

The Story (6) – Joshua

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I. Israel Conquers the Land¹ (Ch. 1-12)

A. Preparations for Conquest (ch. 1-5)

1. Joshua is, of course, Moses' successor as the leader of Israel. Deuteronomy 34:9 states (ESV), *And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him. So the people of Israel obeyed him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses.* In Joshua 1 God tells Joshua that now that Moses has died it is time for Israel to enter the promise land. He assures him that he will be with him, exhorts him three times to be "strong and courageous," and commands him to obey all the law he had revealed through Moses. And in that regard he commands him to meditate on the Book of the Law day and night.

2. Joshua reminded the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh that, despite having been granted land east of the Jordan, they were obligated to help their fellow Israelites conquer Canaan. They confirmed their commitment in that regard, and then they told Joshua "Only be strong and courageous."

3. In chapter 2 Joshua sends two men to spy out the land, especially Jericho, and they came to the house of a prostitute named Rahab. The king of Jericho got wind of their presence and sent men to Rahab demanding that she turn them over. Rahab hid the spies, told the king's men that they had already left, and then had the spies agree that when Israel conquered the land, which she said the people all feared was going to happen, they would spare her family. The spies returned, and Joshua understood that Rahab's comment about the fear of the inhabitants was confirmation that God had given the land to them.

4. The next day the Israelites moved from Shittim to the bank of the Jordan. After three days, the people headed out following far behind the Levitical priests who were carrying the ark of the covenant, the chest that represented God's special presence among Israel. When the priests carrying the ark entered the river, God stopped the river from flowing, which was at flood stage, and dried the bed so that the nation crossed the Jordan on dry ground! As God did at the Red Sea when Moses was their leader, so now he did at the Jordan with Joshua as their leader.

5. Pursuant to the Lord's instructions through Joshua, twelve Israelite men, one from each tribe, gathered twelve stones, one each, from the dry Jordan at the place where the priests carrying the ark had stood. With those stones Joshua erected at Gilgal, which is just east of Jericho and the place where they first camped west of the Jordan, a memorial for future generations testifying to God's great work on their behalf.

¹ Outline from Arnold & Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament*.

6. In chapter 5 all the males who had been born during Israel's time in the wilderness were circumcised. And on the fourteenth day of the first month, the Israelites celebrated the Passover at Gilgal. The next day they ate food taken from the land, and the day after that the manna God had provided all those years ceased. It was a new era.

B. The Central Campaign (ch. 6-9)

1. The strategy for subjugating Canaan was to divide and conquer by first taking the central portion of the land. The Israelites were in Gilgal, very close to Jericho, so Jericho is on lockdown. It is a fortified city, meaning it has walls and locked gates that are designed to keep attackers at bay.

a. By God's instruction, Joshua had the Israelites march around the city once a day for six days with the ark of the covenant leading the way. The priests who accompanied the ark were blowing on their animal horns throughout those marches. On the seventh day, the group marched around the city the same way but this time they did it seven times. After the seventh march on the seventh day, the horns fell silent and Joshua told the people it was time to shout. The priests then sounded a distinctive long blast on their horns which was the signal to shout, the people shouted, and God pulled down the walls. As the Spirit says in Heb. 11:30, *By faith the walls of Jericho fell after being encircled for seven days.*

b. Everyone in the city was killed except Rahab and her family. She went on to live in Israel, and as Mat. 1:5 indicates she was an ancestor of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. In chapter 7 Israel sent a force of only about 3,000 men to attack the small town of Ai because they thought it would not require more, but Israel was defeated and 36 of their men were killed. The reason was that Achan had sinned by keeping some of the booty from Jericho for himself rather than devoting it to the Lord as he had commanded. And Achan and his family, presumably because they also were culpable in the matter, were executed by the people. With that sin purged from the camp, Israel again attacked Ai and was victorious. That is the time they also captured neighboring Bethel (8:17, 12:16).

