dominions as mentioned, say, in Ephesians 1. They are under his feet now; they're already conquered. Nevertheless, they still exist, and so, at the end of Ephesians in chapter 6, we see that believers do spiritual warfare with them, but we battle with a team that's already lost, and we are just waiting for the final siren to sound, and then the game is over. We already know we're on the winning side.

### **Dr. Glen G. Scorgie**

The final conquests that are necessary for the perfection of God's kingdom remain ahead, but they have begun, and they were decisively inaugurated in the ministry of Jesus Christ. And we get some clue to what the inaugurating assault on the enemies of the kingdom looks like when we consider the text from Isaiah that he chose to speak from in the synagogue in Nazareth when he launched his earthly ministry. One of the decisive enemies of the kingdom of God is the rulers of darkness and the principalities and powers that do not give up their turf without a fight. Jesus launched a massive assault on them. And the New Testament celebrates, really, the



intimidation that the greater strength of Jesus Christ created in the powers of darkness. And what this means to believers is that we are no longer under the dominion of fear, fear of evil spirits, fear of death, fear of the control of the bondage to sin. All of these things were, in the inaugurating ministry of Jesus Christ, assaulted in a decisive way, and began then the dismantling of the structures of injustice and deceit and lies that perpetuate the forces of darkness and their stranglehold on human nature. He spoke truth; he assaulted the gates of hell himself, and then empowers his liberated followers to continue that assault on the road to complete victory.

**Dr. Stephen J. Wellum**

In Jesus' coming, it's very clear that the New Testament says that he inaugurates God's kingdom. God's kingdom is rooted and grounded in the Old Testament. Indeed, it goes all the way back to Adam as a vice-regent who is, as representative of the human race, is to rule over God's creation, and indeed all of us as human beings are to do that. But because of sin, he does not do that. Sin enters the world, which then becomes not only that which is transmitted to all of us, but also in Scripture is described as a power, as a domain. Sin leads to death so that in our lives we ultimately die because we are sinners before God. It means that we are now under God's judgment because of our sin before God. And it also means that, as a result of sin, the ruler of this world, tied to Satan and his realm, is that which we are now under his power and rule. We're part of his kingdom, not the kingdom of God. And as you work through the Old Testament, the Old Testament anticipates the saving reign of God breaking into this world, that God himself, in and through his Messiah, will accomplish that saving reign and defeat the kingdom of Satan. He will defeat the powers of death. He will do that through, ultimately, the payment of sin and our restoration and reconciliation with God. Now, when it comes to the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ now comes as the second Adam. He comes as the Lord himself, fully God, fully man. He is the one who, in his ministry, brings the kingdom to pass, not only in his teaching, but his miracles, but supremely in his cross, where sin then is dealt with first and foremost. The power of sin, the penalty of sin is removed. It's paid for. Death, then, is defeated, evidenced in his glorious resurrection and ascension and pouring out the Spirit. The realm of Satan now over us is now defeated as we are now transferred from Adam to Christ, from the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of the ruler of this air to that of the kingdom of God. And in all these ways — through the life, death, resurrection, ascension, the pouring out of the Spirit, the inauguration of the kingdom, which is now here, yet we await its consummation in the future — he has defeated the powers. He has defeated sin, death, the Evil One, and we are now victorious in Christ.

**Question 8:****How should Christians interpret Old Testament commands for Israel to engage in divinely-sanctioned holy war?****Rev Sherif Gendy, translation**

Asking about how we as Christians should interpret Old Testament passages describing God's command for Israel to engage in holy war is a very important question. In general, I can say that there are two types of commands in Scripture. There are general commands, which are for all people living in any time and place, such as "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," "You shall not murder," "You shall not commit adultery," etc. This type of command is repeated several times in the Old Testament and also repeated and mentioned in the New Testament. But the other type of command is specifically designed for certain people in a certain period of time. The passages in the Old Testament that talk about holy war are the other type of command. These commands are specific to a certain people to accomplish a specific goal in the history of redemption. The commands to launch wars against other peoples in the Old Testament were particular to Israel and were related to a certain period when God was leading the people, through Joshua, to conquer and settle in the land. These commands are not for all people whenever and wherever they are, because they aren't mentioned anymore in either the Old or New Testament. There isn't any other place where God commands his followers to launch this type of war against unbelievers. This doesn't happen again in the Bible. Also, it's important to know that Israel in the Old Testament was a kingdom under the direct authority and sovereignty of God. Israel was implementing God's commands as his representative on earth. Through this role, Israel was executing God's direct mission to launch a holy war against the Canaanites. So, such a mission was specific to the kingdom of Israel under God's sovereignty during a specific period in the history of redemption. We have to keep in mind that God alone has the right to give and take life. He also has the right to use secondary causes to accomplish his purposes and execute his justice. Concerning these wars, God used Israel as a tool in his hand to accomplish his will towards these pagan peoples. These wars were condemnation against them and their behavior for worshiping other gods. So, through it, God was revealing his judgment against them... As I said, such commands were not repeated again to Israel. The patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob didn't possess the land by launching wars against its inhabitants. And after returning back from the exile, Israel restored the land without waging a holy war like the one that took place during Joshua's time. Such wars and commands are not to be repeated. They were specific to a certain period in history in the book of Joshua. And it's crucial to interpret the text within the historical context in which these events took place.

**Rev. Michael J. Glodo**

I think one of the most difficult questions that Christians face when they read the book of Joshua is how they should take the passages commanding Israel to fight holy war. And it's very important to start with a good understanding of what holy war *was* and *wasn't*, but also to understand how radically the new covenant, the fullness of

time, the coming of Christ has changed our response. So, holy war in the Old Testament represents the prosecution of God against unrighteousness and idolatrousness. It is a prefiguration of the final judgment, and it's not because Israel is intrinsically more holy than the Canaanites, but because the Lord has taken them to himself and redeemed them. Now they are to act according to God's purposes, to suppress and eliminate idolatry against God and great moral wickedness that existed among the Canaanites, such as child sacrifice and other things. But when we come to the new covenant, we realize that in the fullness of time, as all things, as the mystery becomes known in the full light of the revelation of the New Testament, we read that while we were yet enemies, Christ died for us. Apart from any action or provision on God's part, we are the Canaanites. But God has then, in Christ, put us to death so that, in fact, we are called to further die to ourselves to live to Christ. And then, we are called to prosecute God's purposes in the world, but as Paul says in Ephesians 6, in Christ, our war is not against flesh and blood, but against the powers and the principalities and the spiritual forces that are at work against God. And so, the way God's holy army prosecutes holy war today is by self-sacrificing, loving those who persecute us, blessing them, loving our enemies, and it is in that way not only that we fulfill the law of Christ but that we win others to Christ. So, we prosecute holy war today by the tools of the gospel, the proclamation of the good news that Christ has died for sinners and that all who would put their faith and trust in Christ can be reconciled to God and no longer be at enmity with God, no longer to be alienated to God, but be reconciled to God. But it has to be through the ethical witness of God's people, the church, living out God's righteousness, and even more, the self-sacrificing love of God's people for those who do not know the Lord, because we can do more for those who do not know the Lord today than Joshua could. Joshua could only carry out God's final judgment, but we can bring the good news to those who are apart from God so that they can belong to the Lord and be part of his people.

**Dr. Dan Lacich**

When Christians look back on the Old Testament, especially looking at things like Joshua and the conquest of the land and God's call to actually go and conquer, we can do one of two things very badly with that passage. One is that we can try to just explain it away and ignore it altogether and say, "Oh, well, that was then and that's really not anything to do with us on any level," or we can become very nationalistic with it and become almost militaristic in our demeanor with people. And I think what we need to really look at with Joshua and the conquest of the land is to understand that was a specific time and place for the nation of Israel to occupy the land at that time. And since the new covenant and the coming of Christ, God's kingdom goes beyond national geographic borders, it goes beyond people groups, and it's a kingdom as Jesus himself said is not "of this world," and we're not wrestling with flesh and blood, but it's a spiritual battle. And so, the weapons of human warfare are just not appropriate for Christians to use on any level when it comes to expanding God's kingdom. And I think we need to expand that, not just to the actual weapons of warfare, but even our demeanor of us against them, and we're going to conquer them in some other way. It's really about the expansion of God's kingdom through the

gospel, through the good news of what Christ has done for us, as opposed to us conquering someone else.

### **Question 9:**

**How will Jesus' victory over his enemies and deliverance of his followers be complete when he returns?**

#### **Rev. Michael J. Glodo**

When Jesus returns, we see the completion of his victory, and we see the benefits that his followers gain at that time. The New Testament picture is really one that begins even as early as Psalm 2 where the nations conspire against the Lord and his Anointed One, but blessed are those who take refuge in the son, who kiss the son, but over his enemies he will rule with a rod of iron. And so, at the end of the New Testament, particularly in the book of Revelation, we see the risen Christ, the one who was dead but now is alive forevermore. He's the slain and standing Lamb next to the Father in Revelation 5, and his victory means the complete conquest of all the enemies of God's people and his. But that victory will be achieved in two ways: through gospel conquest, meaning gathering all those for whom he died to himself, and also the utter defeat and eternal punishment of those who remain opposed to him at his coming. And as we live as Christians, looking for that victory to be completed, we have to remember we don't always know the difference. In fact, we never know for sure the difference between those whom Christ will conquer through the gospel versus those who he will conquer with the rod of iron, which is why our battle is not against flesh and blood but against dark forces and why we preach the gospel instead of bear the sword for the name of Christ.

#### **Dr. Sean McDonough**

When we think about Jesus coming again and winning his final victory, we don't want to think simply in terms of Jesus overwhelming his enemies by what the French would call *force majeure* or just raw exercise of power. In Revelation, it talks about the sword coming out of Jesus' mouth, and that is surely the sword of the Word, the sword of justice, that final judgment is as much about exposure as anything else. And likewise for the saints, particularly in the New Testament context, vindication is one of the chief themes. They've gone on believing in Jesus and gone on turning the other cheek and loving your enemies and doing all these other things while the world says this is complete foolishness. So, at the judgment, all things are made clear, all things become transparent, the truth will out, and that will be good news for the saints and bad news for the wicked whose wickedness consists precisely in resisting Jesus and his message.

#### **Dr. Glen G. Scorgie**

I think we have every right to dream of that day when the kingdom of God is fulfilled in its entirety, and our experience of life, restored and renewed life, will be what God intended for us. In many ways, the journey back to the completion of God's perfected

kingdom is a journey back to Eden, to linking back to what we lost in the Fall and perhaps making it, not only equal to that in a restored way, but better than ever. Jesus came to save us from sin, and that full restoration will involve a complete liberation from the guilt of sin, which we experience by justification now, deliverance from the power of sin, which we will continue to struggle with to some degree in this life, and most of all, it will involve a complete deliverance from all the consequences of sin, which is a category that encompasses not just death but all the dysfunction, all the pain, all the woundedness that is our human plight in this life flawed by sin. So, what we look forward to is a comprehensive restoration project, a complete salvation from the guilt, the power, and the comprehensive consequences of sin — back to Eden through Jesus Christ.

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# The Book of Joshua

LESSON  
THREE

## TRIBAL INHERITANCES



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# Contents

<b>I. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II. Initial Boundaries .....</b>	<b>2</b>
A. Structure and Content	2
1. Boundaries in Cisjordan	3
2. Boundaries in Transjordan	3
B. Original Meaning	4
1. Divine Authority	4
2. God's Covenant	4
3. Standard of Moses's Law	5
4. God's Supernatural Power	5
5. All Israel	6
<b>III. Specific Allotments .....</b>	<b>6</b>
A. Structure and Content	6
1. Opening Summary	8
2. Closing Summary	8
3. Judah	8
4. Ephraim & Manasseh	9
5. Minor Tribes	10
6. Levi	10
B. Original Meaning	10
1. Divine Authority	11
2. God's Covenant	11
3. Standard of Moses's Law	12
4. God's Supernatural Power	12
5. All Israel	13
<b>IV. National Unity .....</b>	<b>13</b>
A. Structure and Content	14
1. Construction of Altar	14
2. Threat of War	14
3. Confrontation	14
4. Cessation of Threat	15
5. Naming of Altar	15
B. Original Meaning	15
1. Divine Authority	15
2. God's Covenant	16
3. Standard of Moses's Law	16
4. God's Supernatural Power	16
5. All Israel	17
<b>V. Christian Application .....</b>	<b>17</b>
A. Inauguration	17
B. Continuation	18
C. Consummation	19
<b>VI. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>21</b>

# The Book of Joshua

## Lesson Three

### Tribal Inheritances

#### INTRODUCTION

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When the head of a large family business grew old, he determined that it was time for his five sons to take over. So, the father gathered his sons in the central office, handed each of them legal shares in the company and laid it on the line. “Each of you now owns a part of the business,” he said. “And all of you have to take your places and work together as never before.”

In many ways, Joshua did much the same with the tribes of Israel when he grew old. He knew that it was time for them to move forward without him. So, he gave each of the tribes inheritances in the Promised Land, and called for them to work together as never before.

This is the third lesson in our series on *The Book of Joshua*, and in this lesson we’ll look at Israel’s “Tribal Inheritances.” We’ll see how the second major division of Joshua called the people of Israel to live together as heirs of the Promised Land.

In earlier lessons, we summarized the original meaning of the book of Joshua in this way:

**The book of Joshua was written about Israel’s victorious conquest, tribal inheritances and covenant loyalty in Joshua’s day to address similar challenges facing later generations.**

Just as in Joshua’s day, the original audience faced the challenges of defeating their enemies, securing their tribal inheritances and renewing their covenant loyalty to God. So, our author wrote his book to guide his original audience in each of these areas.

To accomplish this purpose, our book unfolds in three major divisions: Israel’s victorious conquest in chapters 1–12, Israel’s tribal inheritances in chapters 13–22, and Israel’s covenant loyalty in chapters 23, 24. In this lesson, we’ll examine the second major division of our book, the tribal inheritances allotted to Israel.

On a large scale, this division of Joshua consists of three main steps. It begins with the initial boundaries of Israel’s inheritance in 13:1-14. It then moves to the specific allotments of inheritance given to each of Israel’s tribes in 13:15–21:45. And it closes with a narrative that focuses on Israel’s national unity in the days of Joshua in 22:1-34.

Following this outline, we’ll explore Israel’s tribal inheritances by looking at each of these three steps. Then we’ll close with some reflections on the Christian Application of this portion of our book. Let’s begin with the first step: the initial boundaries of Israel’s inheritance.

## INITIAL BOUNDARIES

---

As we saw in a previous lesson, the author of Joshua understood that Israel had inherited large regions of the land promised to Joshua. And this inheritance was a special part of God's ongoing call for humanity to have dominion over the earth. But as we're about to see, our author also recognized that, in the days of Joshua, Israel didn't receive all of the lands promised to their patriarch Abraham. Rather, God only gave Israel a foothold, a strong presence in a portion of it. But from our author's point of view, it was essential that every generation of Israel identify and secure the lands that were within those initial sacred boundaries.

We'll look at two dimensions of this record of Israel's initial boundaries. First, we'll note its basic structure and content, and second, we'll turn to the original meaning of this portion of our book. Consider first its structure and content.

### STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

This section of Joshua divides into two episodes. First, 13:1-7 focuses on the boundaries of Israel's land in Cisjordan, the land of Canaan west of the Jordan River. And second, 13:8-14 gives attention to the boundaries of Israel's land in Transjordan, the territories east of the Jordan River.

As we approach this part of Joshua, we need to keep in mind a bit of background on the boundaries of Israel's inheritance. In Genesis 15:18-21, God promised Abraham's descendants a land that would extend to the west from "the Wadi of Egypt." This wadi, or "river" or "brook," as it may be translated, was either an eastern branch of the Nile that no longer exists, or Wadi El-Arish that still exists east of the Nile today. And toward the northeast, Abraham's land would reach as far as "the great river, the river Euphrates." From there, Israel would spread the blessings of God to the ends of the earth. But in reality, Israel's lands didn't reach these boundaries until the time of David's kingdom. In Joshua's time, God granted Israel only a portion, a foretaste of these territories on both sides of the Jordan. But as our book indicates, settling securely in these lands was a crucial first step for Israel.

**Beginning with Abraham, God promised a people would come, and that people would be a blessing to the earth, would have important roles to play. But one of the things, also, would be that he'd give them a land. That's key to who the Israelites were. They were a people who, when they finally left Egypt and got that land, understood that they didn't deserve it. God had paved the way for them to get a place on the planet that they hadn't earned, that they didn't have any right to, but that he gave them by his own promise and his certain plan to make it happen.**

— Dr. Douglas Stuart

## Boundaries in Cisjordan

The first episode on the boundaries in Cisjordan builds on the list of territories that Joshua had conquered in chapter 12. It opens in 13:1 with the fact that Joshua was “old and advanced in years,” and that “there remain[ed] yet very much land to possess.” The land that remained was in the region of the Philistines and in the northern regions of Canaan. In 13:6, God promised, “I myself will drive [the inhabitants] out.” So, in verse 7, God commanded Joshua to go ahead and treat all of Canaan as Israel’s inheritance.

## Boundaries in Transjordan

In the second episode, in 13:8-14, our author completed his sketch of Israel’s initial inheritance by describing the outer boundaries in Transjordan — the lands to the east of the Jordan. Our author began in 13:8 with the note that Moses had granted these territories as Israel’s inheritance before he died.

Israel’s initial tribal inheritances east of the Jordan extended to the south as far as Moab and to the north as far as Mount Hermon. But our author noted in 13:13 that the Israelites had not yet driven out some groups, like “the Geshurites or the Maacathites.” Still, Moses had designated the entire region as Israel’s inheritance by the time of Joshua. And to be as comprehensive as possible, our author also added a parenthetical note in 13:14. He explained that the Levites received an inheritance, but theirs was “the offerings by fire to the Lord,” rather than land.

**The question of geography in Joshua is very important, and the boundaries of the land is a very important question, especially related to mountains... And what they do, they create a boundary of what the Holy Land will be, and it becomes this marker, this waypoint, if you will. The northern point of Israel is Mount Hermon, traditionally, and then the eastern boundaries of Israel are created by the mountains, especially of Edom in the south, and then the highlands of Moab, the mountains, the plateau, the hill country, if you will, of Moab and Bashan. So, all across what is modern-day Jordan — all the way, northern Jordan to southern Jordan — that creates the eastern boundaries of the land.**

— Dr. Tom Petter

With the basic structure and content of the initial boundaries of Israel’s inheritance in mind, we’re in a position to ask about the original meaning of these verses. Why did our author begin this division of his book with a sketch of Israel’s inheritance at this stage in history?

## ORIGINAL MEANING

To answer this question, we must remember that in the days of the judges, the monarchy and the Babylonian exile, Israel struggled to gain and maintain control over the territories that God had granted them. Conflicts among Israel's tribes, trouble from other peoples within these lands, attacks by desert tribes, and eventually catastrophic invasions by great empires like Egypt, Assyria and Babylon, repeatedly diminished Israel's hold on the land that God had promised to Abraham.

By reminding his audience of the extent of these territories, our author pointed out how important it was for them to secure control over these lands. It was only then that Israel could move toward gaining more lands and spreading God's blessings to all the nations of the world.

To convince his audience that the initial boundaries of Israel's inheritance were never to be forgotten, our author wove the five themes he'd highlighted earlier in his book into these chapters as well.

## Divine Authority

In the first place, he pointed out how divine authority had established Israel's inheritance. He began his focus on Cisjordan in 13:1 with the words: "the Lord said to [Joshua]." And in 13:6, he reported that God told Joshua to "allot the land to Israel ... as I have commanded you." Beyond this, divine authority also established the borders of Israel's lands in Transjordan. In 13:8 we read that these were the lands that "Moses the servant of the Lord gave them."

The author of Joshua knew how easy it was for Israel to settle for occupying only a portion of these territories. So, he made it clear that if later generations lost their devotion to possessing the full extent of these lands, they would be turning against the authority of God and his authoritative human representatives.

## God's Covenant

In the second place, the author of Joshua noted that the initial boundaries of Israel's lands were secured by God's covenant with Israel. Regarding Cisjordan, God explained in 13:6 that all of Canaan belonged to Israel as an "inheritance," or "*nachalah*" (נַחֲלָה) in Hebrew. As we noted in earlier lessons, these territories were called Israel's inheritance because, in his covenant with Abraham, God promised them as an enduring possession for Israel. And God confirmed this promise in his covenant in Moses at Mount Sinai. In much the same way, in 13:8, Transjordan is also called Israel's inheritance.

By drawing attention to God's covenant in this way, our author's message was unmistakable. Every generation of Israel should acknowledge that Israel's possession and control of these lands was established by God's sacred covenant with their ancestors.

**In the book of Genesis, when God establishes a covenant relationship with Abraham, he promises him, really, four things. He promises him many descendants — they'll number like the stars in the sky, the sand on the seashore. He promises that he's going to protect them — that he's going to be their God, that he'll be with them, that he'll prosper them. He also promises that, of course, they'll become a blessing to all nations, a messianic promise that the Messiah will come through the Jewish people, the Hebrews. But fourthly, he promises that the people of God in the Old Testament will have a land of possession, the land of Canaan... And it's not only a general promise to the people of Israel, but it's specific to the tribes that each of them within the family of God, so to speak, have a particular inheritance.**

**— Rev. Kevin Labby**

### **Standard of Moses' Law**

In the third place, the account of Israel's initial boundaries also stressed that they accorded with the standard of Moses' law. For example, in the opening of the section on Cisjordan, God said in 13:1, "there remains yet very much land to possess." This wasn't a new revelation. It was based on areas that Moses had directed Israel to possess in passages like Deuteronomy 20:16, 17. In much the same way, when it came to Transjordan, 13:8 refers to "their inheritance, which Moses gave them." The law of Moses granted possession of these lands across the Jordan in passages like Numbers 32:33-42 and Deuteronomy 3:8-17.

The author of Joshua drew attention to the law of Moses to address anyone in his audience who questioned their need to possess Israel's initial tribal inheritances. Moses himself had commanded Israel to take control of these territories.

### **God's Supernatural Power**

In the fourth place, as our author dealt with the initial boundaries of Israel's territories, he also drew attention to God's supernatural power. In the section dealing with Cisjordan, God said, in 13:6, "I myself will drive [the remaining Canaanites] out from before the people of Israel." And in the episode dealing with Transjordan, he noted that possession of these lands resulted from supernatural victories that God had granted Moses. In 13:10, he referred to the well-known miraculous victory over "Sihon king of the Amorites." And in verse 12, he recalled the miraculous victory over "Og in Bashan."

Both of these episodes indicated to the original audience that they must put their hope in divine intervention on their behalf. Only then could they realistically hope to gain and hold their inheritance in Cisjordan and Transjordan.

## All Israel

In the fifth place, the record of Israel's initial boundaries also focused on the participation of all Israel. Joshua 13:7 notes that Cisjordan was to be divided among "the nine tribes and half the tribe of Manasseh." Joshua 13:8 mentions that Transjordan was the inheritance of "the other half of the tribe of Manasseh, the Reubenites and the Gadites." To highlight the theme of all Israel even further, 13:14 also mentions the special inheritance of the tribe of Levi.

As he stressed time and again, our author made it clear to his original audience that the tribes of Israel must stand together. The unity of the people of God was essential to establishing their presence throughout the initial boundaries on both sides of the Jordan.

Having seen the initial boundaries of Israel's tribal inheritances, we should turn to our second main topic in this lesson: the specific allotments of inheritances to each tribe. How were these lands apportioned?

## SPECIFIC ALLOTMENTS

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In this part of his book, our author went beyond identifying Israel's boundaries and focused on the particular portions assigned to specific tribes. As we're about to see, these allotments were problematic because some tribes received larger and better inheritances than others. Not surprisingly, the books of Judges, Samuel and Kings tell us that these disparities led to all kinds of distrust, abuse, division, even war among the tribes. To help his original audience deal with these kinds of troubles, our author called for them to respect the specific tribal allotments that God had established in the days of Joshua.

