

JOSHUA

As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or the left. Joshua 1:5b-7

The book of Joshua begins just after Moses' death. The Israelites had lived a nomadic life mostly in the region south of the modern country of Israel. Forty years earlier they were escaping slaves who received God's law and covenant and began journeying to Canaan. God promised they could move in and take over the land, but then they were too frightened. Only two Israelite spies said it could be done despite giants in the land: Caleb and Joshua.

Forty years later, they are poised on the east side of the Jordan River. Will Joshua be able to lead as well as Moses? Will God's promise that this land will become theirs be fulfilled? How? Will they adjust to this new life?

IMPORTANT NOTE: This book is not written in the Hebrew language of Joshua's time, over 1,200 years before Christ. It is written in the Hebrew of 600-400 years before Jesus. The northern kingdom of Israel had been taken over by the Assyrians. This is written when the southern country of Judah is under threat or already conquered by the Babylonians. This telling of moving into the promised land is idealistic, and even ruthless, in presenting obedient faithfulness. Think about how this is a sermon for another era when God's people have failed to put God first and now realize they need to recommit.

Obedience and Victory – Joshua 1-6

In words and deeds, God shows that He is with them. The Jordan River separates, like the Red Sea. Watch the attention to remembering God's actions and fulfilled promises. Note their priorities: before conquest, the men are circumcised, and the first Passover is held. Manna ceases. These chapters contain the well-known stories of Rahab and the city walls of Jericho falling down.

Warfare and Conquest – Joshua 7-11

You can read these chapters for the victorious conquest and effective military strategy, but there is more here. Who really wins the battles? Why does God command them to destroy everything? What does it take to remain pure and obedient? Notice, too, the indications that gaining dominance over the land was not simply destroying cities and killing the inhabitants. Rahab and her family and the Gileadites who cleverly gain protection are consistent with archaeological evidence that many local inhabitants were absorbed into Israelite tribes or lived side by side. The next book of the Bible, Judges tells us stories

of peaceful and oppressive co-existence, of disobedience and trust.

Distribution of Land – Joshua 13-21

These chapters detail the distribution of land to the tribes. There are some interesting stories and explanations in between descriptions of boundaries. The cities of sanctuary in chapter 20 show God's mercy and justice. It helps to read with a map. If you have maps in your Bible, you probably have at least one from the earlier time of Abraham and/or the later kingdoms of Saul and David. Additional maps will be available at church. If this section is boring or overwhelming, focus on getting a general sense of the land distribution. Who set boundaries? Why?

Now What? – Joshua 22-24

The concluding chapters name threats to future unity and faithfulness. The land is at rest. Wandering is over. Joshua's last task is to challenge them. ***“Choose this day whom you will serve! As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”*** He warns them that it will not be easy, that they must put away the foreign gods among them, but they remember what God has done for them. ***The Lord our God we will serve and Him we will obey.***



NEIGHBORING PEOPLES IN ITALICS
ISRAELITE TRIBES IN CAPITAL LETTERS