3. We see in the last part of chapter 8 that Israel had gone about 25 miles north from Bethel to Mount Ebal. Joshua there conducted the covenant renewal ceremony commanded by Moses in Deuteronomy 27. Sacrifices were offered, the law was copied, blessings and curses were recited with half the group in front of Mount Gerizim and half in front of Mount Ebal, and the law was read. They thereafter returned to Gilgal.

4. Gibeon was a major city in central Canaan, only about fifteen miles southwest of Gilgal. Fearing their imminent destruction, they sent a delegation to the Israelites pretending to have come from far away. Not having sought counsel from the Lord, the Israelites were fooled and entered into a covenant in which they committed in God's name not to kill the Gibeonites. A few days later, Israel learned the truth about where the Gibeonites lived. This put them in a pickle because God had commanded Israel to destroy the inhabitants of Canaan but they had

agreed in God's name to spare them. Joshua and the leaders determined that the best solution in that case was to allow them to live but to enslave them.

C. The Southern Campaign (ch. 10)

1. After the covenant with Gibeon, Israel controlled central Canaan. A coalition of five Amorite kings from the southern part of Canaan then attacked Gibeon. Israel came to Gibeon's rescue, and God granted Israel the victory, killing many of the Amorite soldiers with large hails stones as they tried to flee. This is when God stopped the sun in the sky to extend the daylight hours to help Joshua to victory. The five kings were executed, and the town of Mekkedah was captured.

2. The Israelites continued advancing in a southern direction, conquering the cities of Libnah, Lachish, Gezer, Eglon, Hebron, and Debir. Joshua 10:42-43 states (ESV), *And Joshua captured all these kings and their land at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel. Then Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal.*

D. The Northern Campaign (11:1-15)

1. With Israel in control of central and southern Canaan, Jabin king of Hazor, the largest city of the northern region, brought a number of kings together into a military alliance. This huge army, with many horses and chariots, assembled near the waters of Merom to await Israel's anticipated advance.

2. Joshua attacked them suddenly, and God gave him the victory. The Israelites pursued them as far as Sidon to the northwest and the Valley if Mizpah to the northeast. They then turned back and captured Hazor, killing the king and all who were in the city.

E. The subjugation of Canaan that is compressed in these accounts took six or seven years (see Josh. 14:7, 10). In all of it, God was the one giving the victory. He was fulfilling his promise to the patriarchs centuries earlier.

II. Israel Divides the Land (Ch. 13-21)

A. Israel's Remaining Challenge (13:1-7) – Though Israel now *controlled* Canaan they still did not fully possess it. Various peoples continued to inhabit the more remote areas. God tells Joshua that he will drive them out, and instructs him to go ahead and assign the land of Canaan to the various tribes of Israel. Arnold & Beyer comment in *Encountering the Old Testament* (p. 176): "Israel's individual tribes received the challenge to complete the conquest by exterminating these smaller groups. As we will see, Israel did not succeed in driving out these peoples, and pagan influences soon corrupted God's people."

B. Allotment of Land East of the Jordan (13:8-32) – This section identifies the allotment of the Transjordan land to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

C. Allotment of Land West of the Jordan (Ch. 14-19)

1. The land allotments were given out by Eleazar the priest and Joshua. Which tribe was assigned to what area was done by lot as God had commanded through Moses (Num. 26:55-56, 33:54). The casting of lots was a matter of divine guidance (Prov. 16:33). The tribes include Ephraim and Manasseh, the two sons of Joseph, and do not include the Levites. The Levites received forty-eight cities and their surrounding pastureland that were scattered among the tribes instead of receiving a region of land.

2. Caleb, the one faithful spy in addition to Joshua, was given the city of Hebron. At age 85 he said that if the Lord would be with him he would indeed possess that city, which is what happened (15:13-14).