We'll look at our author's presentation of the specific allotments of Israel's inheritance in our usual way. First, we'll examine its basic structure and content, and second, we'll explore its original meaning. Let's turn first to the structure and content of this part of Joshua.

## STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

The record of Israel's specific tribal allotments, in 13:15–21:45, can be confusing. It contains long lists of peoples, regions, cities, towns and villages, interspersed with a number of brief stories and quick asides. To grasp the main ideas in all of this variety, it helps to see that it divides into two main parts: the tribal allotments Moses directed in Transjordan, in 13:15-33, and a much larger record of the tribal allotments that Joshua directed in Cisjordan in 14:1–21:45.

The record of tribal allotments in Transjordan is rather short. It begins with the tribe of Reuben in 13:15-23. The tribe of Gad appears in verses 24-28. And the half-tribe of Manasseh's allotment in Transjordan follows in verses 29-31. Then, our author closed

this section, as he did the preceding section, by mentioning the special inheritance of the tribe of Levi in verses 32, 33.

**Because the tribe of Levi was chosen as the tribe that served and executed the service of the priesthood for the entire nation of Israel, the tribe did not receive any land inheritance. It's said in Joshua 13 that *God* was their inheritance. Because of this, the tribe of Levi was excluded from the allotments among the twelve tribes of Israel, and the portion the tribe of Levi received was the offerings that were made by the Israelites — the gifts and tithes given by the entire nation of Israel.**

**— Rev. Henryk Turkanik, translation**

In these verses, the author of Joshua carefully delineated which portions of lands to the east of the Jordan were allotted to Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. From a large-scale perspective, these allotments may seem clear enough, but for these tribes, the divisions were not as straightforward. Overlapping territories and disagreements over borders made our author explain in some detail to whom specific regions, and even towns and villages, belonged.

**When modern Christians read chapters 13–22 in the book of Joshua, they encounter something that does not really capture our imagination, and that is these long lists of boundaries for this tribe and that tribe, and this tribe had these cities and those tribes had those cities, and so on and so on it goes. In fact, sometimes when people read these as modern people, they look at it and say, “What in the world does this have to do with religion?” or “What’s this have to do with faith at all?” Well, in the original setting of the book of Joshua, it had a great deal to do with the faith of Israel and their walk with God as individual tribes and as a unified people, because we have to remember that God, as the king, had given or allocated places in the world where each of the twelve tribes of Israel were to exist. It was to be their permanent inheritance, something that they were to hold onto and was to actually be the orientation, their homeland, their piece of the homeland for the entire nation of Israel.**

**— Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.**

Following this, our author gave a much longer record of the specific tribal allotments Joshua made in Cisjordan. These materials divide into six main sections.



## Opening Summary

They begin in 14:1-5 with a brief opening summary of Joshua's actions and how they reflected what Moses had already done in Transjordan. This section also notes more than once that Joshua's assignments of inheritances in Cisjordan were in accordance with the will of God.

## Closing Summary

In balance with this first portion, the record of allotments in Cisjordan ends with a closing summary in 21:43-45. Our author explained in 21:43 that all the tribes "took possession of [their lands], and they settled there." And to indicate to his audience how ideal the situation was, our author closed this entire section in verse 45 with the declaration that "Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass."

**In Joshua 13–22, we find the realization of God's covenant promises to Israel, because in those chapters we find the land apportionment to the various of the twelve tribes. And particularly noteworthy is 21:45, that not one of God's promises had failed, pointing the reader back to what God had promised to Abraham, to give him a place, to make him a people, and to be present among his people. And when the land is fully apportioned, we now see Israel resting in the Promised Land that God had promised Abraham long ago, starting back in Genesis 12.**

— Rev. Michael J. Glodo

## Judah

Four main sections stand between these two bookends. They begin with Judah, Israel's most prominent tribe, in 14:6–15:63. According to these verses, Judah received a very large inheritance, stretching southward to the Negev and toward the boundary of Edom. To the west, the border reached the land of Philistia and extended along the coast of the Mediterranean as far as the Wadi of Egypt. It reached northward along the Mediterranean coast slightly north of Jerusalem — or "Jebus" as it was called at the time — and to the east as far as the Dead Sea.

It's understandable why our author placed Judah's allotment first in this list and highlighted how much Judah had received. According to Genesis 49:8-12, Judah was destined to be the royal tribe of Israel. Our author highlighted the honor given to Judah, first, by providing a short narrative about the lands given to the prominent Judahite warrior, Caleb. Then, he went on to mention by name some 126 towns and villages in Judah's territory — far more than he listed for any other tribe.

## Ephraim & Manasseh

After the record of Judah's southern allotment in Cisjordan, we find a second lengthy record, the prominent allotments given to the tribes of Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh in chapters 16, 17.

Ephraim and Manasseh received a great deal of land in the northern regions of Canaan. Their allotment extended from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, with Ephraim south of Manasseh. These territories were among the most fertile in all of the Promised Land. In addition to this, you'll recall that half of the tribe of Manasseh had already been given land to the east of the Jordan.

It's no wonder that these tribes received the honor of possessing such a large and rich portion of Israel's inheritance. As Genesis 48, 49 explain, Ephraim and Manasseh were Joseph's sons. And Joseph was greatly honored because he was so faithful to God in Egypt. He replaced Reuben as Jacob's firstborn and received the firstborn's double inheritance through his two sons.

**So, Ephraim and Manasseh are Joseph's sons. They're not sons of Jacob — Jacob being the man who got his name changed to Israel — and Jacob had these twelve sons. One of them, Joseph, was sold as a slave in Egypt. And then another, Levi, he was sort of withdrawn from the count of the twelve when the Lord decided to take for himself the tribe of Levi instead of all the firstborn of the people of Israel... And then the blessing of Jacob, he went to bless the sons of Joseph, and he articulated his blessing over Ephraim and Manasseh, and it's as though those two take the place in the numbering of Levi and Joseph. And so, when they go to divide up the land, apportion the land among the twelve tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh each receive an allotment of land, a tribal inheritance... And then, Joseph is represented in his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.**

— Dr. James M. Hamilton

Chapter 16 begins with a brief overview of all of Joseph's lands in Cisjordan, and then gives specific details about the tribe of Ephraim. Following this, in chapter 17, the narrative moves to the tribe of Manasseh, including the story of Zelophehad's daughters' land inheritance from Numbers 27. And this section concludes with Joshua's explanation of why Ephraim and Manasseh received more land due to their large numbers.

The prominence given to the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh is striking because these tribes caused all sorts of troubles by the time our book was written. But our author indicated that, despite this history, Israel should acknowledge how God had honored the tribes of Joseph.

## Minor Tribes

After dealing with the land allotments to the prominent tribes of Judah, Ephraim and Manasseh, our author turned to the minor tribes in chapters 18, 19. He began in 18:1-10 with a narrative of how Joshua called for representatives of each tribe to survey these lands. And he closed in 19:49-51 with a story indicating that the tribes approved of these arrangements because they gave Joshua his own special family inheritance.

Between these opening and closing narratives, our author recorded the allotments for Israel's minor tribes of Benjamin, Simeon, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan. Although these tribes received inheritances, they didn't receive nearly as much as Judah, Ephraim and Manasseh. And, in later times, these lesser tribes had difficulties maintaining their lands. Our author himself mentioned in 19:9 that the inheritance of Simeon was actually "in the midst of Judah's inheritance," a fact that eventually led to the assimilation of Simeon into Judah. And he also noted in 19:47 that "the territory of the people of Dan was lost to them" — a story we read in Judges 18. Knowing that these and other instabilities troubled the minor tribes, our author wrote to insure that his audience acknowledged these allotments.

## Levi

Joshua's allotments in Cisjordan also include a record of the tribe of Levi in chapters 20, 21. The author of Joshua began his record of the tribe of Levi by naming the cities of refuge in 20:1-9. According to Exodus 21:12-14 and Deuteronomy 19:1-13, these cities offered protection for those who committed unintentional homicide until Israel's courts could determine their guilt or innocence. Following this, in chapter 21, our author listed the Levitical cities in general, following Moses' instructions in Numbers 35:6-34.

The cities of refuge and other Levitical cities were scattered throughout the territories of other tribes in the land of Israel. This made it possible for the Levites to lead every tribe in God's service. Unfortunately, these allotments were easily forgotten in times of trouble. But the author of Joshua insisted that his audience must remember them because the service of the Levites was so crucial to the well-being of the nation.

With the structure and content of these specific tribal allotments in mind, we should briefly summarize the original meaning of these chapters.

## ORIGINAL MEANING

Modern audiences often have difficulty appreciating the geographical details that the author of Joshua included in these chapters. But his call wasn't just for Israel to secure their initial national inheritance. He also called them to recognize the specific status and differences God had established for each tribe so that they could move forward in furthering the spread of God's kingdom.

In his usual style, our author wove his five recurring themes into his record of Israel's specific tribal allotments.

## Divine Authority

In the first place, he stressed the divine authority that directed the distribution of lands among the tribes. In his record of allotments in Transjordan, our author remarked four times — in 13:8, 15, 24 and 29 — that these were the divisions of lands that Moses, God's divinely-authorized leader, had given them.

Our author also indicated the divine authority behind the tribal allotments in Cisjordan. In his opening summary, in 14:1, he wrote that “Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun and the heads of ... the tribes” established the divisions of the land. He made the same point in his record of Ephraim and Manasseh in 17:4. And we see this again in his discussion of the minor tribes in 19:51, and in his treatment of the tribe of Levi in 21:1.

In addition to this, our author introduced the inheritance of the tribe of Levi in 20:1 in his customary way, saying, “Then the Lord said to Joshua...” The implications for anyone in the original audience were clear enough. Dissatisfaction with these specific tribal allotments amounted to dissatisfaction with what God had directed.

## God's Covenant

In the second place, as the author of Joshua dealt with Israel's specific tribal allotments, he also emphasized that these divisions were based on God's covenant. The author repeatedly referred to the portions of land allotted to the tribes as their “inheritance,” using the Hebrew word, *nachalah* (נַחֲלָה). As we mentioned before, this term was closely tied to God's covenants with Abraham and Moses. In 13:32, he called the Transjordan lands Israel's “inheritances.” In verse 33, he identified the Levites' special portion as their “inheritance.” In his opening summary of allotments in Cisjordan, he used the term “inheritance” in 14:1, 2 and 3. He also spoke of Judah's land as an “inheritance” in 14:9, 13, and 15:20. He did the same with Ephraim and Manasseh in 16:4 and seven more times. And he called the minor tribes' allotments an “inheritance” some seventeen times. And in his last account of the tribe of Levi, in 21:3, he spoke of how each tribe gave towns and pasturelands to the Levites from their “inheritance.” Finally, in his closing summary of this section, in 21:43, our author wrote that God had given Israel, “all the land that he swore to give to their fathers.” All of these references made it clear that these specific tribal allotments were rooted in God's covenant. And if anyone neglected them, they neglected the sacred promise of God to his people as their covenant Lord.

## Standard of Moses' Law

In the third place, in his report of Israel's specific tribal allotments, the author of Joshua also stressed obedience to the standard of Moses' law. This emphasis is most clearly seen in his treatment of Cisjordan. His opening summary states, in 14:2, that Joshua acted "as the Lord had commanded by the hand of Moses." And 14:5 adds that the Israelites divided the land "as the Lord commanded Moses." In 17:4, Zelophehad's daughters appealed to what "the Lord commanded Moses." The account of the tribe of Levi mentions in 20:2 that Israel was to follow what God had spoken to them "through Moses." And, according to the closing summary, in 21:2, 8, cities were assigned to the tribe of Levi as "commanded through Moses."

Our author's appeal to the standard of Moses' law in these chapters called all generations of Israel to observe these divisions of the land. To violate them was to bring the curses of God on his people. To observe them was to bring his blessings.

## God's Supernatural Power

In the fourth place, these chapters also acknowledge that Israel's specific tribal allotments were confirmed by God's supernatural power. The record of allocations in Transjordan mentions the miraculous defeat of King Sihon in 13:10, 27. And we read of Balaam's killing in 13:22, and of the victory over Og in Bashan in 13:31. All of these events recalled God's supernatural activity in Transjordan.

In addition, our author's record of allotments in Cisjordan repeatedly refers to casting lots to indicate God's supernatural involvement. As passages like Numbers 36:2 and Proverbs 16:33 explain, casting lots was one of the ways God supernaturally revealed his will to Israel. The opening summary of Cisjordan mentions casting lots in 14:2. And casting lots appears in the allotments to the minor tribes some eleven times. Israel also cast lots for the inheritance of the tribe of Levi in 21:4, 10.

Our author's purpose for these repeated notices of God's supernatural involvement is not difficult to discern. Members of the original audience may have been tempted to deviate from these tribal allotments. But time and again our author demonstrated that these allotments were not to be violated because God himself established them.

**It is interesting in Joshua that they actually cast lots to see who got what land, and I think this shows that it was in God's hands, that there wasn't going to be any inequality, even with Joshua choosing who gets what, but it's God's giving this to them. And by casting lots it is pointing to the significance that, again, this is God and his people, and God's giving this to his people in fairness. And there is this idea, I think, that needs to be understood, that God will uphold the property rights of these people, and inheritance is very important for them. And it's interesting also that this land will not go... no one can lose this land *forever*, that if they even sell off their land there comes a**

point where there's a Jubilee where the land has to be returned. And so, all of this is tied to the fact that this is their inheritance from God, that this is their right given by God, and God is upholding these boundaries and that no one, not even a king, can come along and say, "This isn't your land." Kings tried to, but not by law, they couldn't do that because it was God's gift to them and their inheritance from him as his people.

— Dr. T. J. Betts

## All Israel

In the fifth place, like earlier chapters in the book, these chapters on Israel's specific tribal allotments also stress the inclusion of all Israel. We can see this emphasis in the way the record of allotments in Transjordan specifies lands for each tribe to the east of the Jordan. The record of allotments in Cisjordan does the same. It not only reports what was given to the tribes of Judah, Ephraim and Manasseh, but also what was given to the minor tribes. And beyond this, it even specifies the cities devoted to the tribe of Levi.

Our author's detailed attention to *all* of the tribes of Israel reinforced his firm belief that *all* Israel must reside in the Promised Land. By the time our book was written, some tribes had been absorbed by others. Other tribes had lost territories to enemies here and there. And by the time the Assyrians destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel and the Babylonians conquered Judah, only a remnant of the people of God remained in their tribal inheritances. But our author insisted on an ideal for which every Israelite should strive. All of Israel was to have its rightful portion of the Promised Land.

We've examined how the book of Joshua deals with Israel's tribal inheritances by reviewing the initial boundaries of their inheritance and the specific allotments to particular tribes. Now, let's turn to the third major step in our lesson: Israel's national unity.

## NATIONAL UNITY

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Time and again through the centuries the tribes of Israel divided and turned against each other. And our author knew that Israel could not move forward in expanding God's kingdom unless the tribes stood together as one people. To address this issue, our author closed this division of his book with a time when severe conflict threatened the national unity of Israel in Joshua's day.

As we've seen a number of times, the book of Joshua repeatedly draws attention to a major, natural divide that existed between the tribes of Israel in Transjordan and Cisjordan. This geographical division was problematic in Joshua's day because it nearly led to a war between the tribes on either side of the Jordan. So, as our author closed the

second division on Israel's tribal inheritances, he recalled how Joshua led the tribes in Transjordan and Cisjordan to remain united. These events illustrated how his original audience should resolve similar tensions in their own day.

We'll follow our same pattern as we explore Israel's national unity by looking first at the structure and content of this section, and then at its original meaning. Consider first the structure and content of this chapter.

## **STRUCTURE AND CONTENT**

The account of Israel's national unity in chapter 22 is a rather straightforward narrative that unfolds in five main steps. It begins in verses 1-10 with the dramatic problem of the construction of an altar by the tribes of Transjordan.

### **Construction of Altar**

After Israel's victories in Cisjordan, Joshua sent the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh back to their inheritances east of the Jordan. He warned them to remain faithful to God. As they travelled, the Transjordan tribes built a large, imposing altar near the Jordan River. When the tribes of Cisjordan heard about this, they assumed the altar had been erected as a substitute for the Lord's altar at the Tabernacle of Moses.

### **Threat of War**

The tension of the narrative increases in verses 11-14 with the rise of the threat of war. Fearful that the altar erected by the Transjordan tribes would bring God's anger on all of Israel, the Cisjordan tribes made plans to attack. But, in an attempt to avoid war, they first sent a delegation of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, and ten chief men to confront the tribes of Transjordan.

### **Confrontation**

The lengthy turning point of our story, in verses 15-31, reports the confrontation between this delegation and the Transjordan tribes. The delegation warned that the newly-constructed altar violated God's command to sacrifice only at the Tabernacle. But the leaders from Transjordan passionately explained that they had not built their altar for sacrifice. Rather, it was a symbol of their unity with the other tribes because they feared that the other tribes would reject them from the nation. In response, the delegation rejoiced because the Transjordan tribes had not been unfaithful to the Lord.



## Cessation of the Threat

The falling action of the narrative appears in verses 32, 33 with the cessation of the threat of war. The delegation reported on what they had learned, and the tribes in Cisjordan praised God and immediately stopped speaking of war.

## Naming of Altar

Then the final resolution of the dramatic tension of the story appears in verse 34 with the naming of the altar. The Transjordan tribes demonstrated their intentions by naming their altar at the Jordan, “Witness.” As they explained, “[I]t is a witness between us that the Lord is God.” By doing this, the Transjordan tribes confirmed their honorable motives, their intentions to sacrifice only at the Tabernacle and their commitment to the national unity of Israel.

With the basic structure and content of this narrative about Israel’s national unity in mind, we should make a few comments on its original meaning.

## ORIGINAL MEANING

It isn’t difficult to see why our author closed this division of his book with the narrative of chapter 22. This story explains how the tribes were able to maintain their unity, even in the face of tremendous potential for conflict. The tribes of Cisjordan rightly prepared to punish the tribes of Transjordan for what they thought was flagrant rebellion against God. But they wisely investigated the situation and gladly rejoiced in their national unity in the worship of God. These events charted a course for the original audience to follow whenever similar conflicts arose among the tribes of Israel.

We can see that our author designed his narrative about national unity to guide future generations by noting the same five themes we’ve seen many times in his book.

## Divine Authority

In the first place, the theme of divine authority appears in the construction of an altar. In 22:1, we learn that it was Joshua, God’s ordained leader, who called for the tribes of Transjordan to return to their allotted lands. And more than this, in the rise of the threat of war we see in verse 13 that the divinely-ordained authority, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest led the delegation from Cisjordan.

Our author drew attention to Joshua and Phinehas to shape his audience’s outlooks on this story. They were not to treat this as a record of irrelevant events in the past. Instead, the participation of divinely-ordained authorities called them to apply these events appropriately to uphold national unity in their own day.



## God's Covenant

In the second place, the story of national unity in chapter 22 also touches on God's covenant. This theme comes to the foreground especially in the confrontation between the delegation from Cisjordan and the tribes of Transjordan. As we read in verses 25, 27, the Transjordan tribes didn't want the other tribes to say, "You have no portion in the Lord." The word "portion" translates the Hebrew term *cheleq* (חֵלֶק). And, as passages like Joshua 18:7 and 19:9 illustrate, our author closely connected *cheleq* (חֵלֶק) with the word "inheritance," or *nachalah* (נַחֲלָה). As we've seen a number of times in this series, the term "inheritance" was commonly associated with God's covenants with Abraham and Moses. So, the Transjordan tribes wanted to ensure that the tribes west of the Jordan treated them as full heirs of the covenant promises given to their ancestors.

The author of Joshua drew attention to these matters to impress his call for national unity on his original audience. He insisted that his original audience must never lose sight of the fact that all the tribes of Israel — north, south, east and west — had a portion in the Promised Land that was rooted in God's covenant with Israel.

## Standard of Moses' Law

In the third place, our author's account of Israel's national unity also highlights the standard of Moses' law. In the opening step of the narrative, Joshua warned the tribes of Transjordan, in 22:5, "[B]e very careful to observe the commandment and the law that Moses ... commanded you." In the confrontation between the tribes, the delegation from Cisjordan warned in verse 19, "[D]o not rebel against the Lord or make us as rebels by building for yourselves an altar." To do so was to violate Moses' law. And in verse 29, the tribes of Transjordan affirmed the standard of Moses' law when they exclaimed, "Far be it from us that we should rebel against the Lord."

Our author's focus on the law of Moses raised a crucial qualification for the pursuit of national unity. As important as it was for his audience to seek the unity of the nation, they were to do so only in accordance with the regulations of Moses' law.

## God's Supernatural Power

In the fourth place, the narrative of national unity also draws attention to God's supernatural power. This theme appears especially in the confrontation between the delegation from Cisjordan and the tribes of Transjordan. In verse 17, the delegation warned of God's power to curse them by reminding the Transjordan tribes that "there came a plague upon the congregation of the Lord" when Israel sinned at Peor. And by contrast, once Phinehas heard the Transjordan tribes' explanation, he acknowledged the supernatural blessing of God in verse 31, where he said, "Today we know that the Lord is in our midst."

These references to God's supernatural curses and blessings reminded the original audience that the call to national unity in their day was no mere human affair. As in the

days of Joshua, they also would experience God's curses and blessings as they pursued, or failed to pursue, the goal of national unity.

## All Israel

In the fifth place, it shouldn't surprise us to find that this narrative on national unity also highlights the theme of all Israel. The tone is set in the first step of the story when Joshua referred to the Israelites on both sides of the Jordan as "brothers" in verses 3, 7 and 8. In the confrontation, the delegation acknowledged, in verses 17, 20, that the sin of some in Israel could bring God's wrath against the whole congregation of Israel. And in verse 34, the entire narrative ends with a declaration of the unity of Israel's faith when the altar is named, "a witness between us that the Lord is God."

The author of Joshua made it clear that the tensions between Israel's tribes in Joshua's day were resolved because of deep commitments to the unity of Israel's tribes. And he did this to call his original audience to the same level of commitment to national unity in their day as well.

So far in our lesson we've seen how our author's account of Israel's tribal inheritances deals with the initial boundaries of the land, the specific allotments of inheritances to the tribes of Israel, and the establishment of national unity among the tribes. Now we're in a position to turn to our last consideration in this lesson, the Christian application of this division of our book.

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## CHRISTIAN APPLICATION

The many details of this division of the book of Joshua were designed to give very practical guidance to the original audience. Our author addressed how crucial it was for his audience to secure the initial inheritances their ancestors had received. He explained how they should value the specific allotments God had given to each tribe. And he called on them to emulate how Israel maintained national unity in Joshua's day. But how do we apply these practical lessons about Israel's tribal inheritances to ourselves? Simply put, we have to remember that what happened in Joshua's time was only one step toward the much greater fulfillment of God's inheritance for his people in Christ.

We'll deal with Christian application of this division of Joshua in the light of how Christ fulfills Israel's tribal inheritances in the three phases of his kingdom: its *inauguration* in his first advent, its *continuation* throughout church history and its *consummation* at his second advent. Consider first how we should apply Israel's tribal inheritances in light of the inauguration of Christ's kingdom.

### INAUGURATION

When Christ inaugurated his messianic kingdom in his first advent, Israel had spent hundreds of years scattered far from the Promised Land. Even those who had

returned to Palestine lived under the tyranny of one Gentile nation after another. But the faithful in Israel never lost hope for regaining their inheritance in the Promised Land. And they looked forward to the time when their inheritance would expand to include the entire world under the rule of their Messiah.

