



# The Bible Challenge

A daily guide to reading the Bible in a year

## Joshua

1:1-12:24

### The Land

The primary focus of the Book of Joshua is the inheritance of the Promised Land. YHWH, the Divine Warrior, has been true to his promises made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses. The Lord has given his faithful people victory and granted them the promised “rest”.

### Structure

The book of Joshua follows a very simple structure:

- I. Covenant renewal entering the Promised Land (1-5)
- II. Conquering the Promised Land (6-12)
- III. Distributing the Promised Land (13-21)
- IV. Covenant Renewal within the Promised Land (22-24)

The book begins and ends with covenant renewal. The first renewal is from YHWH in renewing his promises with the leadership of Joshua. The book concludes with Israel’s renewal of the covenant with YHWH. The central sections detail the conquest of the land its distribution to the twelve tribes. The structure emphasizes the need for covenant faithfulness by Israel and YHWH.

### Covenant Renewal Entering the Promised Land

The Book of Deuteronomy ends with the death and exaltation of Moses as the leader of Israel. While the torch was symbolically passed to Joshua with his commissioning (Deut 31), the time has come for the new leader to lead. It is one thing to say, it is quite another to do.

### Be Strong and Courageous

The Joshua is encouraged four times to “be strong and courageous. Three times by YHWH and once by the people, and each time he is given a reason.

The primary reason is YHWH’s abiding presence. Just as YHWH was “with Moses” so he now promises to Joshua, “so will I be with you.” (1:5, 9, 17)



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The Second reason Joshua can be strong and courageous is because of the Book of the Law. The Torah has provided the blueprint for the not only why and how the Land should be conquered, but how Israel is to live in relationship to YHWH once they possess it:

*Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. 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. Have I not commanded you? –Joshua 1:7-9*

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This promise contains a warning to “be careful”. Joshua will only be strong when he leads in the way of the Word.

Thirdly, courage and strength come in the promise itself. YHWH has made a land gift to Israel. He again outlines the boundaries of the gift and Joshua can be confident in the mission: “you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.”

Finally the people renew their unity and commitment to the mission and to Joshua. One of the key questions left hanging in the Deuteronomy was whether Reuben, Gad and half-Manasseh would be true to their word to fight for their brother tribes even though they plan to settle outside the land. (cf. Numbers 32) Unity under the leadership of Joshua and YHWH are the key. God’s people encourage their leader!

## **The Spies, Do Over**

Israel has come to the threshold of the Promised Land before. The last time a spy expedition brought back a “bad report” and Israel grumbled with fear. This time the spies return with a good report



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based on their experience with Rahab the Prostitute. Her actions and words reveal the might, the majesty and the mercy of YHWH:

*For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house... --Joshua 2:10-12*

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The spies return enthused from their experience: “Truly the LORD has given all the land into our hands. And also, all the inhabitants melt away because of us.” (2:24)

## **The Threshold Moment (3-4)**

The moment of “passing over” the Jordan had arrived. For forty years this has been an impenetrable border because of the fear and faithlessness of Israel. Once again YHWH requires faith in his power and might mediated through his chosen leader, Joshua. In crossing the threshold of the Jordan, Joshua will also cross the threshold of leadership. Word must now translate to tangible steps of faith.

The two central components to the crossing are the commands of Joshua and the Ark of the Covenant. Obedience to the command of Joshua will literally require a faith step—this step was not as risky as the ones to come. Israel needed to be absolutely confident in YHWH and Joshua.

*And when the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap.” --Joshua 3:13*



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## Memorial Stones

Threshold moments are to be memorialized. Nothing would testify more to the mighty act of YHWH than the exchange of twelve large river stones with twelve large land stones. The exchange would be a permanent memorial to the crossing and future generations would be able to learn the story:

*“When your children ask their fathers in times to come, ‘What do these stones mean?’ 22 then you shall let your children know, ‘Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.’ 23 For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over, 24 so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, that you may fear the Lord your God forever.” –Joshua 4:21-24*

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*For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.*

--1 Corinthians 10:1-5

The stones will “forever” provide a remembrance of YHWH’s goodness and evidence of his mighty hand. The date was the “tenth day of the first month” (4:19); on that same day forty years before had begun to prepare for going out of Egypt by setting apart the Passover Lamb. (Exodus 12:2-3)

## Circumcision (5)

The final act of covenant renewal in preparation for the conquest was the re-circumcision of Israel. The covenant of circumcision was given to Israel through Abraham (Gen. 17) as a sign of the promise that they would inherit the land. Lack of circumcision was a sign of curse and being “cut off from the land. (Gen 17:14)

The fact that the first generation HAD been circumcised and yet failed to enter the land and the second generation HAD NOT been circumcised and would enter the land is theologically instructive. The sign points to a deeper reality, that one can bear (or not) the marks of the people of God and but lack the faith of the people. “You can receive the sacrament but have no faith...You may hold membership



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among God's flock but have no relationship with the Shepherd. You may live in the King's country but reject his sovereignty.<sup>22</sup>

The renewal of the covenant of circumcision was a painful reminder of a prior generation's unfaithfulness and a costly statement of a new generation's commitment to covenant faithfulness.