3. Here is a map showing the regions allocated to the 12 tribes both east and west of the Jordan.



4. Several texts note that certain tribes did not drive out various groups inhabiting their territory (15:63, 16:10, 17:12-13). The eventual acceptance of the religious practices of these groups had a terrible effect on Israel's faith.

5. After territory had been allotted to Reuben, Gad, Manasseh, Ephraim, and Judah, Israel relocated from Gilgal, which had been the base of operations for some seven years, to Shiloh in the territory given to Ephraim. They erected the tabernacle there, which is where it stayed for many years. The remaining territories were allotted from there.

6. By God's command, Joshua was given the city for which he asked, Timnath-serah in the hill country of Ephrath. He built the city and settled in it.

D. Israel's Designated Cities (Ch. 20-21)

1. Chapter 20 identifies the "cities of refuge," which were places to which someone who had accidentally killed a person could flee to be protected from the "avenger of blood," a relative of the dead person who would be seeking a life for a life. It was a sanctuary or place of asylum. There were three on each side of the Jordan.

2. In chapter 21 the cities in which the various clans of Levi were to live were given by lot. Being dispersed among God's people, the Levites were available to help with spiritual matters and to arbitrate disputes.

III. Israel Begins to Settle Into the Land (Ch. 22-24)

A. An Early Misunderstanding Almost Leads to Civil War (ch. 22)

1. In chapter 22 Joshua told the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh that they had fulfilled their duty to assist their brothers in gaining control of Canaan, so it was now time for them to return to their territories east of the Jordan. In 22:5 he exhorted them (ESV): *Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments and to cling to him and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul.*

2. On their way back to their territory east of the Jordan, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh built a large altar by the Jordan River.

a. When the Israelites in Canaan learned of it, they intended to go to war with them for disobeying God's command to worship or offer burnt offerings only at the place specified by the Lord (Deut. 12:13-14) and thus jeopardizing the entire nation. Fortunately, they first sent a delegation of leaders to the eastern tribes to confront them over the issue.

b. They then learned that the altar was not functional but was intended solely as a monument to remind the western tribes that the two and a half tribes east of the Jordan also were part of God's people. If in future generations the western tribes ever claimed they were not part of God's people, they would say (22:28, ESV), "Behold, the copy of the altar of the LORD, which our fathers made, not for burnt offerings, nor for sacrifice, but to be a witness between us and you."

c. This satisfied everyone, and a civil war was avoided. The altar was called "Witness" by the people of Reuben and Gad.

B. Joshua's Final Challenges to God's People (23:1-24:27)

1. Joshua's first speech (ch. 23) - Near the end of his life, Joshua summoned Israel and reminded them of how the Lord had fought for them so that they had gained control of Canaan. He said God would drive out the various groups that remained in the land, but they needed to be diligent in keeping God's law so as not to mix with the remaining nations or get pulled into worship of their gods. If they do, then God will not drive those nations out, and they will become a trap that will lead to Israel's exile from the land.

2. Joshua's second speech (ch. 24)

a. In chapter 24 Joshua assembled the people at Shechem. He reminded them of God's mighty works and faithfulness to his promises.

b. Joshua then called the people to renew their covenant commitment to God. He declared in 24:14-15 (ESV): "*Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.* ¹⁵ *And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*"

c. The people declared that they too would serve the Lord. And when Joshua warned them that there would be dire consequences if they turned from God, they declared again that they would serve him. When Joshua urged them to put away all foreign gods, the people declared a third time (v. 24) "The Lord our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey."

d. Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law, and set up a large stone as a memorial of their covenant renewal.

C. Three Burials (24:28-33)

1. There are three burials at the end of chapter 24: Joshua, who died at age 110; the bones of Joseph that had been brought out of Egypt; and Eleazar the son of Aaron.

2. Verse 31 is a great inspired tribute to Joshua's leadership and influence. It says (ESV), *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.*

NEXT WEEK – We follow the story into the Book of Judges.