**God's promise of a land to Israel goes back to the Garden. God gave a commission to humankind in the Garden to subdue, not just the Garden, but the whole earth. And so, what we see in the gift of land is, again, this echo of the promise to take dominion over the whole earth, to spread the borders of God's kingdom. And we start to get a glimpse of that in the Davidic kingship in Psalm 2 and Psalm 72 — "Ask of me and I will give you the nations" — or in Isaiah's vision that Israel's role was to be a blessing to all the nations, echoing the Abrahamic covenant that, "I will bless you, and through you I will bless all the families of the earth." And so, in Isaiah 2, we read how the nations will stream to Israel and her witness to Christ, or to the Messiah. So, what we see in Jesus' ministry when he comes is that he restores Israel to that role to be a light to the nations. And so, at the end of Matthew's gospel he says, "Go, and tell all the nations everything that I have commanded you; disciple them in all that I have done for you and with you." And then we see in the book of Acts how "you'll be my witnesses," again, echoing Isaiah 43: "Go, and tell that there's only one Savior for all the nations." And so, the land represents the whole earth and God's dominion over the whole earth.**

— Dr. Greg Perry

The New Testament explains that Jesus' first advent was a major step toward fulfilling this hope. As Hebrews 1:2 explains, God appointed Jesus as the "heir of all things." Or as Paul put it in Romans 4:13, Jesus is the "heir of the world." And more than this, as passages like Galatians 3:29 tell us, "If you are Christ's, then you are ... heirs according to promise." In the words of Romans 8:17, we are "heirs — heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ."

This is why the four gospels report that Jesus ministered throughout the boundaries of Israel's tribal inheritances that had been allotted in Joshua's day. He and his disciples ministered both in the northern and southern territories of Cisjordan. And, on occasion, they ministered in Transjordan as well. All the while, Jesus gathered to himself a faithful remnant from the tribes of Israel who would inherit the earth with him. And beyond this, the newly-ascended Christ gathered into Jerusalem representatives of the tribes of Israel who began to follow him "from every nation under heaven," as Acts 2:5 tells us.

But overall, the most important connection between Israel's inheritance and the inauguration of Christ's kingdom is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church that began on the day of Pentecost. In Ephesians 1:14, the apostle Paul referred to the Holy Spirit as "the guarantee of our inheritance." And in 2 Corinthians 1:22 and 5:5, Paul also called him "a guarantee." But to understand why Paul viewed the Spirit as a deposit — or

as the first installment of our future inheritance in Christ — we need to recall that, according to Genesis 1:2, it was the Spirit who brought order to creation in the beginning. And Old Testament prophecies, like Isaiah 44:3, 4, explain that the Spirit of God will also bring about the renewal of creation in the days of the Messiah. In effect, the gift of the Holy Spirit to Christ's church is the foretaste of this renewed creation. He is the portion of our worldwide inheritance granted in the inauguration of Christ's kingdom as we wait for the consummation of all things in Christ's return.

For this reason, the major themes that appear repeatedly in this portion of Joshua give us opportunities to reflect on the foretaste of our inheritance in the Holy Spirit. Much like Joshua distributed Israel's inheritance in the Promised Land with divine authority, Jesus and his apostles and prophets distributed believers' inheritance in the Spirit with divine authority as well. Just as Joshua's distribution of lands was based in God's covenant, Jesus' distribution of the Holy Spirit to God's people was in fulfillment of the new covenant in Christ. Israel's inheritance under Joshua accorded with the standard of Moses' law, and the distribution of the Spirit was the result of Christ's perfect obedience to Moses' law, in the light of God's further revelation after Moses' time. Israel's inheritance depended on God's supernatural power, and the New Testament makes it clear that during Jesus' first advent, even greater supernatural power was at work in the distribution of the Holy Spirit. And the ideal of all Israel's inclusion in Joshua's day was expanded during the inauguration. Not only the faithful remnant of Israel, but also the Gentile believers received the deposit of Christ's inheritance in the Holy Spirit.

Having touched on how Christian application of Israel's tribal inheritances should turn us toward the inauguration of Christ's kingdom, we should also look at how it applies to the continuation of his kingdom throughout church history.

### CONTINUATION

Between Jesus' first and second advents, Christ continues to bless his people with foretastes of the world to come through his Spirit. And much like the book of Joshua called Israel to move forward by securing the Promised Land, the New Testament calls us to move forward in the Holy Spirit. We are to "walk by the Spirit," according to Galatians 5:16, and to "be filled with the Spirit," according to Ephesians 5:18. In addition, much like the original audience of Joshua was to acknowledge the specific allotments of every tribe, followers of Christ are to acknowledge something similar in the Spirit. As 1 Corinthians 12:4 teaches, "[T]here are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit." Moreover, the original audience of Joshua was called to seek unity as they lived together in the inheritance of the Promised Land. And, in Ephesians 4:3, the apostle Paul called Christ's followers to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit."

In this light, every time we encounter the five major themes of this division of Joshua we have opportunities to discern how we are to live for Christ day by day. Just as Joshua acknowledged the divine authority behind Israel's inheritance, we are to acknowledge divine authority in Christ by seeking our inheritance in the Spirit and not in the things of this world. As Israel's right to their initial inheritance was based on God's covenant, we can be confident that the Spirit seals us for the day of redemption because of the new covenant in Christ. As Israel received their initial inheritance in submission to

the standard of Moses' law, we live in the inheritance of the Spirit as Moses' law is applied in the light of New Testament revelation. As Israel's inheritance was granted by God's supernatural power, our inheritance is poured out by the power of God's Spirit. And as all Israel had a share in their national inheritance, Christ's followers from every tribe and nation on earth share the same inheritance in the Spirit.

Christian application of Israel's tribal inheritances not only looks back at what Christ did in the inauguration of his kingdom, and at our current circumstances during the continuation of his kingdom, it also strengthens our hopes for the inheritance we'll receive at the consummation of his kingdom.

### CONSUMMATION

According to Revelation 21:1, you and I have the sure hope that when Jesus returns he will rule over "a new heaven and a new earth." The fallen creation will be refined by fire, evil will be eliminated, and the kingdom of God will extend throughout creation. But this new creation will not only belong to Christ. In Revelation 21:7 we learn that on that great day God will declare, "The one who conquers will have this heritage." As the people of God, the new creation will be *our* eternal inheritance.

**The theme of national inheritance in the book of Joshua is an important topic and has many applications for us as Christians today, because the promise of the land was only partially fulfilled in the days of Joshua. That is, the land which the Lord promised Abraham was not geographically limited to the land of Canaan, as we see in the book of Joshua. We read in Romans 4:13: "For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith." Here Paul tells us that Abraham will inherit the world — the entire world! ... And these promises are fulfilled to the Gentiles too, who aren't the offspring of Abraham in the flesh, but receive these promises by faith in Christ, who is himself Abraham's offspring. So, what Abraham received and what Israel received in the days of Joshua was a small picture of a greater, larger, and more complete land that God promised to Abraham, fulfilled in Christ, and will completely fulfill in Christ's second coming. Eventually, when Christ comes back he won't only reign in Canaan, but he will reign and inherit the whole earth — the new earth and the new heavens — and we will reign with Christ forever.**

— Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation

For this reason, the five main themes in this division of Joshua turn our eyes toward the hope we have in the consummation of Christ's kingdom. As divine authority undergirded what Joshua did in his day, Jesus will do God's bidding perfectly and fully when he returns in glory. As Israel's inheritance was secured by God's covenant, our

final inheritance is secured by the new covenant in Christ. As Joshua distributed Israel's inheritance in accordance with the standard of Moses' law, every follower of Christ will be fully conformed to the image of Christ and will fulfill the standard of all divine revelation in the world to come. As Israel's possession of its inheritance resulted from God's supernatural power, God will display his power as never before when Christ returns. And as Israel's inheritance included all Israel, everyone that is in Christ will receive their eternal inheritance in the world to come.

## CONCLUSION

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In this lesson, we've explored Israel's tribal inheritances in the second major division of the book of Joshua. We've seen how our author gave priority to the initial boundaries of Israel's inheritance by describing Israel's land in both Cisjordan and Transjordan. We've also considered the specific tribal allotments distributed in Joshua's day in both Transjordan and Cisjordan. And we've seen that our author promoted national unity among all the tribes of Israel by describing how Israel remained unified in Joshua's day. Finally, we've looked at Christian application of this division of Joshua in light of the inauguration, continuation and consummation of Christ's kingdom.

The author of Joshua impressed on his audience how important it was for them to affirm what God had accomplished under Joshua's leadership. And today, we must do the same as followers of Christ. We know that Jesus has *already* secured our eternal inheritance. Day by day, we live with the foretaste of this inheritance in the Holy Spirit. And we look forward to the day when Christ will return in glory. On that day, he will take his rightful place as the heir of all things and he will distribute the great inheritance of the new creation to all who have trusted in him for all eternity.

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# The Book of Joshua

LESSON  
THREE

## Tribal Inheritances Faculty Forum



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# Contents

<b>Question 1:</b>	Why were the promises of the Abrahamic covenant so important for Joshua and Israel as they secured the boundaries of their inheritance? .....	1
<b>Question 2:</b>	What does the narrative of Israel’s tribal inheritances in the book of Joshua teach us about God’s faithfulness to his covenant? .....	2
<b>Question 3:</b>	How does the book of Joshua emphasize the inclusion of “all Israel” in the Promised Land? .....	4
<b>Question 4:</b>	What is the significance of the specific tribal allotments found in the book of Joshua?.....	6
<b>Question 5:</b>	Why did the tribe of Levi receive no land inheritance? .....	7
<b>Question 6:</b>	Why did Ephraim and Manasseh each receive an inheritance even though they were Joseph’s sons and not Israel’s sons? .....	9
<b>Question 7:</b>	What was the story of Zelophehad’s daughters, and what did it teach Israel about how to apply God's law in the Promised Land? .....	10
<b>Question 8:</b>	How is the theme of national unity highlighted in the book of Joshua, for instance, in stories like the construction of an altar by the Transjordan tribes?.....	11
<b>Question 9:</b>	How is the promise of Israel’s land inheritance fulfilled in Christ? .....	12
<b>Question 10:</b>	What are some ways that the theme of national inheritance in the book of Joshua applies to Christians today? .....	14
<b>Question 11:</b>	What was the significance of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost during the inauguration of God’s kingdom? .....	15
<b>Question 12:</b>	What does it mean that the Holy Spirit guarantees our future inheritance? .....	16
<b>Question 13:</b>	What does it mean in Scripture to be filled with the Holy Spirit?.....	17
<b>Question 14:</b>	What will the new heavens and new earth be like? .....	17

# **The Book of Joshua**

## **Lesson Three: Tribal Inheritances**

### **Faculty Forum**

With

Dr. Danny Akin  
Dr. Gregg R. Allison  
Pastor Ornan Cruz  
Rev. Sherif Gendy  
Rev. Michael J. Glodo  
Dr. James M. Hamilton  
Prof. Dwi Maria Handayani

Dr. Dana M. Harris  
Dr. Todd M. Johnson  
Dr. Craig S. Keener  
Dr. Chip McDaniel  
Rev. Kevin Labby  
Dr. Greg Perry  
Dr. Tom Petter

Rev. Vernon Pierre  
Dr. Vern S. Poythress  
Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.  
Rev. Canon Alfred Sebahene Ph.D.  
Dr. Seth Tarrer  
Rev. Henryk Turkanik

### **Question 1:**

**Why were the promises of the Abrahamic covenant so important for Joshua and Israel as they secured the boundaries of their inheritance?**

#### **Rev. Kevin Labby**

Back in the book of Genesis, God establishes a covenant relationship with Abraham, and he promised to Abraham four great blessings, the first one being that he would be the father of a great nation, that his descendants would number like the stars in the sky or the sand on the seashore. And in the book of Joshua, of course, we've seen that. We've seen it earlier, but God's people are numerous; they're a great nation. The second thing that he promised was a land for those people in which they could dwell, and of course in Joshua, in those particular chapters, we see them taking possession of the land and distributing it. So, there's another aspect of the Abrahamic covenant being fulfilled. A third promise there is that God will protect Abraham's descendants, that he will be their God, they will be his people, he'll be their shield and defender, and of course, everything we've read in the book of Joshua up to that point shows that God is the Lord of Hosts and is fighting with them and for them as they take possession of the land. And then, finally, there's that great promise to Abraham that out of that nation of whom he's a father, God will send forth a Messiah to redeem; he'll be a blessing to all nations... One of the clearest foreshadowings of Christ in all of the Old Testament is in the book of Joshua, in the person of Joshua, who leads God's people in a great deal of righteousness and faithfulness to God, trusting in him, and leading them in procession to take possession of that which is theirs according to God's grace.

#### **Dr. Tom Petter**

A covenant is a set of rules that governs the life of ancient Israel. And the primary covenant that governs the life of ancient Israel in the Old Testament is the covenant made at Sinai with Moses, the covenant of Sinai. Sometimes people call it "covenant of Moses," "Mosaic covenant." And that's a set of rules and regulations that govern

the life of Israel. But you can't understand Sinai without going further back and understand where at Sinai, how it fits within the Israelite history, and it comes from the Abrahamic covenant, the covenant made with Abraham. And so, starting there, the covenant made with the towering tribal figure of Abraham is one where God makes a promise to him, and he says, "This is what I'm going to do for you: I'm going to give you a progeny, lots of children, and they're going to become a nation. And I'm going to give you a land where these people can live." ... And of course, when they come into the land of Canaan that God gives them, the Promised Land, the land promised to Abraham, when you fast-forward the storyline to the time of Joshua and when they conquer the land, and you read the story with this lens, you realize it was really God's doing, God's promise. And so, that's the foundation.

**Prof. Dwi Maria Handayani, translation**

It was very important for the nation of Israel to realize that the land they received was the land that was the fulfillment of God's promise. It was not land that they had obtained on their own just because they wanted it or because they had fought for it. It was given by God. Before they even knew about the existence of that land, the Lord had promised it to Abraham. That was a lasting promise to his descendants, and now they were the ones who were inheriting that promise. And this is what Joshua kept telling them. He reminded them continually that this was the land that had already been promised to their ancestors, and now they were receiving it... And that promise of the land didn't stop at the nation of Israel alone, but it's also given to Abraham's descendants, even in the church today, to us, to you and me who believe in the Lord. Through Jesus we will receive that promised inheritance — an eternal salvation that is unconditional in nature, which God has given to us, to each person who confesses that they believe — because *we* are the descendants of Abraham, the father of everyone who believes.

**Question 2:**

**What does the narrative of Israel's tribal inheritances in the book of Joshua teach us about God's faithfulness to his covenant?**

**Dr. James M. Hamilton**

In Joshua 13–22, we see the Lord upholding his end of the bargain, so to speak. And in that way the book is emphasizing the covenant that God has made with Israel because it's showing the Lord being faithful to what he's promised to do. In fact, there's this remarkable statement here in Joshua 21:43 where the text reads:

**Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there (Joshua 21:43).**

And then it goes on, and in verse 45 it says,

**Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass (Joshua 21:45).**

And so, the book of Joshua, by showing Israel conquering the land and then apportioning the land among the tribes, it's being emphasized that the Lord is giving them exactly what he promised to give them, and he's bringing to pass everything that he said he would do. And in that way it's almost putting the ball in Israel's court, so to speak. It's putting the onus now on Israel to uphold their end of the bargain and to bring the character and likeness of God to bear on all they do in the land, and then as they seek to expand the borders of the land given to them, they're to make God known. And so, in this way, I think the book of Joshua is showing the Lord as a faithful member of the covenant. He's a covenant-keeper by bringing his word to pass.

**Pastor Ornan Cruz, translation**

These are the chapters of the distribution of the land. Joshua 13–21 narrate the whole episode of the distribution of the Promised Land, and in these chapters we're seeing the faithfulness of God to his covenant, and we're seeing him fulfilling his promise from as early as the time of Genesis 12, when the Lord called Abraham and told him, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." This covenant with Abraham was remembered over and over, and God told the nation of Israel all the time, "I will give you a land." So, when the time of the conquest came, the people had to keep trusting in God's faithfulness... And the people, without a doubt, would be remembering that God was fulfilling his covenant promise. In faithfulness and loyalty to his commitment, the beautiful time had arrived that their ancestors had longed for but weren't able to see. This is the relationship of these chapters with God's covenant.

**Prof. Dwi Maria Handayani, translation**

The book of Joshua is, basically, a book that tells about the covenant. God keeps his covenant. Beginning with the first chapter, the Lord said to Joshua, he reminded him that what Joshua was going to go through was part of the covenant that God had given to his predecessors — to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, and now, to Moses, and now, also, Joshua was the one chosen by God to claim God's promise. And if we continue to read chapter after chapter, the covenant is always repeated by God. In fact, even in chapter 1, the Lord reminded Joshua, commanded Joshua to remind the nation of Israel, not to forget the law of Moses. And we know the law of Moses is part of God's covenant. And then, in chapter 7 — Achan's sin — God said that that sin was not merely an ordinary sin, but it was sin because it violated God's covenant. And then, in chapter 8, Joshua instructed the nation of Israel to remember God's covenant on Mount Ebal, and there he wrote again God's covenant and read it to the whole nation of Israel. In chapters 13–21, which was the division of the land, there was the climax of the fulfillment of that promise — not only the promise of land but, as it turns out, also the promise of offspring from one man, Abraham, now becoming one nation, twelve tribes, and also the promise of land that now was truly given by God to them. Each tribe possessed their own land and they enjoyed the promise that

God had given to the nation of Israel. So, the book of Joshua, if we read it from chapter 1 to the last chapter, all of it talks about God's covenant.

### **Question 3:**

### **How does the book of Joshua emphasize the inclusion of "all Israel" in the Promised Land?**

#### **Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation**

The book of Joshua emphasizes the inclusion of "all Israel," complete unity in the Promised Land, in various ways. First, this expression, "all Israel," is repeated many times in the book, either relating to conquering the land or distributing it. And it was very important that the people of Israel be unified in their behavior and in the events that happened, because through their unity the Lord's victory was assured. So, the unity here was related to wars and their behavior before the Lord. But also, the unity is related to sin. When an Israelite sinned, the consequence was that all the people were affected somehow by this sin. For example, we read in Joshua 7:1:

**But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel (Joshua 7:1).**

Note here the explanation given by the Scriptures that "the people of Israel" broke faith in regard to the devoted things. Actually, the one who stole and broke faith was Achan son of Carmi, and he was mentioned by name. But it asserts here that the punishment of this sin and its consequences included all Israel — not only in the punishment, but in the sin itself. In the sight of the Lord, all of Israel cooperated in it. For that reason, the people of Israel broke faith, and the anger of the Lord burned against Israel. So, the union here is not only related to conquering and distributing the land, but also to the sinful behavior, in the sight of the Lord, that all Israel cooperated in... The issue also is related to the covenant, because all Israel had a role in their commitment to the covenant before the Lord. That's why we read, for example, that Joshua gathered all Israel, gathered all the tribes of Israel in 23:2 and 24:1. He gathered all the people, all Israel, to renew the covenant with them before the Lord, and to remind them of the warnings related to the covenant that the Lord had made with them. So, the unity of Israel was part of proclaiming their loyalty to the Lord within the covenant. That is why it was very important that all the people be unified, whether in war, worship, or devotion to the Lord.

#### **Dr. Seth Tarrer**

Well, the book of Joshua at the textual level uses this phrase: "all Israel," "all of Israel," over sixteen times, and the idea of this is to drive home to the reader the unity and the cohesive nature of the binding requirements the Lord is placing upon Israel. Not only that, the notion that the Lord is with, not only Joshua, the Lord is with all of

Israel, and as such, all of God's promises and blessings are promised to Israel, as are God's warnings, and is the contingent nature of Israel's response of obedience in faith to the Lord's commands. So, this phrase "all Israel" then serves at the textual level to hold all of Israel accountable before the Lord as they move into the Promised Land. This will not be done by a single figure. This will be an event in which the entirety of the nation of Israel is to take place. Now, when we look at this thematically, a story that very clearly pops to mind is the story of the sin of Achan in Joshua 7... And interestingly when we look at the story of Achan, we see all of Israel held accountable for the sin of Achan. Now, symbolically, Achan and his entire family, and everything that he owned is destroyed. So, in some sense Achan pays for his sin through the death of his family and himself. However, all of Israel is called on to bear witness to this, and all of Israel cannot move forward until the sin of Achan is dealt with. Now, all of Israel is also called to remember the sin of Achan. This is not something that can be forgotten and dusted and swept under the carpet. Israel must live with this before itself, and this is seen in two different ways. The first is that the name "Achan" is closely associated with the noun *akar* (עָכָר), right, which means "trouble," which, when we get into 1 Kings, you see King Ahab calling the prophet Elijah "a troubler," right, to which Elijah turns around and calls Ahab the troubler. Either way, in the Hebrew language and throughout the Hebrew story, this notion of *akar*, related etymologically to Achan, lives on, is remembered as the troubler. So, all of Israel is called to constantly remember the sin of Achan through the use of this name.

Secondly, we see that ... the sin of Achan is to be memorialized, in the same way that the crossing of the Jordan was memorialized, with the heaping of stones, and in the same ways we'll see the Transjordan tribes raise a stone to express their unity with the other tribes, so too is the sin of Achan held before all of Israel in a physical monument, which is this stone pile raised to commemorate the sin of Achan. And interestingly, here the text tells us that in his sin Achan has "crossed over." What has he crossed over? In the same way the Israelites crossed over the Jordan River, Achan has crossed over. He has violated the covenant commands of the Lord in disobeying God and hiding loot. So, Israel, all of Israel, is called to remember, through the use of these visible symbols, Israel is called to remember the sin of Achan. All of Israel had to deal with Achan's sin. All of Israel stands before the Lord. And all of Israel must give account for her obedience or lack thereof... There are two other ways in which all of Israel is highlighted... As Israel moves into the Promised Land, all of Israel is to be cared for, not some of Israel, not the leaders, not a particular class or tribe. All of Israel is made much of in the book of Joshua... Two examples in which the Lord cares for all of Israel, not just some of Israel, can be found in Deuteronomy 25 and Leviticus 25. In Deuteronomy 25, we have Levirate marriage vows. In this case, should a woman's husband die, the nearest brother of her husband is to take her as his wife in order to perpetuate the family name. And in this we see, as Israel moves into the Promised Land, the least of the community, those who are most vulnerable, those who are most likely to be forgotten or marginalized, are to be cared for. There are provisions made for all of Israel. Secondly, we see in Leviticus 25, here the land is cared for. A major ingredient and component of Israel was the geographical location — their land. This is the inherited, promised, covenantal blessing of the land. The



land is to be cared for. So, should a member of Israel lose their land due to hard times financially or some disadvantageous situation, their nearest kin was to step in and care for them. These are just two examples of which the Lord has continually made provision, not for some of Israel, but for all of Israel.

### **Question 4:**

### **What is the significance of the specific tribal allotments found in the book of Joshua?**

#### **Dr. Tom Petter**

Well, Joshua, the book, we think it's all about the conquest, and we think it's all about Joshua taking all these cities, but a significant part of the book is about tribal boundaries, tribal allotments — who gets what among the twelve tribes. And so, it's a significant part of the book. Starting in chapter 12, it's very boring. It reads like an accountant's record, and it's about who gets what part of the land in very, very specific terms. So, Judah, you read about the boundaries of Judah, you read about the boundaries of Simeon, so it has to do with a topographical mapping of the land. And I think the degree of specificity for us as modern readers is lost on us. We think, "Oh, it's boring. Let's skip these chapters," as we read Joshua. But I think they're very important because what they're telling us is Yahweh is giving the land to the people in very specific terms, and these boundaries of the land, who gets what — Ephraim, Manasseh, Dan, and all these tribes — who gets what matters immensely to Yahweh because it's about his land. Again, it goes back to the sacredness of this space, and the best way to imagine this is the parallel with the tabernacle in the wilderness. The tabernacle has specific measurements, and there's specific parts that belonged to certain groups of Levites to carry. It's very specific. You can't touch certain things. And then the dimensions are very tight. And this is Yahweh's sacred space. That ambulant tent moves about, and it's Yahweh's sacred space. Now, the sacred space of Yahweh, where Yahweh meets with his people, has become a land. It's static; it's a piece of geography. And so, the holy sacred space of Yahweh that was the tabernacle becomes a landscape with mountains and rivers and fields, and it becomes apportioned in very, very specific terms just like the tabernacle. And then you see later on in Israelite history that you do not mess with tribal inheritance. This is something that Yahweh gave to the tribes. And some kings will flex their muscles to steal land from other people, and they get condemned for that — Ahab and Jezebel comes to mind with Naboth's vineyard. You cannot steal somebody else's land because it's holy space — holy, apportioned to the Israelites. And, of course, this issue has to do with inheritance, what's being passed on to the next generation. An inheritance is very sacred in Israelite history, and in Yahweh's mind, because it's preparing the way for the redemption that comes through Christ. So, very sacred.