## Conquering the Promised Land (5:13-12)

The second major section of the Book of Joshua tells the story of the initial battles of the conquest of the land. Israel would be victorious in conquering the land so long as they remained true to the Word of YHWH.

## YHWH fought the Battle at Jericho (5:13-6:27)

The popular children's song has it wrong. Joshua did NOT fight the battle of Jericho—YHWH did! The Amorites and YHWH had their own relational history. Back in Genesis 15:16 we read that the "iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." YHWH knew that the people within the land of Canaan would become utter sinful, violent and perverse, in time he would use the descendants of Abram to bring judgment upon them. (cf. Deut. 9:4-5)

Joshua's first lesson was one of humility. Like a good general Joshua was out surveying the field before the battle. He runs into a mysterious man. Joshua asks, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" the response returns, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come." Joshua was there to fight for the LORD, not the LORD for Joshua.

It would be the priests, not armed men that would be used by God to destroy Jericho. Just as with the parting of the Jordan, the Ark of the Covenant is the power—more steps of faith. With trumpets, shouting and a display of YHWH's power, the "wall fell down flat."

The Israelites were to devote everything in the city to destruction to the LORD. Nothing was to be taken as plunder and the city was never to be rebuilt. The only ones to be spared were Rahab the Prostitute and her family for the faithfulness to YHWH in hiding Joshua's spies.

*"What does my Lord say to his servant?"*

*--Joshua 5:14*

<sup>22</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *No Falling Words*. (Grand Rapids; Baker, 1988) p. 46.



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## **The Trouble with Broken Faith (7:1-8:29)**

The LORD was clear in commanding that none of the “devoted things” be taken as plunder. Yet, one man, Achan of the tribe of Judah thought it wouldn’t matter if he took a few things for himself. He was dead wrong.

The next city for conquest was Ai. Everything went wrong, from the spies’ report to Joshua’s failure to consult the Lord; the battle was an utter failure. Israel had a meltdown. Instead of the people of Ai’s hearts melting with fear, it was the men of Israel who “melted and became as water.”

When Joshua consulted the LORD in defeat, he learned of the trouble in the camp. “There are devoted things in your midst, O Israel. You cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the devoted things from among you.” (7:13)

Israel learned that one act of unfaithfulness to YHWH can bring trouble for the entire nation.

Once the sin was purged from the camp, the Israelites were again victorious over the city and people of Ai for the Lord said, “I will give it into your hand.” (8:18)

## **Ratification of the Law: Blessings and Curses (8:30-35)**

Following the failure and victory over Ai, Joshua returned back to the script from the Word of Moses and ratified the Covenant with the YHWH and Israel. The ceremony was prescribed in Deuteronomy 27. Joshua faithfully carried out the ratification ceremony “just as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded the people of Israel.” (8:31) The altar was made; the sacrifices offered; and in the presence of the people, the Law was memorialized within the Promised Land on stones. The Book of the Law and its blessings and curses are now in full effect. Israel is without excuse.

## **A Rash Oath**

Immediately following the ratification of the Law, Israel is trapped by a “rash oath”. Leviticus made allowance for such a thing (Leviticus 5:4), however the people fail to follow the Law precisely and trapped



*And the sun stood still,  
and the moon stopped,  
until the nation took  
vengeance on their  
enemies. –Joshua 10:13*

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and tricked by their own sin of ignorance. The Gibeonites cunningly deceive the Israelites into vowing to protect them. In promising to let them live, the leaders of the tribes unwittingly will sow the seeds which will later bring down the entire house of Israel—they leave corruption in the land.

## **The Sun Stands Still for Israel (10)**

The Lord showed forbearance with the rash oath, by continuing to grant victory over the Amorites in a single *extended* day.

From that point forward Israel prevails over their enemies. In a dramatic and symbolic display of Israel's authority over the Promised Land, Joshua commands his chiefs to place their feet on the necks of the conquered kings:

*And Joshua said to them, "Do not be afraid or dismayed; be strong and courageous. For thus the Lord will do to all your enemies against whom you fight." –Joshua 10:25*

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## **The Conquests (10-12)**

The victories would be repeated throughout southern Canaan. The emphasis is on "all Israel". As a united nation fighting their enemies together, they prevail over cities and kings. Every person in the city would be "struck with the edge of the sword and devoted to destruction."

There were three cities that were selected for an intensified judgment, Jericho, Ai and Hazor. These three cities were all burned to the ground. The other cities were left intact in order to be used along with the livestock and spoil.

*There was not a city that made peace with the people of Israel except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon. They took them all in battle. For it was the Lord's doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be devoted to destruction and should receive no mercy but be destroyed, just as the Lord commanded Moses. –Joshua 11:19-20*

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