#### **Prof. Dwi Maria Handayani, translation**

The division of the land in the book of Joshua was something that was very important because that division of the land proved that the Lord actually fulfilled his promise.



Not just one tribe or two tribes, but all tribes, the entire nation of Israel received their share. And because of that, each of these tribes then became a part of the community that was tied exclusively to the Lord. They had responsibilities toward God, and they enjoyed every blessing that the Lord gave them. So, this division of the land was something that was very important, very crucial in the book of Joshua, proving that God did not forget even one of his children. Every tribe received the inheritance that God had promised them.

**Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.**

As the writer of Joshua lifts up a model for how he wants his audience to reaffirm what God wants for the people of God, so that they can move the kingdom forward, one of the things he does is he wants, first, every tribe to know what part of the Promised Land they are to possess. They're to go back there; they're to occupy it again. It is to be their orientation in life, and from there they're to build out. But even more than that, Israel as a whole, the whole nation is to respect those allocations of land that were given to the people of God and various tribes, so that even in a book like Chronicles, you find there's a great deal of emphasis on all twelve tribes returning to the place that God had given to them. And this, of course, emphasizes the unity of the people of God, it emphasizes their diversity within that unity, it also emphasizes how important every single tribe of Israel was to the plan of God, and thus it helps us, even as Christians, to understand why Jesus did not simply live his entire life in Judah. He did not live his entire life in Jerusalem, the capital city, but actually traversed up north and went through all the tribal regions of Israel, including the tribal regions across the Jordan... If you're going to rebuild the kingdom of God, as Jesus was determined to do in his day, then you must go back, as it were, and reaffirm the starting point. And the starting point was that these were the areas where God's people were to settle, and the tribes were to identify themselves as part of the larger people of God with their own gifts, their own inheritance, their own responsibilities within the Land of Promise. And Jesus did that as he gathered a remnant from all the various regions of the Promised Land from all the tribes of Israel.

**Question 5:**

**Why did the tribe of Levi receive no land inheritance?**

**Dr. Seth Tarrer**

In the book of Joshua, each of the twelve tribes receive an allotment of land once they enter into the Promised Land, or in the case of the Transjordan tribes, on the other side of the Jordan. However, one of the twelve tribes, the priestly tribe, the Levites, did not receive an allotment of land, per se. And so, right away we see that this tribe of the Levites was categorically different than the other tribes, the other eleven tribes. As such, their interaction with the Promised Land and their value therein is going to be categorically different as well. As we mentioned, all eleven receive an allotment of land. The Levites receive, per the text, "offerings by fire." Their inheritance is not

land; their inheritance is deemed an offering of fire. Now this phrase is used throughout Leviticus 1–7, and it denotes various kinds of burnt offerings. It can also denote other types of offerings, grain and gift offerings as well. But the idea is that Israel's priestly tribe will be interacting and symbolically different than the other tribes in the Promised Land... Further stipulations for the Levites in the Promised Land are given in Deuteronomy 18:1, 2... In Deuteronomy 18:1, 2, we're told that the Levites are going to live off of their neighbors' sacrifices. Their livelihood will not come from their working their own particular plot of land. It will come from the sacrifices of the Israelites as they come in obedience to worship of the Lord. And in verse 2 of Deuteronomy 18, we're told the Levites' inheritance itself will be the Lord — "The Lord himself will be your inheritance." ... In chapter 21 of Joshua, we're told that the Levites, instead of being given one land that belongs to their tribe, they are given cities inside of the other tribes' land. In these cities, the Levites can live, receive sacrifices and live off the neighbors' sacrifices that are brought to them. They also are allowed to raise cattle for their own consumption on some land outside of the city. And so, again, we see that the Levites interaction with the Promised Land is categorically different than the other tribes... The designation of these tribal cities for the Levites in chapter 21 has this dual effect on this different category of tribe, these Levites. The first effect that it has on the Levites is that it severely limits their possessions, physically underscoring the fact that all that they've received, all that Israel has received, is from the hand of the Lord. It's not their own doing. So, the first effect of the Levites simply inheriting cities as opposed to an entire land is that they're reliant upon others. The second effect is that the Levites themselves physically become symbols, symbols of God's presence, first of all locally among the other tribes, and then Israel becomes a symbol of God's presence amongst neighbors who do not worship the Lord. The Levites become these constant physical, tangible reminders of Israel's devotion exclusively to the Lord and reminders and encouragement that, in fact, the Lord is devoted to Israel as well and has placed his representative, the Levites, those who commune with him directly, in their midst for their good.

**Pastor Ornan Cruz, translation**

The people of the tribe of Levi were the ministers of God among the nation. Some in Aaron's family were priests who ministered in the temple. Others were singers, water carriers, but in one way or another, they were the ministers of God. So, when the distribution of the land came, they gave no land to the Levites. Instead, they received a tithe from all the other nations, from their brothers. The tithe of their brothers was for the tribe to maintain itself. And at the same time, they would receive land and cities from their brothers. This was God's way of saying that he didn't want his ministers to be isolated from the people, that he wanted his ministers to be among the people. It's interesting to see that God graciously placed his ministers among the people. But then, in Numbers 3:12, 13 there is a very interesting text. God says that he had consecrated all the firstborn sons of the animals and people to himself once they were free from slavery in Egypt... Then God raised the Levites as substitutes for all the firstborn in the rest of the tribes, and he says in this text, "[They] shall be mine,

for all the firstborn are mine.” This was a special way of being dedicated to God. It was a special way to serve him and to serve among their brothers.

**Rev. Michael J. Glodo**

When we read of the apportionment of the land in Joshua, we find that the tribe of Levi was not given an apportionment of the land. And this is because the tribe of Levi belonged peculiarly, especially, to the Lord. Going back to Exodus 12 where the firstborn of every Israelite household was redeemed by the substitute of the Passover lamb, every firstborn of every Israelite household belonged to the Lord. But instead of taking the firstborn of every Israelite household into his tribal service, God gathered, as a substitute for the firstborn, the whole tribe of Levi. So, the whole tribe of Levi belongs peculiarly and especially to God in the service of the tabernacle and all of the worship that went with it. And you even see in the book of Numbers how the counting of the firstborn is calculated in relation to the number of the tribe of Levi so that there is to be a specific one-to-one correspondence. But it would be remiss to say that Levi had no inheritance. Even though they didn’t have land given to them specifically, they had the land of the tabernacle, they had the vicinity of the tabernacle. In fact, they had God himself as their inheritance, as they belonged to him as the tribe set apart for priestly service.

**Question 6:**

**Why did Ephraim and Manasseh each receive an inheritance even though they were Joseph’s sons and not Israel’s sons?**

**Dr. Chip McDaniel**

The custom of that day was that the eldest son could expect two rights as the eldest son. The first of these was the right to rule in which, after the death of his father, he would become the patriarch of the family. The other was a double portion in that he would receive twice as much as any of his other brothers... In order to show that these two features were operating within Israel’s history, we go to the story of Jacob and Esau, where even before they’re born it is said that Esau would serve, the elder would serve the younger. And so, the right to rule would go to Jacob instead of Esau. That the double portion was allotted to the firstborn son is seen in Deuteronomy 21 where the firstborn is to be acknowledged as the firstborn, even if he’s the son of the wife who is less loved... Esau lost these privileges probably when he sold his birthright to his brother for a bowl of red stuff, and he certainly lost the right to rule when his father blessed his brother instead of him, and so he’s left with neither of these rights. When we fast-forward to the blessing of Jacob upon his grandsons Ephraim and Manasseh, we see that, again, Ephraim is placed above Manasseh in the blessing. But when we come to the next chapter, Genesis 49, we see that the blessing is bestowed on Joseph, and Joseph is the one who will receive the double blessing because he is the one that becomes two tribes. Judah would receive the right to rule. The firstborn was passed over because of his sin, and Simeon and Levi were passed over because of their sin, their violence, and so Judah has the right to rule, and Joseph

has the double blessing. That these two tribes would receive big allotments is suggested by the effusive blessing that Jacob renders onto his son Joseph. He's giving him a very special inheritance. He himself is going to be divided into two tribes and he receives the double blessing. That would be why Ephraim and Manasseh would be so prominent and why they would both become tribes.

**Rev. Michael J. Glodo**

When we read about the tribal allotments, we see that Manasseh and Ephraim are both given tribal allotments along with the other tribes of Israel when, in fact, they're not one of the twelve tribes of Israel. These are the two sons of Joseph. So, why should these two receive a full inheritance? Well, if you go back to the latter part of Genesis and the Joseph story, you see that God providentially worked through Joseph and his virtuous actions to preserve Israel, and as a result, Jacob administered, or gave a double blessing to Joseph as if Joseph were the oldest son, even though he wasn't... And the way this plays out is that Joseph's two sons receive a full inheritance each, which add up to the double blessing that Joseph was given by Jacob.

**Rev. Henryk Turkanik, translation**

Because the tribe of Levi did not receive a portion of the land when the lots were cast, the tribe of Joseph was divided into two tribes, so that there would again be a total of twelve tribes of Israel. Instead of the tribes of Levi and Joseph, there would now be the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, because these were the two sons of Joseph that received a specific blessing from the dying Jacob in chapter 48 of Genesis. In this way, the sons of Joseph were incorporated as the sons of Jacob.

**Question 7:**

**What was the story of Zelophehad's daughters, and what did it teach Israel about how to apply God's law in the Promised Land?**

**Rev. Michael J. Glodo**

The story of Zelophehad's daughters gives us a sense of how the law was apportioned, particularly with concern for the needy and the vulnerable, the poor, in the book of Joshua. Zelophehad's daughters are widowed, and therefore, without a land allotment, and without a land allotment an Israelite would be without a provision for life, for sustenance. And so, they came to Moses in a special case and they said, "When we come into the land we will be without an inheritance unless you do something." Moses sought God's will on this, and Moses ruled, if you will, in a special provision that these daughters of Zelophehad should, in spite of their widowhood, be offered an apportion so that they would not be vulnerable and not be impoverished. And this brings out an important principle about the land. The land was never relinquished by God to Israel, but the land always was retained by God as his possession, and it was for the purpose of blessing and prospering his people. So, the land was to be administered in a way in keeping with God's will, and we know that it was God's will from the laws of Deuteronomy that the poor and the weak and

the needy be provided for within Israel, such that there would — even though there would always be poor among them — that there would never be poor among them, as Deuteronomy 15 says.

**Pastor Ornan Cruz, translation**

The story in the book of Joshua of Zelophehad's daughters is particularly interesting. These daughters approached Joshua, saying, "Our father had no sons. Now that it's time to distribute the land inheritance, we're asking you to give us our land." This was not the first time this had happened. In Numbers 27:1-11, these same daughters of Zelophehad went before Moses and Eleazar the priest saying the same words: "When the time comes, we want to inherit the land that belonged to our father." And God answered Moses, "The daughters of Zelophehad are right. You shall . . . transfer the inheritance of their father to them." Thus, God's law was being contextualized for the circumstances in which his people were living in order for his righteousness to shine. God's law will always seek to fulfill his righteousness, to make sure it is God who gets the glory. So, God told Moses to put a clause into the law, to please add this in case history repeats itself: "If a man dies and has no son, then you shall transfer his inheritance to his daughter. And if he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. And if he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father's brothers. And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the nearest kinsman of his clan, and he shall possess it," so that the name of this Israelite will be perpetuated. . . In other words, looking at the law of God in that historical moment, which is unique to Zelophehad's daughters' request, we understand how to contextualize what God is saying without losing its essence as a divine command. We keep it applicable, but in such a way that divine justice shines over everything. It's very simple to deny a reasonable request just because we've never had it before, rather than analyzing the purpose of the law, as well as the circumstances in the moment, and then asking God for wisdom to make a final decision. For Moses this was a lesson, for Joshua this was a lesson, and for us it's also a lesson. So deep, so important that from that moment on, a new clause was added to God's law.

**Question 8:**

**How is the theme of national unity highlighted in the book of Joshua, for instance, in stories like the construction of an altar by the Transjordan tribes?**

**Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation**

From the beginning of the book of Joshua, the Lord asserts that all Israel be consecrated before the Lord, and all Israel be prepared for war, and all Israel be united in worshipping the Lord. That's why, for example, in chapter 22 we see that the tribes to the east of the Jordan — the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh — built for themselves an altar as a witness before the Lord. The rest of the tribes, on the west side of the Jordan, thought that these tribes had rebelled against the

Lord by building an altar other than the one in the tabernacle of Moses. What happened is that Joshua addressed this issue by sending Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest, and sent with him ten chiefs of Israel to evaluate the situation. The result was a reassurance of the unity of all Israel in their worship of the Lord. Consequently, the unity of Israel — all Israel together — was very important regarding conquering the land, distributing the land, and worshiping the Lord. It was a very important issue before the Lord.

### **Dr. Seth Tarrer**

Now, while there are numerous themes that emerge from the book of Joshua, one particularly compelling theme that I see time and again in the book of Joshua is this question of corporate solidarity or national unity, this notion that Israel stands or falls together. Now, this notion of national solidarity, national unity, corporate solidarity, was adumbrated all the way back in the book of Deuteronomy prior to Joshua's leadership. In Deuteronomy 5 and Deuteronomy 11, we hear talk of this notion of "all Israel" as a formulaic phrase. Now, this phrase is going to appear over sixteen times in the book of Joshua. It's clustered heavily in the book of Joshua, this idea that there is this building of this national unity, this corporate identity. It appears in Joshua 3, 4, 7, and 24. Not only does it appear at the textual level, there are symbolic representations or actions that occur throughout the book. The building of the altar in the Jordan River as they enter into the Promised Land is an act of corporate solidarity; one from each tribe places a stone as an act of remembrance for perpetuity... When we look at Joshua 22, there's another memorial being built. This is a memorial by the Transjordan tribes of the Gadites, the Reubenites and the half tribe of Manasseh. This also stands as a physical memorial representation that binds Israel together.

## **Question 9:**

### **How is the promise of Israel's land inheritance fulfilled in Christ?**

### **Dr. James M. Hamilton**

When we think about the question of how Israel's land inheritance is fulfilled in the first and second comings of the Lord Jesus, we really have to go all the way back and start with Adam. And what I have in mind here is the way that the Lord, when he made man and woman in his own image and likeness, he blessed them and said to them be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth — so they're to fill all the lands with those who bear the image and likeness of God — and then he told them to subdue the earth and to have dominion over the animal kingdom. And it's very interesting, in Joshua 18:1, when the people of Israel have come into the holy land, there's this statement at the end of Joshua 18:1 that says the land — and in Hebrew, this is *erets* — it lay subdued, and it uses the same term from Genesis 1:28 before them, so that what Adam was supposed to accomplish for all the earth, to subdue all the earth, Israel, as they come into the land, the land is subdued before them. And I think that probably Adam's responsibility in subduing the earth was to expand the borders of the Garden of Eden until all the world was like a place where God was present with

his people. And then similarly, with the people of Israel as they come into the Land of Promise, I think their responsibility is to expand the borders of the land until all the world is covered with those who live in God's place, as God's people, under God's law. And essentially, I would argue that this is what is going on in the church as well. As we seek to make disciples of all nations, what we're doing is extending the realm in which God's people are in God's place under God's teachings and instructions. And so, Jesus has opened up a way for all nations to be incorporated, and then at the second coming, the book of Revelation proclaims that he is going to definitively be the ultimate Joshua, so to speak. He is going to be the conqueror who... You know, the book of Hebrews, it says that Joshua didn't give rest to the land and Jesus is the one who will come, and he will subdue the land in a way that Adam failed to do and in a way that Joshua failed to do. So, Jesus will come as the true conqueror, as the world's true king, and he will subdue all the earth.

**Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation**

The promise of the land to Abraham and his offspring is fulfilled in Christ. How do we know this? There is an important verse in Galatians 3:16:

**Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ (Galatians 3:16).**

The apostle Paul tells us that Abraham's offspring, to whom the land was promised, is Christ. Christ is Abraham's offspring. Not only this, but we learn also from 2 Corinthians 1:20:

**For all the promises of God find their Yes in him [in Christ]. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory (2 Corinthians 1:20).**

So, the promises were given to Christ who is Abraham's offspring and were fulfilled in Christ who is also Abraham's offspring. The promises were given to Christ and fulfilled in Christ. But Paul also takes it a further step in the same chapter. Galatians 3:9 says:

**Those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (Galatians 3:9).**

And then in verses 13-14 he says,

**Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us — for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree" —**

And then verse 14 is so important,



**... so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith (Galatians 3:13-14).**

Paul here tells us that we, as believers in Christ, receive Abraham's blessing by faith, the promises given to Abraham. That is why Jesus for example said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Even Abraham himself, as we learn from Hebrews 11, was not looking forward to the land as the final fulfillment of the Lord's promises to him. That's why we learn that, "he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God." We also learn from Hebrews 11 that the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, "all died not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth." So, although the fathers and then Israel possessed the land of Canaan, they lived as strangers on earth, for they desired a better heavenly country.

### **Question 10:**

**What are some ways that the theme of national inheritance in the book of Joshua applies to Christians today?**

#### **Rev. Michael J. Glodo**

The prominent feature of the land in Joshua can make the reader wonder what happens to that prominent feature when we come to the New Testament. And the simple answer is that all that the land represents in the Old Testament, which is God's inheritance to his people, is God himself in the new covenant in Christ. Ephesians 1, for instance, uses that very language, that we have been given an inheritance through our elder brother, Jesus Christ, we have been adopted as sons, and so that all is his is ours by right of divine grant from God the Father. And that is then effected through the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is described by Paul as a down payment. But of course, the gift of the Spirit means the gift of God himself, so that in Christ today we have all that the land represented potentially because we have God himself as our own — him dwelling in us and we dwelling in him through Christ. Now, at Christ's second coming you see the outward manifestation of all that is ours now in the heavenly places in Christ so that the earth becomes full of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea; the kingdom of this world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. And so, in the end, in the consummation of all things, you see a new heavens and earth where the whole earth is God's kingdom, or his reign, or his dominion physically present with his people, bringing to full expression our inheritance that is ours in God's plan in Jesus Christ.

#### **Dr. Craig S. Keener**

Throughout the Old Testament we have the promise of the land to Israel, and that raises the question, well, how does that apply to us as believers? But in Galatians 3:14 it says that the promise to Abraham is fulfilled among us in terms of the blessing of



the Spirit, which of course Paul says elsewhere is the foretaste — in Greek, the *arrabón* — the down payment, the first installment of our future inheritance. Well, what is our future inheritance? Will we participate in this promise? If you look in Revelation 21 where it describes the New Jerusalem, I mean, are we new Jerusalemites? Will not all of us who are followers of Jesus, who are spiritually children of Abraham, also participate in this inheritance? ... Well, today, we may say, well, who gets the land? Does Israel get the land, or do we as spiritual heirs of Abraham get the land? It's going to be pretty big. I don't think we're going to have to worry about whether there's room for us or not. And I believe in light of Romans 11 that, yes, as Gentile believers we have been grafted into the heritage of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but my understanding — and I know not everybody agrees with this but — of Romans 11:26 is that there will be a turning of the Jewish people also in the end time and that those Jewish people who turn then will be grafted back in. And so, it looks to me like God has a way to wrap it all up together.

### **Question 11:**

**What was the significance of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost during the inauguration of God's kingdom?**

#### **Rev. Canon Alfred Sebahene Ph.D.**

Pentecost is a very, very important event in the history of the church, and like the call of Abraham, the exodus from Egypt, the cross and resurrection — although these belong each to a particular period of history — but these are the events that shed light on some dealing on how God dealt with man throughout history. With regard to Pentecost, this is the great turning point in history. Here, with Pentecost, we have the truth that [the] Christian era is distinctly the age of the Spirit. At Pentecost, the disciples received power, and this power was meant to enable them to preach the gospel and extend the kingdom of God, and men were brought together and for the fulfillment of God's mission in the world. Its significance can be seen as that which is demonstrated in the whole plan of God... So, Pentecost is the fulfillment of what was promised, the coming of the Spirit, and its significance... is that which demonstrated the plan of God. So, Pentecost set the pattern or direction of the church on what was to come for the church age as a whole.

#### **Dr. Todd M. Johnson**

The significance of Pentecost in the founding of the early church is that it set the direction for the faith. And this is a continuity that Pentecost has with Old Testament passages which pointed to the fact that this gospel was going to be preached in the whole world and that it would include all of the world's peoples, even going back as far as Abraham. So, Pentecost is a way in which we find out where our faith is going to go, and it's going to go to the ends of the earth because people from all over the world come together and receive this gift of the Holy Spirit and then they go back to where they live and the gospel spreads all over the world among many different languages and people groups.

**Question 12:****What does it mean that the Holy Spirit guarantees our future inheritance?****Dr. Dana M. Harris**

As believers we're caught in a tension, which is sometimes described as the "already-not yet." Part of the already is the fact that we have the Holy Spirit as a down payment. This is what Paul talks about in Ephesians 1:14. This down payment is an assurance that we will one day have our eternal inheritance. We also experience this in the reality of spiritual gifts and the spiritual bond that we feel between believers around the world. But we also know that we live in a world that is wracked by evil and is still under the effects of a world in condemnation. So, we look forward to that day when we will see Jesus face to face and when he will return and bring about the complete and total eradication of evil.

**Dr. Craig S. Keener**

The early Christians understood something that sometimes modern Christians have forgotten, and that is that the kingdom is not only future, but because the king who is yet to come has already come, the future has invaded history. And that's why you have passages in the New Testament, for example ... 1 Corinthians 2:9, 10 where Paul says, "Eye has not seen nor ear heard, neither has it entered the human heart what God has prepared for those who love him, but God has revealed them to us by his Spirit." Or in 2 Corinthians and in Ephesians 1, he uses a term that often appears in business documents for a down payment. He says that we have received the first installment of our future inheritance by receiving the Spirit. We have received a foretaste of the future world, because we're not just expecting a future resurrection and a future Messiah, a future king, but we're expecting a king who has already come, who has already been raised from the dead and, therefore for us, we have a foretaste, and we need to live like the people of the future age. We need to live for the future in this present age to let the world have a foretaste of what heaven is going to be like.

**Dr. Danny Akin**

You know, one of God's great gifts at salvation is the gift of the Holy Spirit. And the Bible speaks in so many different ways about how the Spirit ministers in our lives as Christians to ultimately bring us to conformity to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1 talks about the fact that we're sealed by the Holy Spirit, which gives us the assurance that our salvation is a permanent reality. I didn't do anything to earn it, I can't do anything to lose it, and God gave the Spirit as a down payment to ensure that my salvation will reach fruition. I am going to be like the Lord Jesus Christ because of the promise of the Holy Spirit.

**Question 13:****What does it mean in Scripture to be filled with the Holy Spirit?****Dr. Craig S. Keener**

When we read that Moses laid hands on Joshua, Joshua was filled with the Holy Spirit in Deuteronomy 34, he's filled with the spirit of wisdom, and that's so that he can lead God's people. We also read elsewhere in the Pentateuch that God filled someone with the holy spirit of wisdom so that they could do artwork and exquisite work on the architecture of the tabernacle. So, in Acts 6, we also read of those who are going to be leading, in terms of caring for the poor, that they are filled with the spirit of wisdom. So, we have this language used in various places. Now, elsewhere in Luke and in Acts, we read about being filled with the Spirit to prophesy. In Ephesians 5:18, in the context it says, don't be drunk with wine but instead be filled with the Spirit, and then describes what that is to look like, where you're praising God, you're thanking God for all things, and you're serving one another. So, there are a number of different expressions of the way that the Spirit fills us for a number of different things, for our particular callings, and then the kind of thing that we all need to be full of the Spirit for — to praise God and to serve one another.

**Dr. Gregg R. Allison**

In Ephesians 5:18 Paul commands us, "Do not be drunk with wine. That leads to debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit." What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? It means to be commanded, to be directed, and guided, controlled by the Spirit in all aspects of our life. If we look at Paul's command, we do see that it's an imperative, it is a command, which means we can obey it or we can disobey it. Now, we certainly are to obey it, but it is a responsibility of ours to respond to this command and exercise obedience to be filled. It's also an ongoing imperative, an ongoing command. We could paraphrase it: keep on being filled, keep on being controlled or guided by the Holy Spirit, moment by moment. So, it's a command that draws our attention to obedience, being controlled by the Spirit moment by moment. It's also a passive command. It's not an active, "throw the ball!" command. Rather, it's a passive command — *be* filled. And the step of obedience that is required is that we put ourself in a position of yielded-ness; we adopt a posture of yielding to the Spirit's control and guidance in our life. So, what does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? It means to be consciously obedient, submitting to, yielding to the Spirit's direction and control, guidance in our life, moment by moment.

**Question 14:****What will the new heavens and new earth be like?****Dr. Craig S. Keener**

It's really hard for us to try to describe the new heavens and the new earth because there are a number of biblical passages that present it in different ways. And I think one reason for that is you have to describe it poetically, you have to describe it

artistically, because it's on a greater level than anything that we can normally understand. I think that's why 1 Corinthians 2:9, 10 tells us this: "eye has not seen, neither has ear heard, neither has it entered the human heart, the things that God has prepared for those who love him, but God has revealed them to us by his Spirit." We have the foretaste, not so much in words, but the foretaste of God's presence that reminds us what a great future God has in store for us. And so, all these images that we have in the Prophets and in the book of Revelation are just a foretaste of the glory that awaits.

**Dr. Vern S. Poythress**

What will the new heavens and new earth be like? Well, in one sense we don't know because it's up to God, and God has surprises. He gives us a detailed description of the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21 through the first part of 22, but that's a visionary description. It's symbolical. For instance, the city is in the shape of a perfect cube, which is the shape of the Holy of Holies in the temple in the Old Testament. So, that's symbolical of the holiness of that new order. We also know that it will be a transfiguration of this present order just as Christ's resurrection body is a transfiguration of his pre-resurrection body, and that's the pattern for our resurrection but also for the entire cosmos. So, we know there'll be some continuity, but it's up to God exactly what he's going to do. The point is to trust God rather than to calculate the details.

**Rev. Vernon Pierre**

What will the new heavens and the new earth be like? We don't have every detail about it, but the Bible tells us a whole lot. In Revelation 21, 22 particularly, it speaks of heaven coming down and becoming part of earth. And one of the things I'd like to emphasize there, it's not as if the earth goes away. It's a new heavenly world, if we can put it that way. And this new heavenly world is a place where God is always present. It's a place where the Bible says there's no more tears, there's no more pain, there's no more suffering, and most especially there's no more sin. In many ways, it's humanity in the way that it should have been, in the way that it never has been since Adam sinned and humanity has continued to sin and reject God. All that is wiped away and human beings are able to honor God and follow God and worship God in the ways that they should. It's going to be a place characterized by love and by beauty and by joy in the most perfect and pure form, because we will be in the presence of love and joy and beauty, in the presence of God forever. So, the new heavens and the new earth will be an incredibly special place. It's a place for us to look forward to, to motivate us to live in the earth now, knowing that this earth and the heavens, there's better to come.

**Dr. Greg Perry**

We get a vision of what the new heavens and the new earth will be like in Zechariah 8. The prophet is talking about the most important characteristic of this new city is that God, once again, will dwell with his people, and that that's going to make all the difference in every sphere of life. And so, the prophet begins to talk about how the old women and the old men will once again sit in the streets. And there's such a sense

of public safety. The kids, the boys and the girls are running and playing in the streets, and there's a reconciliation between the generations, the old and the young, they want to be together. And the prophet talks about how in the former times you didn't have any wages, and your beasts didn't have any food, but in this time when God returns, you will have what you need. There'll be economic renewal as well. And your work is going to be productive, you're going to produce surpluses, and you're going to have, to be able to share with one another. And then he talks about how there will be also ecological renewal, that once again the grains will grow and the earth will have rain and will have dew that you need, and the vineyards will produce wine. And so, what we see in terms of the new heavens and the new earth is that every area of image bearing will flourish once again as God comes to dwell with his people and he completely renews our role as his image bearers in the world.

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# The Book of Joshua

LESSON  
FOUR

## COVENANT LOYALTY



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# Contents

<b>I. Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II. Covenant Warnings .....</b>	<b>2</b>
A. Structure and Content	2
1. Joshua's Summons	2
2. Joshua's Speech	3
a. Joshua 23:2-8	4
b. Joshua 23:9-13	4
c. Joshua 23:14-16	5
B. Original Meaning	6
1. Divine Authority	6
2. God's Covenant	6
3. Standard of Moses's Law	7
4. God's Supernatural Power	7
5. All Israel	8
<b>III. Covenant Renewal .....</b>	<b>8</b>
A. Structure and Content	9
1. Summons	9
2. Speech & Responses	9
a. First Call and Response	10
b. Second Call and Response	11
c. Third Call and Response	11
3. Ratification Ceremony	11
4. Dismissal	12
B. Original Meaning	12
1. Divine Authority	13
2. God's Covenant	13
3. Standard of Moses's Law	14
4. God's Supernatural Power	14
5. All Israel	15
<b>IV. Christian Application .....</b>	<b>15</b>
A. Inauguration	17
B. Continuation	19
C. Consummation	20
<b>V. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>21</b>

# The Book of Joshua

## Lesson Four

### Covenant Loyalty

#### INTRODUCTION

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Imagine that you're watching a theatrical production in which one character takes a leading role in nearly every scene. It's obvious that what he does in the story is significant. But in the last scene, he steps to the center of the stage and explains the grand significance of the entire drama to his audience.

Well, in many ways, this is what happens in the book of Joshua. Joshua has a leading role throughout the book. And everything he does is significant. But in the last scenes, he offers two speeches that our author used to reveal the grand significance of the entire book for the people of Israel.

This is the fourth lesson in our series on *The Book of Joshua*, and we've entitled it Israel's "Covenant Loyalty." In this lesson, we'll explore how the third and final division of Joshua reveals the significance of our book by calling Israel to be faithful to the terms of their covenant with God.

Earlier in this series, we said that the original meaning of Joshua could be summarized like this:

**The book of Joshua was written about Israel's victorious conquest, tribal inheritances and covenant loyalty in Joshua's day to address similar challenges facing later generations.**

The book was originally composed to guide Old Testament Israelites living either in the period of the judges, during the monarchy, or as late as the Babylonian exile. It addresses how the original audience was to deal with their enemies, their homeland, and their privileges and responsibilities as God's covenant people.

As we learned in previous lessons, to reach this goal, our author divided his book into three main divisions. In chapters 1–12, he focused on Israel's victorious conquest. In chapters 13–22, he moved his attention to Israel's tribal inheritances. And in chapters 23, 24, he concentrated on Israel's covenant loyalty. In this lesson, we'll look at this last major division.

The third division of Joshua consists of two main parts and an afterword. It begins with a speech, in 23:1-16, in which Joshua presented covenant warnings to Israel. It then turns to a second speech, in 24:1-28, given at a ceremony of covenant renewal that is followed, in verses 29-33, with a brief afterword reporting Joshua's death and several subsequent events.

Our lesson on Israel's covenant loyalty will look at these final chapters in three steps. We'll look first at Joshua's covenant warnings in his initial speech and then at Israel's covenant renewal, including a few comments on the afterword that follows. Finally, we'll explore Christian applications for this division of our book. Let's begin with Joshua's covenant warnings.

## COVENANT WARNINGS

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Everyone familiar with the Bible knows that both Old and New Testament authors frequently warned their audiences not to rebel against God. But many evangelicals don't readily associate such warnings with the biblical idea of "covenant." Rather, we tend to connect God's covenants only with his blessings. Now, we've seen in this series that the author of Joshua often drew attention to kindnesses that God showed to Israel through his covenant with them. But as we're about to see, chapter 23 of our book gives special attention to warnings about judgments that come when God's people violate his covenant.

We'll explore Joshua's covenant warnings using a familiar pattern. First, we'll consider the structure and content of this section. And second, we'll reflect on its original meaning, or how it was designed to impact its first audience. Let's begin with the structure and content of this chapter.

### STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

You'll recall that Joshua had led Israel's conquest into the heart of Canaan, and he'd waged major campaigns in the south and in the north. He'd also maintained the unity of the nation of Israel as he sent them to settle in their particular tribal inheritances, both in Transjordan and Cisjordan. But at this point in the book, our author focused attention on an assembly that Joshua held, probably at Shiloh, in the territory of Ephraim. Israel gathered there to hear crucial instructions from Joshua.

For our purposes, it will help to look at this chapter in two steps, beginning with Joshua's summons that appears in 23:1-2a.

### Joshua's Summons

It's important to remember that the book of Joshua refers to a number of other times when Joshua gathered Israel. But the description of this summons indicates that our author considered this assembly far more significant than Joshua's earlier gatherings.

In the first place, our author mentioned, in 23:1, that Joshua was "old and well advanced in years." Now, this same expression appears at the beginning of the second division of our book, in 13:1, but here we find the additional note that this was, "a long time afterward." And along these same lines, in 23:2, Joshua began his speech saying, "I am now old and well advanced in years." And in verse 14, he even commented, "I am about to go the way of all the earth." Our author's emphasis on Joshua's advanced age indicated that this assembly was one of his final acts as Israel's leader. Much like people today give special attention to a dying person's last words, every faithful Israelite in the original audience would have understood that this was a very important event.

In the second place, 23:2 also notes that, "Joshua summoned all Israel, its elders and heads, its judges and officers." Notice that Joshua didn't address the high priest or even high-ranking Levites who largely remained separated from the common people of

Israel. Rather, he addressed “all Israel” through the kinds of leaders that had frequent contact with the people. It was the responsibility of the “elders and heads . . . judges and officers” to enforce what Joshua was about to say. So, we see that in this assembly, Joshua raised matters that impacted every Israelite, every day and in every sphere of life.

But what was so important about this assembly? We find the answer to this in the second step of chapter 23, in Joshua’s speech. From verse 2b-16, Joshua warned Israel against violating God’s covenant.

## Joshua’s Speech

We’ve talked about divine covenants elsewhere in greater detail. But in brief, divine covenants reveal the central administrative policies that God established for his kingdom. We can organize the dynamics of these covenant policies into three main categories: divine benevolence, human loyalty and the consequences of blessings and curses.

When we speak of divine benevolence we have in mind how God’s kindness both initiates and sustains all of his covenants. Human beings have never been able to begin or continue a covenant relationship with God by their own merit or strength. Divine benevolence is always essential. At the same time, divine covenants also raise the expectation of human loyalty as our grateful response to God’s benevolence. Human beings have always been told to offer God their loyal service in the light of what he has done for them. And in the Scriptures, God’s covenants also entail the consequences of blessings and curses. When God’s people are loyal to him and observe his commands, they receive his abundant blessings. But if they are disloyal and reject his commands, they experience his curses.

Now, biblical authors pointed out that these dynamics frequently unfold in ways that are inscrutable to human beings. God’s patience and forgiveness, as well as his severity and judgment, often surprise us because his ways are so far beyond our capacity to understand. But time and again, biblical authors assured us that God is always true to the terms of his covenants and that he administers them with unsurpassed goodness, knowledge and wisdom.

As we’re about to see, Joshua’s speech in chapter 23 refers directly to all three covenant dynamics. But, primarily Joshua emphasized warnings about the curses that would come to Israel for flagrant disloyalty to God.

**When Joshua is speaking to the people in chapter 23, in the first 16 verses, he’s talking about the warnings of the covenant. Joshua is reminding them about the divine command to be loyal. The whole book has talked about the God of the covenant; it’s talked about the benevolence of this God, the God who fights in the battle, the God who gives victory, the God who pours out his care, the God who pours out his favors, but most importantly, the God who wants us to be loyal. So, Joshua is telling the people about obedience and about the consequences of obeying and of disobeying. Just like every other**

**covenant, this one included, not just the powerful king who makes a covenant with a weaker king, and not just the benevolence of that powerful king, but also the command for us to be loyal, and the consequences of obeying and disobeying, of being loyal and of not being loyal. After writing a whole book about the greatness of God — the God of the covenant who does everything, not because we deserve it, but because he has made a covenant with us — Joshua warned the people not to forget that we also have to be loyal to that God.**

**— Pastor Ornan Cruz, translation**

Although it's likely that Joshua said much more in such an important assembly, our author summarized his speech in three segments. Each segment begins with a reminder of divine benevolence followed by a focus on covenant loyalty, covenant consequences, or both.

***Joshua 23:2-8.*** The first segment, in 23:2-8, begins with two examples of God's benevolence to Israel. In verse 3, Joshua reminded Israel that their victorious conquest resulted because "the Lord your God ... fought for you." And in verse 4, Joshua recalled that God himself had "allotted ... as an inheritance ... those nations that remain."

Joshua then turned to the requirement of Israel's grateful loyalty to God. In verse 6, Joshua called for Israel to "be very strong ... and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses." These words recalled God's commands to Joshua in 1:7. But following these familiar words, we find a call to a specific kind of loyal service. For the first time in the book, we hear Joshua's call to Israel to avoid Canaanite idolatry and the corrupt practices of Canaan's idolatrous societies. In verse 7, he said, "You may not mix with these nations remaining among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them." Instead, Joshua told Israel in verse 8, "cling to the Lord your God."

Needless to say, Joshua's prohibition against idolatry wasn't new. It recalled the first two of the Ten Commandments and many other passages in the Pentateuch that warned against the corrupting influences of false gods. But by introducing it here, our author made it clear that this issue was particularly important to everything he had written in earlier chapters of his book. Given everything that God had done for his people under Joshua's leadership, the Israelites were obligated not to turn to other gods.

***Joshua 23:9-13.*** The second segment of Joshua's speech, in 23:9-13, also begins with God's benevolence. In verse 9, Joshua reminded Israel that "The Lord has driven out before you great and strong nations." And in verse 10, he said that, even now, "It is the Lord your God who fights for you."

Then, in verse 11, as in the first segment, Joshua called for Israel to respond with loyalty. He exhorted them to, "love the Lord your God." Here Joshua alluded to Deuteronomy 6:5 — the greatest of all commandments. This familiar verse says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." Both in Deuteronomy and in Joshua, to love God was to be wholly and exclusively devoted to the Lord and to no other god.

But in this segment of his speech, Joshua went one step further. To indicate how necessary it was to maintain this singular devotion, he warned Israel of severe consequences of curses for disloyalty to God. As he put it in verses 12, 13, “If you ... cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you ... [then] God will no longer drive out these nations before you.” And he added, “They shall be a snare and a trap for you ... until you perish from off this good ground.” Despite all God had done for them, if Israel followed the ways of the Canaanites that remained in the Promised Land, they would come under God's severe judgment.

In many respects, this exclusive focus on curses is unusual. In passages like Exodus 19:4-6, we find only positive consequences of future blessings mentioned. In other passages like Deuteronomy 28 and 30:15-19, the offer of blessings and the threat of curses stand alongside each other. But in this segment of Joshua's speech, he only mentioned the future consequences of *curses*.

**Joshua 23:14-16.** In the third segment of his speech, in 23:14-16, Joshua again began with God's benevolence. In verse 14, we read, “Not one word has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you.” This statement alludes to 21:45 where our author made a similar affirmation. But in this third segment, Joshua skipped calling for loyalty and instead immediately warned Israel of severe consequences for violating the covenant. In 23:15, he emphasized that God would bring on them “all the evil things, until he has destroyed you from off this good land.” As places like Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 4, 28 teach, rebellion against God would lead to the destruction of Israel and a period of exile from the Promised Land.

The progression among these segments reveals Joshua's primary emphasis in this speech. First and foremost, he wanted to warn Israel of curses that would fall on them if they proved to be ungrateful for the kindnesses of God. Now, it's important to note that Joshua didn't threaten these terrible consequences for small failures. He warned Israel in 23:16 not to “transgress the covenant of the Lord your God ... and serve other gods.” The expression “transgress” translates the Hebrew verb *abar* (אַבַּר). Our author reserved this terminology for serious, treasonous offenses, as in the case of Achan in 7:10, 15. Joshua didn't have in mind mere imperfections or peccadilloes. Rather, he meant the rank apostasy of idolatry, or as he put it here, the devastating sin of serving other gods.

**It's clear even from the text of 23:16 that he's warning the people that they are not to go and serve other gods. So, in this case, transgressing the covenant of the Lord would involve breaking the first two commandments, which thereby would entail breaking the covenant. And this is what Moses warned the people not to do in the blessings and curses of the covenant in Leviticus 26, and it's what he has urged them not to do in places like Deuteronomy 4:25-31 and Deuteronomy 28-32. And so, Joshua is continuing the instruction of his mentor, Moses. And he's urging the people — now that they have crossed into the land and subdued the land — that they are not to break the commandments and thereby transgress the covenant of the Lord. And Moses warned what would happen: if they did so, they would be**

**exiled from the land. And so, in a sense, Joshua is urging them to have a long life in the land by keeping the covenant.**

**— Dr. James M. Hamilton**

With the basic structure and content of Joshua's covenant warnings in mind, we're in a position to consider the original meaning of this chapter.

## **ORIGINAL MEANING**

In general terms, it isn't difficult to imagine the impact that the author of Joshua hoped this chapter would have on his audience. By the period of the judges, Israel had already begun to experience covenant curses because they had been drawn into Canaanite idolatry. At different times during the monarchy, even worse consequences had come on Israel because of their involvement in the worship of Baal and other gods. And of course, the Babylonian exile eventually came on Israel just as Joshua had said. So, rather than allowing his audience to blame their troubling circumstances on God's failure to be faithful to his people, our author expressly told his original audience that their trials resulted from their failure to remain faithful to God.

To convince his audience of their responsibility for their circumstances, our author wove into his covenant warnings the five main themes that we've seen throughout his book.

### **Divine Authority**

In the first place, in Joshua's summons, he revealed the divine authority behind the assembly. In 23:2a, he mentioned that it was *Joshua* who summoned the people. As we know, our author repeatedly emphasized that God had authorized Joshua as Moses' authoritative successor. So, by stating that it was Joshua who summoned the people, and then that it was Joshua who gave the speech that followed in verses 2b-16, our author emphasized the divine authority behind both.

As we've already hinted, this chapter of our book presented a point of view that was difficult for many in the original audience to accept. Many did not want to accept responsibility for the consequences of their failure to keep covenant. So, our author addressed the reticence of his original audience by making it clear that Joshua himself had spoken these words.

### **God's Covenant**

In the second place, it's not surprising that the covenant warnings in Joshua's speech are devoted to the theme of God's covenant. In 23:4, the author alluded to God's covenant when he described Cisjordan as Israel's "inheritance." You'll recall that the



Hebrew term for “inheritance” — “*nachalah*” (הֵנַחֲלָה) — indicated land promised by oath, or covenant, to the patriarchs in passages like Genesis 15:18. We should also recall that in 23:16, Joshua summed up his speech by warning Israel not to “transgress the covenant of the Lord your God.”

Our author’s concentration on God’s covenant called his original audience to express gratitude for the many benevolences God had shown them and their ancestors. And Joshua warned of the severe consequences of divine curses if they did not.

## Standard of Moses’ Law

In the third place, Joshua’s covenant warnings also highlighted the standard of Moses’ law in a number of ways. In Joshua’s speech, in 23:6, he ordered Israel to “do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses.” In 23:11, Joshua drew from Moses’ law in Deuteronomy 6:5 when he ordered Israel to “love the Lord your God.” And Joshua commanded Israel, in verse 7, not to “mix with these nations” and not to worship their gods. These, and similar instructions in verses 8, 12 drew from passages like Deuteronomy 7:3 and 10:20.

Our author noted how Joshua had referred to Moses’ law to remind his original audience of a point of view that appears time and again in his book. The only hope they had for receiving the blessings of God was to reaffirm their loyalty to the standard of Moses’ law.

## God’s Supernatural Power

In the fourth place, this chapter detailing Joshua’s covenant warnings also draws attention to God’s supernatural power. For example, in 23:1, the record of Joshua’s summons refers to God’s great power when it states that, “The Lord had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies.” The same theme also appears several times in Joshua’s speech. In 23:3, Joshua reminded Israel that “It is the Lord your God who has fought for you.” In verse 5, he assured them that “The Lord your God will push [your enemies] back ... and drive them out of your sight.” He repeated this motif in verse 9 saying, “The Lord has driven out ... great and strong nations.” And in verse 10, he said, “The Lord your God ... fights for you, just as he promised.” Joshua also referred to God’s supernatural power in the judgment against Israel. As he put it in verse 15, “The Lord will bring upon you all the evil things, until he has destroyed you.” And in verse 16 Joshua warned that, “The anger of the Lord will be kindled against you.”

As we can see, our author repeatedly pointed out how Joshua had reminded Israel of God’s supernatural power. He intended Joshua’s words to move his original audience toward gratitude and blessings. And, along the same lines, he designed every warning of supernatural curses for disloyalty to strike fear into their hearts and lead them to repentance.



## All Israel

And in the fifth place, the covenant warnings in chapter 23 also stressed the participation of all Israel. In Joshua's summons, verse 2 notes that Joshua had assembled "all Israel." And in Joshua's speech, his warnings against the consequences of curses for violating God's covenant didn't apply to just *some* of God's people. The future of the entire nation of Israel would be determined according to the principles Joshua declared in this chapter.

Without a doubt, the author of Joshua focused on this major theme in chapter 23 to call everyone in Israel to pay attention to what Joshua had said. As in the days of Joshua, the entire nation in our author's day needed to give heed to Joshua's warnings. Only then could they hope to find the blessings of God.

**God instructed the Israelites the things that they should do and should not do... But they were going to be with neighbors who worshipped other gods and with other horrible and terrible practices. So, God wanted Israelites to remain faithful in the covenant with him. And he promised that if they would stay faithful in the covenant with God, things would go well with them. But if they violate his covenant, something wrong will happen to them. This is the same even in our lives. If we remain faithful to God's covenant, God will be with us, will lead us, and will continue to work in us as he promised Joshua.**

— Pastor Micah Ngussa

Now that we've seen how the book of Joshua deals with Israel's covenant loyalty by reporting Joshua's covenant warnings, we're in a position to turn to our second main topic in this lesson: Joshua's ceremony of covenant renewal.

## COVENANT RENEWAL

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In many ways, the drama of chapter 23 leaves us in suspense. Joshua gave a speech that warned Israel of terrible things that would happen if they broke their covenant with God. But there's no indication of how Israel responded. Our author omitted any record of their response to prepare his audience for what he was about to write in chapter 24. In this last chapter, Joshua held a second assembly. Here, in a ceremony of renewal, the Israelites recommitted themselves to keeping covenant with God. And this ceremony modeled how the original audience was to respond to everything they learned from the book of Joshua.

We'll look at Joshua's ceremony of covenant renewal in our usual fashion. We'll note its structure and content and then its original meaning. Let's consider first the structure and content of Joshua's covenant renewal.

## STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

As we've seen, after the tribes of Israel had settled in their various inheritances, Joshua called them to assemble, probably in Shiloh. But in this chapter, we find another assembly — this time in Shechem. Shechem was a special sacred place for Israel. It was the first site where Abraham built an altar to God in the Promised Land in Genesis 12:7. And Shechem was in the vicinity of Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, where Moses had commanded Israel to renew their covenant with God in Deuteronomy 11, 27. And, in this final chapter of our book, Shechem is where we come to the culmination of Joshua's service as the leader of Israel.

Israel's covenant renewal at Shechem is a seamless narrative that divides into four main parts. We first read Joshua's second summons to the assembly in 24:1. This summons is balanced in the end of the book by Joshua's dismissal of the assembly in 24:28. Between these two, the main narrative consists of Joshua's second speech and Israel's responses in verses 2-24, followed by the ratification of the covenant in verses 25-27. Consider first the opening summons in verse 1.

### Summons

The record of Joshua's summons to this assembly is both similar to and different from his summons in chapter 23. Like the previous assembly, 24:1 tells us that Joshua brought together "all the tribes of Israel" as well as "the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel." The most significant difference we see in this summons is that Joshua and Israel "presented themselves before God." In other words, they assembled before the visible glory of God at the tabernacle. This is the first of several times when our author highlighted the significance of this event by drawing parallels to Exodus 19–24. In these chapters, Israel made a covenant before God's visible presence on Mount Sinai. So, just as in Exodus, covenant renewal under Joshua also took place in God's visible presence.

### Speech & Responses

After Joshua's summons, our author turned to Joshua's speech and Israel's responses in 24:2-24. In general terms, Joshua's speech here resembled his speech at the assembly in chapter 23 because it drew attention to the basic dynamics of God's covenant with Israel: It focused on divine benevolence; it called for Israel's loyalty to God; and it warned of the consequences of disloyalty. Idolatry was also a special focus of chapter 24, much like it was in chapter 23. But unlike the previous chapter, this chapter reports how Israel responded to what Joshua had to say.

The first segment of this speech amounts to a lengthy rehearsal of divine benevolence in 24:2-13. You'll recall that in chapter 23, Joshua summarized several things God had done for Israel. But here, rather than using his own words, Joshua began in verse 2 saying, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel ..." Throughout these verses,

Joshua reported what he had heard God himself say, probably at the tabernacle. Some eighteen times God declared what he had done for Israel using the first-person pronoun “I.” This first-person perspective echoes Israel’s covenant at Mount Sinai where Moses reported things he had heard God say on Mount Sinai. And it drew attention to the fact that God himself was directly reminding Israel of his many benevolences.

God rehearsed his benevolences to Israel over three periods of history. First, in verses 3, 4, God recalled how he had shown favor to earlier generations in the period of Israel’s patriarchs. Second, in verses 5-10, he discussed his favor in the time of Moses. And third, in verses 11-13, he ended with what had happened to the people of Israel in the days of Joshua. In verse 12, God made it clear that “It was not by your sword or by your bow” that Israel’s enemies had been defeated. And in verse 13, he added that he had given them “a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and ... vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant.” The main idea is clear enough. The Israelites that assembled before God owed every success to God’s benevolence.

**I believe the covenant ceremony had a tremendous message to teach the children of Israel. One aspect of it is looking at how he begins this farewell speech in talking about God's faithfulness in Israel's history. He starts with Abraham and then he goes on and talks about other patriarchs. He moves on then to the Red Sea experience where God has saved Israel there, and then talks about God's faithfulness in the wilderness, and finally brings them up to speed talking about how God has given them victory in the Promised Land. And they have not only heard of God's faithfulness through these other events, but they've seen some of this themselves firsthand. And the point is, I think, that as Joshua goes through this historical lesson for them, is just to remind them of God's faithfulness, that God has been with his people all the way back to Abraham and has continued to be faithful; therefore, they are to be faithful.**

— Dr. T. J. Betts

In the second segment of Joshua’s speech, in verses 14-24, Joshua reflected on God’s kindnesses with a call to loyalty and a warning of consequences for failure. And, like Moses in Exodus 19, 24, Joshua expected and received responses from the people. This segment divides into three calls and responses.

***First Call and Response.*** The first call and response appears in verses 14-18. In verse 14, Joshua exhorted the Israelites to “fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness.” Then he explained that the first step toward this end was for the Israelites to “put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt.” Following this, in verse 15, he told them to “choose this day whom you will serve.” Despite the fact that Joshua had warned against idolatry in his speech in chapter 23, the Israelites still had idols among them. And now, Joshua insisted that God required them to reject all false gods by ridding themselves of every idol. And Joshua set the example by saying those well-known words of 24:15: “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

This theme of serving God was so important to Joshua that he used the word “serve,” or “*abad*” (עָבַד) in Hebrew, sixteen times in this chapter. And in verses 16-18, Israel responded positively to Joshua’s call by expressing their commitment to serve God. As we read in verse 18, the people answered, “We also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.”

***Second Call and Response.*** The second call and response appears in verses 19-22. In verse 19, Joshua challenged the assembly by saying, “You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins.” Now, Joshua didn’t mean here that Israel was unable to serve the Lord and that God would not forgive their rebellion and sins in all times and circumstances. Rather, he focused on the fact that they could not recommit to serving God and receiving God’s blessings until they removed their idols. Although God had patiently overlooked this sin in the past, he would do so no longer. As Joshua warned in 24:20, continuing to serve idols would result in the terrible consequence that God would, “turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good.” Happily, after the people heard this dreadful warning, they responded in 24:21 saying, “No ... we will serve the Lord.”

***Third Call and Response.*** The third call and response appears in verses 23, 24. Having received positive responses from the people in verses 18, 21 and 22, Joshua reaffirmed, in verse 23, that the first outward act of renewed loyalty to God was to “put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your heart to the Lord.” And Israel replied in verse 24, “The Lord our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey.”

**The closing chapters of Joshua — chapters 23, 24 — contain a speech by Joshua about the need for exclusive loyalty to the Lord. And particularly of note you might find in there the admonition of Joshua for them to put away the gods which their fathers served beyond the river and in Egypt. And this is in reference to the fact that Israel had this tendency always to go and follow after other gods. It’s a fundamental law of the human heart, according to A.W. Tozer, that our hearts tend toward idolatry. And Joshua knew that only through exclusive loyalty to Jehovah, to God, would Israel not only succeed, but would experience the fullness of blessing because the gods of the nations, as the psalm tells us, they’re dead gods, and they make those who worship them like them, but there’s only one living and true God. And so, for Israel to remain faithful to the Lord and exclusively committed to him — as he was exclusively committed to them — was their only source of hope and life and prosperity in the future.**

— Rev. Michael J. Glodo

## **Ratification Ceremony**

After Joshua’s speech and Israel’s responses, the narrative turns to the ceremonial ratification of Israel’s newfound commitment to God in verses 25-27. This segment

begins in verse 25 telling us that, “Joshua made a covenant with the people ... and put in place statutes and rules for them.” In verse 26, Joshua also ratified this covenant commitment by erecting “a large stone ... under the terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the Lord.”

The terebinth tree mentioned here is reminiscent of Genesis 12:6 and the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. This was where Abraham built his first altar in Canaan. And, as we’ve seen throughout this series, stones were often used for commemoration in the book of Joshua. For instance, in 4:7, Joshua erected twelve stones for the Israelites at Gilgal as “a memorial forever.” And the altar built by the tribes of Transjordan in 22:34 was erected as “a witness between us that the Lord is God.” In 24:27, Joshua explained that, “This stone ... shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God.” In future generations, this witness-stone would make it impossible to deny Israel’s voluntary covenant with God to reject all idolatry. And if they failed to keep this vow, they could only blame themselves for God’s judgments that would come upon them.

## Dismissal

After these sobering events, the account of Israel’s covenant renewal closes with Joshua’s dismissal of the assembly in verse 28. Our author finalized his record of this event by noting that, “Joshua sent the people away, every man to his inheritance.” This ending to the narrative raised a crucial question for the original audience to consider. Did Israel keep their commitment to reject idolatry and serve only the Lord? In the afterword that closes the book, in 24:31, our author reported that “Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua.” But as we learn from the books of Judges, Samuel and Kings, while Israel remained faithful for a while, later generations violated their solemn oath against idolatry time and again. And the original audience of our book knew the consequences they had suffered because of it.

With the structure and content of Joshua’s covenant renewal in view, we should turn to the original meaning.

## ORIGINAL MEANING

On the whole, the implications of Joshua’s covenant renewal for the original audience are plain enough. By the time our author completed the book of Joshua, the people of Israel had failed to keep the commitments their ancestors had made in Joshua’s day. And the consequences of their disobedience were all too clear. If anyone in Israel wondered why they suffered so severely, Joshua 24 explains that they deserved God’s judgment for the flagrant violations of their covenant.

In an earlier lesson we saw that the original audience of our book may have lived sometime during the period of the judges, during the monarchy, or even as late as Judah’s exile to Babylon. Whatever the case, God’s people had suffered severe consequences for violating the covenant that Joshua renewed in chapter 24 of our book. In the period of the judges, many in Israel fell prey to the temptation of idolatry. And as a result, various

regions of the nation suffered cycles of defeat and deliverance. During the monarchy, idolatry led to all kinds of hardships. In the northern kingdom, repeated Assyrian aggression eventually led to the fall of Samaria and exile for much of the population. Later on, idolatry in the southern kingdom also led to the fall of Jerusalem and to the Babylonian exile. During all of these times, the faithful of Israel longed to know what they could do to find forgiveness and blessings from God. Joshua 24 gave them guidance: Israel must remember God's many kindnesses toward them and renew their covenant with him. And they must do this by devoting themselves exclusively to the service of their one true God, just as Israel had done in Joshua's day.

To move his original audience to action, our author again wove all five of his repeated themes into this chapter on covenant renewal.

## Divine Authority

In the first place, he made it clear that divine authority undergirded this renewal. As in chapter 23, the summons in 24:1 mentions Joshua by name to make it clear that God's authorized leader was in charge of this ceremony. In addition, Joshua's speech and Israel's responses in 24:2 begin with the words, "Thus says the Lord ..." These introductory words leave no doubt that God's own authority undergirded what happened in this chapter. And beyond this, our author went on in his record of Joshua's speech to repeat several times that it was Joshua, God's ordained representative, who spoke to the assembly.

By drawing attention to divine authority in this chapter, our author called every person in his original audience to pay special attention. If they ignored what had happened in Joshua's covenant renewal and went their own way, our author insisted that they were rebelling against the authority of God.

## God's Covenant

In the second place, throughout this account of covenant renewal, Joshua repeatedly referred to God's covenant. His speech and Israel's responses touched on the dynamics of divine benevolence, human loyalty and the consequences of disobedience. And more than this, in Joshua's ratification ceremonies, our author stated explicitly, in 24:25 that, "Joshua made a covenant with the people that day." Our author also alluded to God's covenant with Israel in the dismissal of the assembly. In verse 28, he said that "Joshua sent ... every man to his inheritance," once again using the Hebrew term "*nachalah*" (נַחֲלָה).

Now, as we've just seen, the theme of God's covenant in this chapter focuses both on God's kindness and on the requirement of loyalty. Clearly, our author hoped his original audience would realize how they had violated God's covenant. And he called them to renew their commitment to keeping covenant with God. Without repentance and renewal they and their children would continue to face the curses of the covenant.



## Standard of Moses' Law

In the third place, Joshua's covenant renewal in chapter 24 acknowledged the standard of Moses' law. For instance, in Joshua's speech and Israel's responses, verses 14, 15 call Israel to reject "the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt," as well as "the gods of the Amorites" — another term for Canaanites. This directive was based on the prohibitions of idolatry found in Moses' law in passages like Deuteronomy 11:28. In addition to this, when Joshua declared in verse 19 that "[The Lord] is a holy God. He is a jealous God," Joshua drew from portions of the Pentateuch like Exodus 20:5. Our author left no doubt in the minds of his original audience. The law of Moses was the standard that they must observe if they hoped to see the blessings of God.

## God's Supernatural Power

In the fourth place, this chapter on covenant renewal also stressed God's supernatural power. Our author did this most vividly in Joshua's speech and Israel's responses as Joshua reported what God had said concerning his benevolence toward Israel. In verses 3-6a, God spoke in the first person and listed a number of things he had done for Israel. For instance, in verse 3, he said, "I took your father Abraham ... and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many." In verse 5, he said, "I plagued Egypt." From verse 6b-7, Joshua added his own elaborations on what God had done for Israel. In verse 7, Joshua related that when the Egyptians pursued the Israelites to the sea, God "made the sea come upon them and cover them." In verses 8-13, the text returns to the first person. In verse 8, God said, "I gave [the Amorites] into your hand ... I destroyed them." And in verse 12, with regard to the conquest of Canaan, God told Israel, "It was not by your sword or by your bow."

In addition to this, the responses of Israel to Joshua's words focused on God's supernatural power. In verse 17, the people confessed that, in Egypt, God did "great signs in our sight" and that God "preserved us in all the way that we went." And in verse 18, they agreed that, "The Lord drove out before us all the peoples." But Joshua also warned Israel in verse 20, "If you forsake the Lord ... he will ... do you harm and consume you."

These declarations of God's supernatural power reminded the original audience of the kind of God they served. He was the God of power and should never be ignored. His ability to bless and to curse was beyond measure. And because of this, they must always remain loyal to his covenant.

**When we look at God's relationship with the people of Israel, one of the things that comes out clearly is that he blesses them in supernatural ways over and over again. And I think there's a real purpose behind that that helps them to be able to maintain their relationship with God and their loyalty to the covenant... The supernatural blessings that he pours out upon them, I think, is the**

**best way in the long run for people to continually be reminded, this is a God who loves us, who cares for us, who will never leave or forsake us, and because of that love that we've received from God, we turn around and continue to love him and stay loyal to that relationship.**

— Dr. Dan Lacich

## **All Israel**

And finally, in the fifth place, Joshua's covenant renewal begins and ends with references to the participation of all Israel. In Joshua's opening summons in verse 1, "all the tribes of Israel ... the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel" attended. And the account closes in verse 28 with Joshua's dismissal of "every man to his inheritance."

All Israel came to the assembly, renewed covenant, and left to settle in the inheritances God had given them. Our author's purpose for his audience is clear enough. Because this was true in Joshua's day, everyone in the original audience was to renew covenant in their day as well.

So far in this lesson on covenant loyalty, we've looked at the significance of covenant warnings and covenant renewal for the original audience of the book of Joshua. Now we should turn to our third main topic in this lesson, Christian applications of this division of our book. How are you and I to apply these matters to our lives as followers of Christ today?

## **CHRISTIAN APPLICATION**

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The last major division of our book called the original audience to reflect on the dynamics of their covenant with God, especially the requirement of loyalty and the consequences of curses they would face for disloyalty. Joshua himself would have had in view God's covenants with Abraham and Moses. And later Old Testament audiences also would have considered God's covenant with David. But how do these emphases pertain to God's covenant with us today?

As Christians, our relationship with God is governed primarily by what the prophet Jeremiah, Jesus and New Testament authors called the "new covenant." Unfortunately, many sincere followers of Christ have understood the new covenant in ways that make it very difficult to relate this portion of Joshua to Christian living. So, we need to pause for a moment and reflect on what Jeremiah predicted about the new covenant and how New Testament authors understood its fulfillment in Christ.

Listen to what the prophet Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 31:31-32:

**Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like**



**the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord (Jeremiah 31:31-32).**

This passage announces that after the Babylonian exile God would make “a new covenant” — or “renewed covenant,” as it may be translated — with “the house,” or people, “of Israel” and “the house,” or people, “of Judah.”

Jeremiah spent much of his ministry announcing that Judah was about to suffer defeat and exile at the hands of the Babylonians. But in Jeremiah 31, he began with the announcement that “the days are coming.” Elsewhere in this chapter the expression “the days are coming” refers to the time when God’s blessings would be poured out on Israel after the Babylonian exile.

Now, it’s important to note that this new covenant would not be like the covenant God made with their ancestors in Moses’ day. As we’ve seen in Joshua 23, 24, if Israel flagrantly violated their covenant with God by turning to idolatry, they would suffer the consequences of hardships and a period of exile from the Promised Land.

Sadly, Israel did break covenant with God and they suffered under the tyranny of Gentile nations for hundreds of years. But Jeremiah gave Israel hope that, after the exile, God would show mercy and establish a new covenant. In Jeremiah 31:33-34, God ensured that this new covenant would not end in failure like the covenant with Moses. Here we read:

**I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jeremiah 31:33-34).**

In effect, these verses explain that the new covenant would not fail because God would thoroughly transform his people so that they would be loyal to him. He would “put [his] law within them, and [would] write it on their hearts.”

As passages like Deuteronomy 30:10 indicate, having hearts attuned to God’s law was always the ideal for the people of God. And, by God’s grace, there was always a remnant of faithful Israelites who moved toward this ideal. But Jeremiah 31 predicted that when the new covenant came into full effect, spiritual renewal would be complete — not just for a few, but for every individual counted among the people of God.

Here we see a striking contrast with the days of Joshua. When the new covenant comes in its fullness, there will no longer be any need to call God’s people to be loyal to God. They will all be perfectly loyal. God “will forgive their iniquity, and ... will remember their sin no more.”

**The promise in Jeremiah and the promise in Ezekiel was that God would write the laws on our heart and make us to walk in his ways, put his Spirit in us, and he would forgive our sins. And so, the new**

**covenant is like the old covenant in that it's ratified by blood, but as the book of Hebrews makes clear, it's a better covenant because it's the covenant made with the blood of God's own Son, not bulls and goats that could not ultimately remove sins. So, it's a wonderful thing to be living under the new covenant and to have the blessings and knowing these things at a level that they probably simply did not know in the Old Testament times.**

**— Pastor Doug McConnell**

It isn't difficult to see that Jeremiah's description of the new covenant raises crucial questions for you and me as followers of Christ. If there's no need to call the people of the new covenant to loyal service, then why is the New Testament filled with calls to obedience? If there's no need for warnings about the consequences of curses, then why does the New Testament warn those who are tempted to turn from Christ?

To answer these questions, we must return to what we've seen throughout this series about Christ's fulfillment of the book of Joshua. As you'll recall, the New Testament teaches that Christ fulfills the goals of Israel's victorious conquest and tribal inheritances in three phases or stages. He began his grand fulfillment of these goals in the *inauguration* of his kingdom during his first advent. He goes on fulfilling them in the *continuation* of his kingdom throughout church history. And he will complete their fulfillment at the *consummation* of his kingdom when he returns in glory. This pattern of fulfillment is important because Christ fulfills Joshua's call for covenant loyalty in these three stages as well.

We'll explore Christian applications of this final division of Joshua in our usual way by sketching what the New Testament teaches about covenant loyalty in each stage. Let's begin with covenant loyalty in the inauguration of Christ's kingdom.

## **INAUGURATION**

We know with certainty that the age of the new covenant began with Christ's first advent. In Luke 22:20, Jesus himself spoke of "the new covenant in my blood." In Hebrews 8:6, we read that Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant. And in 2 Corinthians 3:6, the apostle Paul spoke of himself and his companions as "ministers of a new covenant."

**At the Last Supper, the Lord Jesus in the Gospels explained that his sacrificial death had significance at two levels. Yes, it was an atoning sacrifice in which he suffered the wrath of the holy God for our sins in our place so that we could escape it, but he also described his death as a covenant-initiating sacrifice. His blood initiated the new covenant, he says in Matthew and Luke very clearly. So, his death is that sacrifice that brings about the new covenant era.**

**— Dr. Charles L. Quarles**

The New Testament highlights two ways in which Christ inaugurated the new covenant. On the one side, it emphasizes Jesus' work as the Messiah. Israel had suffered for hundreds of years under the curse of exile that Joshua warned would come against them. And the Father sent Jesus as an incomparable act of benevolence and mercy. The second person of the Trinity was incarnated as the great Son of David who perfectly fulfilled the requirement of covenant loyalty to God — even to the point of dying and making atonement for the sins of all who truly believe in him. And for this service, God granted him the blessings of resurrection and ascension into heaven as the supreme ruler over all. The New Testament also adds that true believers are now “in Christ,” in the sense that they are identified with Christ in the court of heaven. We are seated in heaven, reigning with Christ in glory.

But on the other side, Jesus' wonderful work when he inaugurated his kingdom did not bring the church on earth to the perfection that Jeremiah prophesied for the new covenant. In the first-century church, there were still “false brothers,” as Paul called them in 2 Corinthians 11:26 and Galatians 2:4. And if they didn't repent, the false brothers were doomed to suffer the eternal judgment of God. But for true believers, we are not only “in Christ,” but Christ is in us through the Holy Spirit as we live on the earth. And the Holy Spirit leads true believers in a lifelong process of sanctification in which we are, in the words of 2 Corinthians 7:1, “bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.”

This earthly reality explains why Jesus and New Testament authors frequently emphasized covenant dynamics during the first century in ways that were very similar to Joshua's warnings in his speeches. Much like Joshua led Israel into covenant renewal, Jesus and his apostles ordained the regular preaching of the Word and the Lord's Supper as means of covenant renewal in the new covenant.

Time and again, they highlighted God's benevolences. But they also called the church to respond with loyalty to God. In the well-known words of Romans 12:2, they insisted, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” And they also frequently warned the visible church in their day of the severe consequences of God's judgment on those who turned from Christ. As we read in Hebrews 10:29, “How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified?” Much like the covenant warnings Joshua issued in his day, these and similar New Testament passages exhorted false brothers to come to saving faith. And they exhorted true believers to continue in faithful service to God.

In this light, it's not difficult to see how the five themes of the last chapters of Joshua apply to the inauguration of the new covenant. When we see divine authority emphasized in the last division of Joshua, we're reminded of Christ's supreme display of divine authority in his first advent. When we encounter the dynamics of God's covenant in the record of Joshua, we're reminded of how Christ established the dynamics of the new covenant. Joshua's emphasis on the standard of Moses' law should turn our hearts toward Christ's perfect obedience and his call for his followers to live according to God's law in light of the new covenant. And Joshua's reflections on God's supernatural power toward Israel should lead us to acknowledge the supernatural power displayed in the inauguration of Christ's kingdom. Lastly, the focus on the unity of all Israel in this

portion of Joshua should remind us of how Jesus and his apostles and prophets called for the unity of the church.

Following these Christian applications associated with covenant loyalty and the inauguration of Christ's kingdom, we should turn to how Joshua's warnings and call for covenant renewal apply to the continuation of God's people throughout church history.

## CONTINUATION

When we compare the kingdom of Christ in the first century with his kingdom today, it's clear that the ascended Christ has accomplished much. Over the last two millennia, as he has ruled over heaven and earth, his church has spread further and further around the world. And it continues to spread even in our own day. But despite the victories won by the ascended Christ against his enemies, Joshua's emphases in his call to covenant loyalty apply to the church in every age.

On the one side, Christ himself still reigns in heaven and continues to represent his people in the heavenly court. We are "in Christ," and God still imputes Christ's righteousness to every person who comes to saving faith in him so that their eternal blessings are secure in him. And more than this, even when we sin, Christ pleads on our behalf before the throne of God. In the words of Hebrews 7:25, "[Christ] is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."

But on the other side, the church of Christ on earth continues to be far from perfect. We must always remind the church of the words of Hebrews 12:14, "Strive for ... the holiness without which no one will see the Lord." There are still those who profess faith but are "false brothers," and only have what theologians often call "hypocritical" or "temporary" faith. In fact, apostasy in the church has grown to great proportions from time to time, and we are right to proclaim warnings like 1 Corinthians 10:12: "Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall."

Of course, by God's mercy there's always a remnant of true believers in whom Christ dwells by his Spirit. But even they undergo temporary hardships as discipline from God. As Jesus explained to the church of Laodicea in Revelation 3:19, "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent."

**The way God shows his love for his people is by sending discipline into their lives in this world... So, while it's wonderful that Jesus took the eternal curses on himself when he died on the cross, it's also a wonderful gift from God that while we live in this life, God has not removed all troubles, all trials, all discipline, even all curses of his covenant on those who truly believe, because that's his instrument, that's his tool for leading us into the ways of holiness and the ways of righteousness, so that the increase of our blessings in the world to come will be evident day by day.**

— Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

It's clear then that the themes of the last division of the book of Joshua speak to the church throughout the continuation of Christ's kingdom. Divine authority in this portion of Joshua reminds us of the authority of Christ over our churches and our individual lives today. The dynamics of God's covenant in Joshua call us to apply the dynamics of the new covenant in Christ as we acknowledge God's benevolence, offer him our loyalty, and receive the consequences of his covenants. When we read of Joshua's emphasis on the standard of Moses' law, we should look to both the Old and New Testaments — always in light of what Christ has accomplished — to guide us in our daily lives. And just as Joshua reflected on God's supernatural power toward Israel, we should rejoice in the supernatural power God displays to his church through Jesus, even today. And, of course, the focus on all Israel in this portion of Joshua calls on us to promote the unity of all of God's covenant people in Christ as the church spreads everywhere throughout the world.

As we've seen, Christian application of the last division of the book of Joshua focuses on what Christ accomplished in the inauguration of his kingdom and in its continuation in our own day. But it also applies to the consummation of his kingdom when Christ will bring these matters to their complete fulfillment.

## CONSUMMATION

On the one side, when Christ returns in glory he himself will gain his full inheritance for his perfect covenant loyalty in the new heaven and new earth. In Revelation 11:15, we read that at that time, "The kingdom of the world [will] become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." And in the words of Philippians 2:11, "Every tongue [will] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

And on the other side, when Christ returns, the church and the world will be utterly purified and glorified. The blessings from God's common grace that unbelievers received in this life will increase their eternal judgment. And the curses they experienced in this life will be but preludes to the eternal judgment they will endure. But those who have exercised saving faith in Christ will share with him in the new creation. Every blessing they received in this life will be but a prelude to the glories that will be theirs. And the temporary curses of discipline that they endured in this life will yield for them a great reward. As James put it in 1:12 of his book, "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life." On that day, the promise of the new covenant will be fulfilled completely. As we read in Revelation 22:3, "No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him."

The themes of the last division of Joshua offer us great hope as we look forward to the consummation of Christ's kingdom. The display of divine authority in this portion of Joshua reminds us that the hope we have in Christ is backed by God's full authority. Joshua's focus on God's covenant calls us to rejoice that, one day, we'll share in the full reward of Christ's perfect loyalty. We can be encouraged knowing that the standard of

Moses' law emphasized in Joshua will be fulfilled in our perfect obedience to God's will as we are united with Christ in the new creation. And Joshua's attention to God's supernatural power toward Israel moves us to reflect on the incomparable display of Christ's power that we'll see when he returns. Finally, the theme of all Israel highlighted in this portion of Joshua calls us to celebrate that, at the consummation of Christ's kingdom, the new world will be filled with God's faithful people who will worship and serve him with unending joy.

## CONCLUSION

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In this lesson on Israel's covenant loyalty, we've explored the last major division of the book of Joshua. We've seen how Joshua's covenant warnings called on the original audience to render loyal service and warned of judgment for disloyalty. We've seen how Israel's covenant renewal showed the original audience how to renew covenant with God in their own day as well. And we've noted how Christian application of this portion of Joshua must be rooted in the ways Christ fulfills the goal of Israel's covenant loyalty in the inauguration, continuation and consummation of his kingdom.

The last division of Joshua revealed the grand significance of the entire book for its original audience. God had blessed his people with a victorious conquest and had allotted enduring inheritances to the tribes of Israel. And these demonstrations of divine benevolence were to lead the original audience of our book to respond with covenant loyalty. God's judgment will come against those who fail to respond to him with faith and service. But great reward awaits all who respond to God's mercy with humble devotion. And the same is true for you and me. In Christ, we have seen the greatest display of God's grace. God offers eternal victory and eternal inheritance in the new heaven and new earth in Christ. And this offer will be fulfilled to everyone who comes in saving faith to the Savior.

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# The Book of Joshua

LESSON  
FOUR

## Covenant Loyalty Faculty Forum



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# Contents

<b>Question 1:</b>	What is the significance of the covenant warnings given in Joshua 23?.....	1
<b>Question 2:</b>	What was the purpose of Joshua’s farewell speech in chapter 23 of the book of Joshua?.....	3
<b>Question 3:</b>	How do the final chapters of the book of Joshua emphasize Israel’s need for exclusive loyalty and devotion to the Lord?.....	4
<b>Question 4:</b>	What would the book of Joshua have taught its original readers about the importance of obedience to Mosaic law?.....	5
<b>Question 5:</b>	What would the people of Israel have learned from the covenant renewal ceremony in Joshua 24? .....	6
<b>Question 6:</b>	How can a loving God say in Joshua 24:19 that he is a jealous God and will not forgive rebellion and sins? .....	8
<b>Question 7:</b>	What did Joshua 23 & 24 teach Israel about the importance of remaining faithful to God’s covenant? .....	9
<b>Question 8:</b>	How would God’s supernatural blessings to Israel have motivated them toward covenant loyalty and faithfulness?.....	10
<b>Question 9:</b>	What are some of the ways that covenant renewal and covenant loyalty in the book of Joshua apply to Christians today? .....	12
<b>Question 10:</b>	Is the new covenant spoken of in Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 8 a brand new covenant or a renewal of the old covenant? .....	14
<b>Question 11:</b>	What does Jesus do as the mediator of the new covenant? .....	15
<b>Question 12:</b>	What benefits does Christ provide for us in the new covenant?.....	16
<b>Question 13:</b>	What does the book of Joshua teach us about God’s benevolence? .....	17

# The Book of Joshua

## Lesson Four: Covenant Loyalty

### Faculty Forum

With

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Rev. Sherif Gendy  
Rev. Michael J. Glodo  
Dr. James M. Hamilton  
Prof. Dwi Maria Handayani  
Dr. Alan Hultberg  
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Dr. Sean McDonough  
Dr. Tom Petter

Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.  
Dr. Charles L. Quarles  
Dr. Mark Saucy  
Dr. Seth Tarrer  
Dr. K. Erik Thoennes  
Rev. Henryk Turkanik  
Dr. Peter Walker

### Question 1:

**What is the significance of the covenant warnings given in Joshua 23?**

**Dr. Richard L. Pratt Jr.**

Lots of evangelical Christians have a hard time with the fact that Joshua warns the people of Israel that God is going to punish or discipline or even curse them. And the reason they have a hard time with that is because they don't want that to be true for themselves. They don't see any relevance in that, in fact, because many of us believe that because Jesus took the eternal curses that we deserve on ourselves, that there's no place for discipline, there's no place for curses, there's no place for *bad things* — just put it that way — bad things to happen to us. And so, we have a hard time, sometimes, dealing with chapters 23 and 24 of Joshua because we believe that God has removed all possibility of bad things happening to us in his plan, because Jesus has taken the eternal curses on himself. But what we have to remember as we read those chapters in Joshua, about the warnings of covenant curses on Israel, is that the same kinds of things appear in the New Testament. You think about Hebrews 6, or Hebrews 10, or think about Revelation 3:19, where Jesus says, "Those whom I love I reprove and discipline." The fact is that the way God shows his love for his true people is by disciplining them in this world. So, while Jesus removes the *eternal* curses from us by his death on the cross, by taking them on himself, he does not remove every bad thing or every trouble or every trial that God sends our way or God permits to happen in our lives in this world. In fact, the book of James, in chapter 1, tells us that the trials and the problems that we have in this world are given to us as gifts from God that sanctify us and build us up... And this was the purpose of the words behind Joshua in chapters 23 and 24. For true believers in Israel, even in Old Testament days, the threat of curse revealed the reality that God would send bad things — punishments, discipline, hardship — to his true believers in Israel to sanctify them. And that was the way it was in the Old Testament, and it's the way it is even in the New Testament today.

**Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation**

The significance of the covenant warnings given in Joshua 23:1-16 are directly related to us as Christians... I say that this is important to *us*, because many times we rely on the grace of the Lord in a way that makes us apathetic about obeying the Lord's commands and requirements... In these warnings, Joshua reminded the people of their commitments to the Lord, the fundamental commitments and their applications. For example, they were not to worship other gods, not to build altars for other gods, not to mix, through marriage, with the gods of the other nations surrounding them. Simply put, they were to obey the law and the commands that the Lord had given them through Moses. The warnings presented by Joshua are covenantal warnings because they follow the general framework of biblical covenants. Covenants in the Bible have three main elements. The first element is divine benevolence where God reminds the people of his kindness, blessings and grace to them. The second element is the required human loyalty. Since the Lord has dealt bountifully with you and his grace overflowed for you, there is a human role, which is the role of loyalty, obedience, and faithfulness under the covenant. The third element is the consequences of the covenant. Obedience has its consequences — the blessings of the covenant. Disobedience and rebellion have their consequences, which are the curses of the covenant.

**Rev. Michael J. Glodo**

In Joshua 23, Joshua issues what we could call covenant warnings to the elders of Israel to be faithful, to win the land fully and completely, not to intermingle, intermarry with, or tolerate the presence of the idolatrous Canaanites among them, because if they did, it would be disastrous. Joshua is giving this speech because he is coming to the end of his life, and it's critically important that the next generation not only remember and know about how God's promises have not failed — “not one of them,” it says in that passage — but how they must continue to prosecute God's covenant as faithful covenant vassals in order to fully secure the Promised Land as their inheritance. Deuteronomy 7, for example, as well as other places in Deuteronomy, have these warnings that they shall not make treaties or settle with the inhabitants of the land because it would lead their hearts astray. They would intermarry, but not just intermarry; this intermarriage and making of peace with the inhabitants of the land would eventually corrupt their worship and would lead their hearts away from the Lord. And so, that's the main thing that Joshua is concerned about, that Israel not let their hearts be led away from the Lord by the presence of the peoples who inhabit the land when they got there.

**Question 2:****What was the purpose of Joshua's farewell speech in chapter 23 of the book of Joshua?****Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation**

In Joshua 23, we see that Joshua gathered all the people together, the entire nation of Israel, because he was very old, or as he said about himself, he was “about to go the way of all the earth,” which means that he was about to die. So, Joshua gathered the people and started to give them his farewell speech, which included important warnings to the people within the context of the covenant... That was Joshua's goal when he gathered all of Israel. He wanted to remind them that they had to be loyal and obedient and devoted to the Lord within the context of the covenant. They were not to take for granted the victory the Lord had accomplished for them and live as if the Lord's commands did not exist and worship other gods. That's why these warnings were so important. Joshua was reminding the people about the covenant the Lord had cut with them.

**Prof. Dwi Maria Handayani, translation**

Joshua 23 is Joshua's farewell speech to the nation of Israel. At that time, Joshua began by reminding Israel about their history, how the Lord had brought the nation of Israel out of the land of Egypt, reminding them again of how good the Lord is. So, the goodness of God is remembered again, professed again by Joshua, and taught again to the entire nation of Israel that was listening at that time. The purpose was so that they would not forget the covenant that was made between God and the nation of Israel. The nation of Israel, at that time, was in a situation where the surrounding nations were still there, and these nations worshiped other gods. It would have been very easy for the nation of Israel to forget God, and reminding them of the covenant was very important. That's why Joshua reminded them again of the history of God's goodness, so that those in the nation of Israel that had not experienced it beforehand — because they were the second generation — would remember it and always keep it in their hearts. Then they could feel it and they could use it in their lives to resist all influences that were around them, the influences from the other nations in Canaan. Because of that, in the second part of the speech Joshua reminded them of the snares or of the influences of the surrounding nations so that they could avoid them.

**Dr. James M. Hamilton**

Well, what we find at the end of the book of Joshua is really reminiscent of the blessings and the curses of the covenant back at the end of the book of Deuteronomy. And the burden of the message in both places is really the same message, and that is that if Israel will keep the covenant in the land, then they will have long and good life in the land. But if they break the covenant, eventually what's going to happen is the Lord is going to scatter them among the nations, which is what he warned would happen in the curses of the covenant, and it's what Joshua warns the people is going to happen. But in particular, in Joshua, it's almost like the book of Judges is being set up. There's even the statement in Joshua 23:12-13 where the Lord speaks of the

nations being a snare and a trap to the people of Israel if they don't thoroughly drive them out, and this is exactly what we find... At the beginning of Judges, at first, the people would not drive out the Canaanites, and then eventually they *could* not drive out the Canaanites, and that was because they were disobedient to the Lord, and the Lord was now using the Canaanites as instruments of discipline against them.

### Question 3:

**How do the final chapters of the book of Joshua emphasize Israel's need for exclusive loyalty and devotion to the Lord?**

#### **Dr. Seth Tarrer**

In chapter 23 and chapter 24 in the book of Joshua, Israel is called to this exclusive worship of the Lord, and with this call comes a warning. Throughout the book of Joshua, Israel's enemies have been devoted to destruction. However, here in chapter 23, Israel, this same destruction Israel is warned of, should they violate this exclusive loyalty or exclusive worship to their God, the saving God, Adonai. Now, when we look at this exclusive loyalty there's two components of it. The first is how is Israel to be exclusively loyal? Well, the Hebrew uses this fantastic word, "*dabaq*," right? And it means, "to cling to." And in 23:8, Israel is told to "cling to the Lord." Another way to translate this would be to "hug." It could be used in the same way. Israel is told to grasp tightly to the Lord, figuratively, literally. In all components, Israel is to not let go of their warrior God, the one who has saved them and brought them into this land. And then four verses later, in 23:12, Israel is told do not "hug" the gods of your nation, the nations around you. Do not *dabaq* the nations. So, there is the "how." How is Israel to remain exclusive? Cling to their Lord. And secondly, to whom is Israel called to be exclusive? Well, this is a question of choice. This is a question of who will Israel decide to follow? When Israel looks back through the aid of memorials and the aid of recitation of the law, the aid of the recitation of the covenant requirements and the renewal of the covenant that Joshua institutes at Shechem there in 23 and 24, this all causes Israel to cast its gaze, once again, on the God who not only brought them through the Sea of Reeds but through the Jordan River and into the land that they now inhabit.

#### **Prof. Dwi Maria Handayani, translation**

In Joshua chapters 23 and 24, we find Joshua's final speech before the end of his leadership. And it was given to the people of Israel, which, at that time, had already settled in the land of Canaan and were living among other nations that worshiped many gods. Because of this, in his farewell speech, Joshua emphasized, again, the importance of worshiping the one true God exclusively. It was very important that they looked to the God who, historically, had brought them out of the land of Egypt and then made a covenant with them exclusively to be, "a chosen race," "a holy nation," "a people for [God's] own possession," "a royal priesthood." And this was a covenant that no other nation received. God is not like the other gods that were known to the nations around Israel. And this is what Joshua emphasized, that they

must look to this one God only — the God who was great, the God who created the entire world, the God who transcended all other gods, the God who took the initiative to relate personally to the nation of Israel, the God who had lifted them out of slavery and redeemed them, the God who blessed them and made them, from one man, into a great nation, giving them the land, the only God who fought for them. So, to worship God — Yahweh — exclusively was very much emphasized by Joshua, because the nation of Israel lived in the midst of a society that very easily influenced them. And this is proven in history in the way that, after Joshua left them, not long after that, the nation of Israel abandoned the Lord. They worshiped other gods, and the consequences were that the Lord punished them and allowed many bad things to happen to the nation of Israel. And in our society now, I think the church must also be reminded of this. It's very important to worship the one true God exclusively, because this world offers us many things as well. Maybe the forms are different than they were in Joshua's day, but we are very easily influenced to turn to other gods. And because we are God's people, bound by God's holy covenant, we inherit this agreement, this faith, and we also must worship God exclusively, because we too can experience the consequences of disobedience. But, if we exclusively worship God, and him alone, then the blessings that God has promised, indeed, will be given to us.

#### Question 4:

**What would the book of Joshua have taught its original readers about the importance of obedience to Mosaic law?**

#### **Dr. Carol Kaminski**

Obedience to Mosaic law is really central throughout the whole Pentateuch and then going forward. And it's interesting because the book of Joshua begins, as Joshua becomes the new leader to take the people into the Promised Land, there's this central place that the word of God has, that he's not to depart to the right, to the left. And in fact, it's his obedience that is going to grant him success as they enter into the land. So, it's given a central place at the beginning of the book. But you also find right at the end of the book, in Joshua 24, as he gives his farewell address — he's about to die and so forth — he also talks about the warnings for God's people to follow God's laws, and he says, again, he gives that same instruction to them, that you're not to turn from the right, to the left. And the question is, well, why is God's law so important to do with conquest of the land? And this goes back to passages like Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 27 and 28, which gives this list of blessings. One of them is entrance into the land *if* they obey the commandments — Mosaic covenant — *if* they obey the commandments. But there's also, if they disobey those commands, then there is this promise by God for the curses, including being exiled from the land. So, under this period of the Mosaic covenant through Joshua, their entrance and holding onto the land is contingent upon their obedience. So, it's central to the book, and it's important throughout the whole narrative. Unfortunately, the Israelites will not obey the command of God, and so what you have in 722 B.C., the northern kingdom, they'll end up being exiled, and then 586 B.C., the southern. That has all kinds of



theology to teach us about the whole role of obedience, and especially, we could even look forward to the whole role of the new covenant, Jesus' own obedience, who fulfills the covenant. So, they're the big questions, but certainly within the book, where we are in the narrative of Joshua, obedience, both beginning and end, is central to the book.

**Dr. T.J. Betts**

I think that the book of Joshua teaches its original audience about obedience to the law, first of all by its introduction. We see the emphasis on Joshua and his keeping God's law, and he has the promise that, if you'll not turn from the right or left but truly stay true to God's law, that he will have success and prosper in what God has called him to do. I think that translates, then, into teaching all the people that this is God's purpose for them. As they had this leader, Joshua, they are to follow in his footsteps and to understand that this is what God's people are about. And so, this is extremely important to them, I think. As we look at, also, the law as Moses gave it, the law was meant as the nation especially got into the Promised Land — and that's what Deuteronomy really speaks to — and so, as they've gotten into the Promised Land, and Joshua has finally brought them here, it's the law that is to govern their government, how they act as a nation. But it also restrains them from sin. It also helps them understand how they are to be involved with each other and do business with each other and to understand property rights and understand what it means to be a holy people from all the other nations. And so, really, it's at the core of Israel's identity, and the book of Joshua just says, okay, this is what Moses gave us, now this is what we are, so let's be what God has called us to be.

**Rev. Henryk Turkanik, translation**

Obedience to God and his law brought blessings and earthly promises for the nation of Israel. This was clearly seen when they conquered the enemy and won Canaan. Disobedience, on the other hand, brought God's punishment and the curses that accompanied the nation of Israel during the acquisition of Canaan. And later, these consequences were evident in the loss of freedom when the nation fell into slavery to neighboring nations that bordered Israel. This happened because the nation was continually disobedient to God. This led to the nation losing their land and being taken captive. They found themselves in slavery, as we know, first by the Assyrians for the northern kingdom and then by the Babylonians for the southern kingdom.

**Question 5:**

**What would the people of Israel have learned from the covenant renewal ceremony in Joshua 24?**

**Dr. James M. Hamilton**

You know, it's fascinating. In Joshua 24, we really see some things that are similar to the end of the book of Deuteronomy, particularly Deuteronomy 29, where, in the early verses of that chapter, Moses tells Israel, "Down to this very day the Lord hasn't



given you the heart that you need.” And then, as he continues through that chapter, eventually he gets into chapter 30 where he begins to speak of the new covenant, the latter day time when the Lord is going to circumcise the hearts of his people. And here in Joshua 24, in a similar way, Joshua is telling the people, “You’re not *able* to serve the Lord your God; you don’t have the *ability*,” this volitional spiritual capacity to serve God. And I think this is intended to have two functions for the people of Israel. On the one hand, I think they’re intended to say, “Lord, if I don’t have the ability, I need you to give me the ability.” And there has been a reference back in Leviticus 26 to the uncircumcised heart of the people being humbled when they are ready to confess their sins, and the Lord will then forgive them of their sins. And then, Moses had commanded them in Deuteronomy 10 to circumcise their hearts to the Lord. So, I think that they’re intended to say to the Lord, “I can’t do this to myself. I can’t do this for myself. I need you to circumcise my heart and make me an obedient person.” And then, on the other hand, I think this is also intended, like Deuteronomy 30, to make them look forward to the day when the Lord will circumcise their hearts and enable them to keep the commandments. So, on the one hand, it’s teaching them their inability. On the other hand, it’s pointing them forward to a new day when the Lord is going to do this work in them that will enable them to obey. And John and the other apostles in the New Testament are claiming that that’s precisely what the Lord has brought about through the Lord Jesus in the giving of the Holy Spirit.

**Prof. Dwi Maria Handayani, translation**

The covenant renewal ceremony led by Joshua at Shechem, in chapter 24, is very important in this book. After Joshua gave his farewell speech, it was followed with a covenant renewal where, as in chapter 23, Joshua reminded Israel again of their history — how God had redeemed the nation of Israel and brought them out and blessed them and covenanted with them. But then Joshua also reminded them that within the covenant was the law that must be obeyed. And Joshua wrote down the law, as the law of God, to be remembered by the people of Israel and obeyed. In the context of the covenant, there are two things to remember here. First, they would receive blessings, but also, they must obey the law. And then, Joshua gave sanctions, or consequences: “If you do not obey, then the Lord will allow the other nations that are around you to become a snare, to become a threat to the nation of Israel.” And this was a reminder, from the beginning of Joshua’s farewell speech, before he passed the responsibility of leadership on to others. And Joshua then also said to them, “as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,” and he challenged the nation of Israel to make a decision as well. So, in truth, this became an important milestone. At the end of Joshua’s leadership, Joshua reminded Israel, by renewing the covenant, that although their leadership changed, they would not forget that they remained under their true leader, the Lord himself. And I think this is a good lesson for the church today. We must always remember the history, once again, of the goodness of God in our lives. And we must — at the end, perhaps, of our own leadership, or when we move on to the next stage — we must bring those under our leadership to God, not to ourselves, reminding them that all of this is God’s work. And there is a law, and things that we must obey, and there are consequences for not obeying, and there are

blessings if we are willing to obey. And that's what Joshua did. And it's something we all should emulate.

**Rev. Henryk Turkanik, translation**

Now, when the Israelites had settled in the land, Joshua renewed the covenant and reminded the nation that obedience to God and his law was the foundation of the nation's occupancy of the Promise Land. Their obedience would bear fruit in the goodness and blessings that would come with whatever the nation of Israel did — blessings of material goods and favor in all of their endeavors. In contrast, disobedience to God would result in God's punishment, such as natural disasters like famine, a frequent punishment in the time of the book of Judges. And this would manifest itself if the nation continued to disobey. It would manifest itself as deportation and even enslavement of the nation in a foreign land. And this happened many years later, when the nation found itself in slavery, first to the Assyrians and then to the Babylonians.

**Question 6:**

**How can a loving God say in Joshua 24:19 that he is a jealous God and will not forgive rebellion and sins?**

**Rev. Kevin Labby**

God demands holiness of those who would be in fellowship with him, which, of course, raises the question of how we who are not holy, who are sinful, can be in fellowship with God. And God, by grace, makes that possible. He sent his son Jesus to be for us what we could never be for ourselves, and he's jealous for that relationship. But the jealousy that the Bible's describing there in Joshua is not a fickle, petulant jealousy. It's the jealousy of a husband for his wife who he loves and in whom he wants to have a wonderful, abiding relationship. And so, that's why so many times in the Old Testament, as well as into the New, idolatry, turning away from the Lord and chasing after other things — as what God would be for us instead — that's why it's likened so much to adultery... And so God, when he would have us be in relationship with him, we need to be faithful as he is faithful, and of course we're not. And he will not forgive — that is, turn aside, say that it's okay when it's really not — our sinfulness. What he requires is justice. He won't satisfy the desires of his love and grace at the expense of his justice, but in his mercy he sent forth his Son to be for us what we can never be for ourselves. And so, God, in that sense, does not forgive, but in another sense does forgive. But he does not forgive by sweeping our sin under the rug. He forgives by paying the penalty for our sin in our place through his Son.

**Dr. K. Erik Thoennes**

The jealousy of God describes God's ardent desire for exclusive favor from his covenant people. It's a demand that a husband has for the faithfulness of his wife. It's an astounding thing that the Creator of the universe, who has no unmet needs, has

nevertheless entered into a relationship with his people that he compares with a marriage. And when we are unfaithful to him as his people, it's spiritual adultery. So, he responds with an appropriate jealous anger, first and foremost for his own glory, but expressed primarily in glorifying him through our faithfulness. So, when we're unfaithful to him and we pursue other "lovers" besides God as the one true object of our affections, he rightly responds with the jealous anger of a husband.

### **Dr. Robert G. Lister**

When we understand, according to the Scriptures, that God's attribute of love is a holy love, a jealous love, a love that brooks no rivals and has no tolerance for idolatry and false worship, we understand that yes, God is loving, but God's love comes with claims on his creatures. It comes with requirements. It comes with an acknowledgement that God is God and there are no other gods. And ultimately, it would be unloving of God to tolerate idolatry. It would be unloving of God to say, "I'm not bothered by the fact that you're worshiping these other gods. I'm not bothered by the fact that you're spurning my redemptive initiative towards you." ... We want to be careful not to dichotomize what is the holistic reality of God's character. And if we take our understanding of God's love in conjunction with our understanding of his holiness, we realize that though hell is a sobering reality and final judgment is a sobering reality, God is absolutely right and just to judge the unrepentant in hell, and in fact, if he didn't, we wouldn't say that he was good. If God did not esteem the proper worship of the one true God — the way that he does in Scripture — we wouldn't say that he was good if he looked askance at sin and treated it as though it were no big deal. So, the love of God is a critical attribute to understand. We just don't want to abstract it and isolate it from the rest of what we know about the character of God as revealed in Scripture.

### **Question 7:**

**What did Joshua 23 & 24 teach Israel about the importance of remaining faithful to God's covenant?**

### **Rev. Henryk Turkanik, translation**

At the end of his life, Joshua reminded the nation of Israel of the most important laws, those that were connected to keeping the covenant and remaining faithful according to the covenant. These were the laws that Moses had repeated for a long time, both during the time of Israel's enslavement and during the time of wandering in the desert for forty years. And these laws had consequences. Blessings would always come to the nation of Israel as a result of their obedience to God. However, if the nation was disobedient to God, curses would fall upon the nation, along with other types of misery. This was written in Deuteronomy 28. There it was written that if you are obedient to God's commandments, you will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out. Your storehouses and your property will be blessed, and whatever you put your hand to, God will bless. But if you are disobedient, you will not be blessed, either coming in or going out. Your basket and your storehouses will be

cursed, your livestock will be cursed, and anything you set your hand to will be destroyed. So, in accordance with the law, Joshua cited in the final two chapters — 23 and 24 — what Moses had spoken of in Deuteronomy 28.

**Dr. Dwi Maria Handayani, translation**

Chapters 23 and 24 take place at the end of Joshua's leadership. And Israel received these chapters in circumstances where the nation was living in a culture that was different than its own. The nations around Israel were polytheistic — worshipping many gods — whereas the nation of Israel, at that time, was the only nation that worshiped the one true God, Yahweh. And a warning was given to the nation of Israel so that they would remain faithful to God. He was not like the other gods that were worshiped in the nations surrounding Israel — whether it was Asherah, whether it was Dagon, or Baal — gods who had no relationship whatsoever with the people that worshiped them, where the concept was only “give and take” — asking, giving, giving an offering and then hoping. But the Lord had a covenant bond that was very personal between Yahweh and Israel. And the nation of Israel was reminded again to remember the importance of this covenant, which involved both parties. There was an initiative from God, and there was also a response from the nation of Israel. This was an exclusive relationship that needed to be maintained. This was the only God, the great God, the true God, who covenanted with them. Other gods, Baal for example, was the god of fertility; still other gods were gods over the sea, the land. But the God of Israel was a God who owned the whole world. And it is this God who made a covenant with the nation of Israel. It was important that they always remembered this covenant and remained in a right relationship. And that also involved the way they lived. If they obeyed God, then he promised to give them blessings. But if they did not obey God and turned to other gods, then the Lord would punish them. There were consequences in the covenant that the nation of Israel had known from the beginning, and this is what Joshua reminded them of because he would soon step down as their leader. And regardless of who became his replacement, I think Joshua wanted the nation of Israel to remember that God was truly their leader who remembered his covenant with them.

**Question 8:**

**How would God's supernatural blessings to Israel have motivated them toward covenant loyalty and faithfulness?**

**Dr. James M. Hamilton**

When we think of the supernatural blessings in the book of Joshua and their function in motivating the people of Israel toward covenant loyalty and faithfulness, the way in which I think we should think about this is in terms of the way that the signs and the wonders, so to speak, that God is doing for Israel in Joshua correspond to and match the signs and wonders that God did for Israel at the exodus from Egypt. So, there are many ways in which these wonders in Joshua point back to the exodus. For instance, the crossing of the Jordan River is very similar to the crossing of the Red Sea; the

people walk on dry ground. Joshua encounters the angel of the Lord and he's told to take off his sandals. Bruce Waltke, in his *Old Testament Theology*, says that there are eighteen points of similarity between the early narratives of Joshua and the narratives about the exodus from Egypt. And I think that the upshot of this is that the conquest of the land is already a kind of new exodus so that the way that God saved his people at the exodus is being presented as the way that he is saving, or working on behalf of his people at the conquest. And so, in the same way that God liberated his people, he's now granting them what he has promised them, and so it should inspire them to be confident in their God. It should convince them that their God is the only living and true God, and therefore he is the only God to whom they should be devoted. And this is reinforcing the message of Moses, particularly in the *Shema* — "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" — and you shall love him. He's the only one, so you shall love him. And this goes along also with the teaching of Joshua where the Lord is saying to Joshua, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you," and that's evident in the way that he saves them, and it's evident in the way that they are to obey what they've been commanded by Moses.

**Rev. Kevin Labby**

You know, when you come into the book of Joshua, one of the things that you see is the commandment to have twelve stones, a monument of God's faithfulness to his people, so that future generations of Israelites could look back upon the mighty works of God and know how God had displayed his love and affection for them in difficult times and proved to be their faithful deliverer. Of course, the Bible tells us we love because he first loved us and says that it's his comfort and his kindness that leads us to repentance. And I think one of the great catalysts to love for God in practice, in our words, our thoughts and our deeds is remembering God's great love to us in the extraordinary and oftentimes even ferocious way in which God rules, defends, cares for his people. And so, as the nation of Israel saw God deliver them through the Red Sea, in the crossing of the Jordan, providing for them bread, manna in the wilderness, meeting their needs, forgiving them time and time again, if they would take the time to reflect upon those things, it would stir their hearts in love and affection for God and then the outward manifestation of it. Later on, in the book of Judges, which of course follows the book of Joshua, one of the most fateful verses in that book is it describes Israel's decline as a whole generation grew up that neither knew the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. So, the writer of Judges is clearly making the same case in the inverse that, as we remember what the Lord has done, his great and mighty works, it stirs our affections toward him and that finds outward manifestation in what we think, say, and do.

### Question 9:

#### What are some of the ways that covenant renewal and covenant loyalty in the book of Joshua apply to Christians today?

##### Dr. Dan Lacich

When we look at covenant renewal and loyalty to the covenant in Joshua, it's easy to think, well, that's for then, that doesn't apply to us as Christians today, but there are some great lessons for us, one of them being the communal sense of the covenant. Certainly, in western Christianity, and in growing parts of the world, our faith is becoming very individualistic — *we* make a decision to follow Christ and it's just a "me-and-Jesus" kind of relationship. But when we look at the covenant with Joshua and God's people, it was very much about the community making this covenant together and even about holding one another accountable to the covenant. It wasn't just me praying a prayer to God and saying, "Yes, I have this agreement with you." It was us together as God's people making this statement, but also saying we will watch out for one another, we will care for one another, we will encourage one another in the keeping of that covenant. I think a second way that it's helpful for us is in the whole area of renewal of the covenant. Certainly, we make an appropriate emphasis on people coming to faith in Christ and repenting, but I think oftentimes, for Christians, we don't know what to do with someone when they sin *after* they've come to Jesus. That's not supposed to happen. What do we do now? And the covenant renewal, I think, lets us know that this is something that is an ongoing, regular occurrence in our lives, to reaffirm the relationship we have with God, and certainly as it relates to the gospel, to tell ourselves the gospel every day. I think if we would renew that commitment more regularly and would share amongst ourselves the gospel of the new covenant more fully, we would find, I think, less major scandals within the body of Christ, because we would deal with sin appropriately along the way and repent and renew instead of waiting until it becomes so big and massive that something just falls apart completely and then we don't know how to recover from that.

##### Rev. Bin Li, translation

In Joshua chapters 23 and 24, we see Joshua lead the elders and people of Israel to renew their covenant before God. The application for us today is that we are to understand God in a new light. In the book of Joshua, what we see is that the people of that day truly experienced God as they entered into Canaan and fought for the Promised Land. They came to know that God was great and worthy of awe as he removed the people of Canaan, not because of any righteousness of the Israelites, but because of his judgment on the Canaanites. Joshua chapters 23 and 24 reminds us that we are always to have a heart of reverence before God: "Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness" — Joshua 24:14. In reality, our understanding of God today tends to be more about his grace, and not enough about his majesty. We don't have enough fear of him. The book of Joshua especially reminds us that when it comes to knowing God, we must be cognizant that God is both merciful *and* majestic. And so, we aren't to approach him only from one side or the other. If we get to know him

strictly focused on his grace, we can easily indulge our sinful desires. But when only seeing his majesty and not his grace, we easily sink into guilt and legalism. That's the first point. The second point we see is that God's covenant leads us to serve him. In the process of teaching his people, Joshua himself told them, "choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ... as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." Because Joshua knew who God was, he chose to serve him whole-heartedly rather than serving idols. What this means for us as worshipers today is that we are to dedicate ourselves to following God. God led the Israelites to live in the land of Canaan, instead of the original residents, so that the Israelites could serve God. It was not just so that they could have a good life. They were not to live for themselves, but for God. The same goes for us today. In the church, we are not just to say that we've been saved by grace and all that's left for us to do is to wait to get to heaven. It's not that simple. What we are to do is to truly know how to respond to God's grace in this life, to worship and serve him. The covenant in the book of Joshua includes what our important responsibilities are, but God's grace also motivates us and causes us to be able to move toward the goal of serving God.

### **Dr. Tom Petter**

Well, the themes of covenant renewal, loyalty in Joshua and how all of that applies today to the Christian life is obvious on the one hand, but tricky on the other, because you look at chapter 1, the whole conquest and success of Joshua is dependent. There's an "if" there, so it's conditional. It's put in a conditional way, that *if* you follow the law and don't walk away from the law, this left and right — and [the] language is "to meditate on it," to think about it day and night. So, it's Psalm 1... This is traditional loyalty, covenantal loyalty that's asked of Joshua, that the Psalms pick up, covenant faithfulness — Deuteronomy — obedience to God's law from the heart. And if he does that, then he'll have success. And so, there's a conditionality there that's built into the conquest and the success of what Joshua will do, and then, how that's then passed on at the end of his life. So, chapter 1 and chapter 24, this whole covenant renewal in 23, 24, is a very powerful moment because then he tells the Israelites, "You have to do the same thing." But then he says, "I know you're not going to do it, but for me and my house, that's what I'm going to do." So, he kind of sets himself apart from the others because he doesn't think they're going to do that. And so, that's the dilemma of the Old Testament. There is the standard being asked. Yeah, covenantal loyalty, faithfulness to God's law, obedience from the heart, knowledge of God's Word, that's all there. And then, "If you do that, then I'll grant you success." ... But somehow, no one quite gets there. And so, of course, now comes Jesus in the new covenant, and he is the faithful Israelite. He fulfills Joshua 1. He fulfills Psalm 1... "Blessed is the man ... who meditates on the law day and night." He doesn't sit with sinners. Joshua 1 — he never departs to the left and to the right, and then he'll have success. And that language of "success" is very intentional because it's picked up in Isaiah 53, that the servant that's coming, Jesus, he will have success. It's the same kind of language. And that success is obedience to God's law. So, in the New Testament, we are absolutely, 100% called to follow and obey the law and to be faithful to God's law. I mean, look at all the imperatives by Paul and Jesus: "You've got to obey me." "If you are a disciple, you follow me." But now, the fundamental



difference is that we've had one who has been faithful ... just like that beautiful song by Augustus Toplady, "Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee." So, we hide in Christ's faithfulness, in his holiness, in his obedience, and so we obey out of Christ's faithfulness and Christ's success. We hide in his success. And as we follow him, we too will have that statement, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

### Question 10:

**Is the new covenant spoken of in Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 8 a brand new covenant or a renewal of the old covenant?**

#### **Dr. Peter Walker**

There's always quite a bit of controversy as one looks at the Bible to discover, is it one big covenant, or is it divided up into two halves, or perhaps even more covenants? And, especially this language of the new covenant, which we find first used in Jeremiah, picked up in Matthew's gospel when Jesus talks about the blood of the new covenant, and also especially here in Hebrews 8, when it talks about the new covenant. Is that a brand new covenant, such that everything that happens in the New Testament is something which is completely new, fresh, and in one sense in opposition to the old? Or is it a *renewal* of the original covenant? I think it holds the Bible much more closer together if we see it as the renewal of the original covenant. And what's that original covenant with Abraham and with God's people? It is that God is going to remove sin from his people and from his creation. And therefore, Jesus comes not to do something entirely new, but to fulfill the original purpose of the covenant. He does that when he dies on the cross, his blood is the blood of the new covenant, and then the writer of Hebrews is then showing the benefits of that renewed covenant. Yes, it does mean certain things from the old are to be removed, and he says that in Hebrews 8, that aspects of the old covenant are close to destruction, he says, but the deep underlying theme is one of unity and continuity, a renewal of the covenant.

#### **Dr. Dan Lacich**

When we look at Hebrews 8 and we see the idea of a covenant and a new covenant, it really is a good question, is it a new one or is it just sort of reformatting the old one? There's a sense in which the answer is both. But ultimately, it is a *new* covenant. It builds on the previous covenant, and that's why it has a sense of being renewed or reformatted. But it's new on a number of levels. It's new because it has a different group of people who are being addressed in that covenant. You move from just the people of Israel to all who would have faith in Christ, so you have a different participant there. The mediator of that covenant is now specifically Christ, which changes it. And even the requirements of the covenant change. Certainly, faith was what gained salvation even for the Old Testament saints, but the requirements of the covenant, because they were so nationalistic for Israel as a people, were different for the requirements of us as God's people who are scattered throughout the world and



throughout his kingdom. So, it is a new covenant, but it is built on the previous covenant with similarities, but a new and improved version, if you will.

**Dr. Sean McDonough**

Virtually any time we are pressed theologically to give an “either/or” answer, it’s a sign that we’re probably dealing with a complex reality, which is going to have something of both. So, when we come to the question, “Is this a renewed covenant or an entirely new covenant?” my inclination based on my theological predilections as well as the evidence of Hebrews and the rest of the New Testament is it’s going to be aspects of both, that the very designation “new covenant” shows that there’s something new about this, that Jesus is superior to and different from the perpetual animal sacrifices in the temple, that he’s got a better priesthood, that the gift of the Spirit — not looming large in Hebrews, but throughout the rest of the New Testament — that the gift of the Spirit is a unique blessing of the new covenant... Even if we go back to the writer of Hebrews’ prime source text for the new covenant, Jeremiah 31, there is clearly a sense in which that’s a renewal of the old covenant. And surely God’s purposes and God’s wisdom were not lacking in the old covenant, so it would be absurd to think that he’d just want to chuck the entire thing aside. So, when we think, “Is it new or renewed?” as in so many other instances, we need to think that it’s going to have aspects of both.

**Question 11:**

**What does Jesus do as the mediator of the new covenant?**

**Dr. Alan Hultberg**

The mediatorial role of Jesus is especially laid out in the book of Hebrews, and in Hebrews, we’re told that Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant, that is, that through the work of Christ ... the new covenant that was promised in Jeremiah 31 is initiated in the life of the church. And so, what did Jesus do to initiate that covenant? The author of Hebrews tells us that he offered his blood as blood of a better sacrifice for this covenant, that that sacrifice is not better only because it was the blood of Christ, but also because it was offered in the heavenly tabernacle, not in the earthly temple. His blood atones for sin *once and for all*, the author of Hebrews says, that is, it’s only offered one time, and its effect is forever. And so, Jesus moves us from temporary and, maybe not “corrupt,” but imperfect sacrifices, imperfect atonement, to perfect atonement, to eternal atonement. And then, as our mediator, he stands as our high priest before the throne of God, interceding for us so that it’s impossible to be disconnected from the love of God when you have a Great High Priest — Jesus — standing, pleading our cause constantly before the Father.

**Dr. Dennis E. Johnson**

God had the plan from eternity past in the covenant of redemption to establish a covenant ... in which the second person of the Trinity, God the Son, would become our human brother and become the faithful servant of the covenant. He would

faithfully fulfill the requirements laid upon us to be utterly loyal to the Lord and absolutely obedient through his whole obedient life. We speak of his active obedience and the imputing, that is, the crediting to us, of his righteousness. And then, as the climax, Jesus offered up himself to endure the curse of the covenant that we deserve. Paul speaks in Galatians 3:13 of Christ becoming accursed for us because though he deserved no curse, we do. And so, he frees us from the curses of the covenant. He bestows on us his righteousness. Our sins are imputed, credited or debited to him as he endures. And so, he brings us together with God the Father. He mediates. He brings us together in peace and joy and blessing.

### **Question 12:**

#### **What benefits does Christ provide for us in the new covenant?**

##### **Dr. Mark Saucy**

The benefits that we get from the new covenant, from Jesus, I think, start to be enumerated right in the original passage of the new covenant, or at least where that term is used in the Old Testament, that's Jeremiah 31. In verse 33 and 34, there is an enumeration, or a listing of the benefits that come in the new covenant that would be coming in the age to come. And it starts out with the law written in your hearts. And then you have, if you bring in other passages about the law is going to be written by the Spirit that God is going to put within the individual in their hearts. Then it moves into questions of knowledge of God. And then it will move into, also, questions of the access that we have to God. And I think, in the Prophets, it also moves into things that are going to happen socially through a restored nation, and it's going to affect all nations and finally the world. And so, we bring these to Christ. Christ is the one who poured out the Spirit at his ascension. That's what Pentecost was about. That is what makes and activates the new covenant age finally for all people who will be found in it by faith. And so, what he does in regeneration, what he does on the heart, what he makes us with a new love, all of the language of the New Testament, that's new covenant promise that Jesus has already initiated. The knowledge of God, a powerful demonstration of this is when the temple veil rent at the crucifixion that showed that the system, that was mediating access to God by a cast — by a priestly cast, by calendar, by clean and uncleanness, definitions of the old covenant — those are done now and access is now in a new open way. God welcomes us without a priesthood, without coming on a particular day. And so, this kind of knowledge of God... And the most profound benefit — I would go back to that passage in Jeremiah — is in verse 34 where he says, "Because I will forgive your sins." There's the foundation of the new covenant, and there's where we see the interface of the crucifixion, the cross of Christ, to the new covenant reality and the life. The sin problem God solved, and so all of the other benefits could be poured out.

##### **Dr. Charles L. Quarles**

There are a couple of key Old Testament passages when it comes to understanding the new covenant. One is Jeremiah 31; the other is Ezekiel 36. Other texts discuss the

new covenant, but these are the fundamental ones. And those texts show us that the new covenant has two primary foci. On the one hand, the new covenant promises the forgiveness of sins. Ezekiel 36 speaks of us being cleansed of our iniquities and our uncleanness. Jeremiah 31:34 speaks of God remembering our sin no more. So, obviously there's a big focus on the forgiveness of sin, and that's normally our focus when we speak of the new covenant. But the new covenant actually entails far more. Not only is there forgiveness of sin, but there is a radical transformation of the person that results in a dramatic change in behavior. And Jeremiah says it this way; he says that God will write his law upon our hearts. And the idea is that the very heart is transformed so that we begin to naturally and spontaneously exhibit the righteousness of God's own character. Ezekiel said it a little bit differently, but the point is the same. He said that God would give us a new heart, and he said that God would grant us the Holy Spirit and that the Spirit would move us to keep God's commandments and fulfill his ordinances. And Jesus does both. Through his sacrificial death, he provides for us forgiveness of sin. But in addition to that, he fulfills the promise of John the Baptist where he says, "The one who is coming after me is mightier than I am. He will baptize you with *the Holy Spirit*," referring back to the promise of the new covenant in Ezekiel 36. And when Christ writes God's law upon our hearts, when he places his Holy Spirit in us, it changes our very identity, it changes our very nature so that we begin to naturally and spontaneously exhibit the character of the holy God.

### Question 13:

#### What does the book of Joshua teach us about God's benevolence?

##### Dr. James M. Hamilton

Joshua 23 and 24 teaches about God's benevolence particularly in the way that, right at the outset of Joshua 24, Joshua is presented telling the people of Israel that when their fathers lived beyond the river — and he especially mentions Abraham — they served other gods. So, Abraham and his father and his brothers, when they lived beyond the river, they were idolaters. And so, what Joshua is saying to the people is God is so good that you cannot, and your fathers *have not* earned their way into God's favor. Instead, what's happened is God has, of his own free mercy, set his kindness and love on Abraham. And then Joshua recounts here in Joshua 24 all that God did for Israel. *He* brought them out of Egypt and *he* has given them this land, and *he* has kept all of these promises that he's made. And so, what Joshua is saying is that God is good and free and his goodness is arising from within himself. His goodness is not being prompted by Israel's obedience; it's not being earned by their faithfulness to the covenant or anything like that. Abraham was not even a monotheist when God was pleased to show his goodness to him and promised to bless the world through him. And so, I think the message of Joshua is really consummate with the message of the Bible that God's goodness comes from who he is, and it is mercifully bestowed on anyone on whom the Lord is pleased to set his compassion.

**Prof. Dwi Maria Handayani, translation**

The main character of the book of Joshua is the Lord... From the very beginning, from chapter 1 to the last chapter, in fact, the one who becomes the main character is the Lord. It is the Lord who takes the initiative. It is the Lord who calls Joshua. It is the Lord who leads Israel into the Promised Land. It is the Lord who arranges the division of the land. It is the Lord who then, also, fights for them. It is the Lord who also punishes them. So, the Lord is the main character, and it's very clear how the benevolence of God really stands out in this entire book. And, in contrast, actually, is the failure of the nation of Israel. So, if we contrast these two things, we see how, in the book of Joshua, God is very good. God is a God who holds fast to the covenant, and the nation of Israel is a nation that fails to keep their promises. And this is what we read in the book of Joshua. From beginning to end, the goodness of God is so clear and evident. And I think we see this, not only in the book of Joshua, but we can draw a parallel with our own lives. The goodness of God is something that is very real and important in the life of the church and in the lives of believers. In essence, in our lives, we often feel that the Lord is a very good God, extraordinarily steadfast, and we see how the church fails to meet the standards of God's truth, fails to hold onto the covenant with God, while God remains a God who is faithful. And this is a lesson for us. Something that happened in ancient times also happens in our time. And it was for this reason that Joshua constantly reminded the people how important it was for the nation of Israel to remember, to look to God and hold firmly to the covenant that God had given them.

**Rev. Kevin Labby**

In the book of Joshua, one of the things we see over and over again is that God's people are called to obedience, and it's through their obedience that God is going to accomplish his plans and purposes in their life. But one of the most beautiful things we see in Joshua and all throughout the Old Testament is that when God's people fall short, they have the gracious opportunity to come to the Lord, seek his forgiveness, reconfirm their orientation and love toward him, and be restored to the knowledge that he's forgiven them and that the relationship has not been destroyed. And so, in Joshua, there are scenes where God's people fall short. There's sin in the camp. But as they deal with that sin, as they confess it, as they repent, as they go through a process of reconciliation and at times even restitution, God reassures them of his continuing love, his continuing affection, that he'll always be with them, he'll never leave them nor forsake them, and that his plans and purposes for them are not going to be interrupted. And I think, as Christians, we're reminded of the same thing. The Bible tells us over and over again, especially in the New Testament, we all stumble in many ways. If any man claims to be without sin, he's a liar. But we have a Great High Priest. We have the Lord Jesus who sits at the right hand of the Father, who intercedes for us, who reminds us by his Spirit according to the Word that we are forgiven, that we are accepted, and as we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive us and will continue to rule and defend us all the days of our life.

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