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# JOSHUA

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## LEADER OF THE CONQUEST



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By Bryan E. Beyer

**J**OSHUA SON OF NUN played a significant role in God's purpose for Israel. Under his leadership, the Israelites conquered Canaan and divided it among the tribes. However, we know little about the background of the man God used so mightily.

### Joshua, the Man

Joshua's name means "Yahweh has saved" or "Yahweh is salvation." His name is thus related to the names Isaiah and Hosea, and the name Joshua was Jesus' Hebrew name as well. (See the allusion to Jesus bringing salvation in Matt. 1:21.) The Pentateuch describes him only as "Joshua, son of Nun" or merely as "Joshua." Joshua hailed from the tribe of Ephraim (Num. 13:8,16), and 1 Chronicles 7:20-27 provides more names from his family background, but yields little additional information.

### Joshua's Life Before the Conquest

The Bible first mentions Joshua in Exodus 17 after the Israelites had left Egypt. The people warred against the Amalekites, a nomadic group in the region, and Joshua led Israel against them and defeated them (Ex. 17:9-14). The Book of Exodus also places Joshua with Moses at Mount Sinai when Moses was receiving God's commandments (24:12-13; 32:17). After his experience at Sinai, Joshua also appeared at Moses' side after Moses

**Left: A Jewish rabbi blowing the shofar. God instructed the children of Israel to march around the city of Jericho once a day for six days. On the seventh day, they**

**were to circle the city seven times. Then the priests were to blow their shofars and the city wall would fall.**

**Below: Mound that is the site of the ancient city**

**of Jericho; in the background is the Jordan River Valley. Jericho was the first city Joshua and the Israelites conquered as they came into the promised land.**



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**Above: Area of the Wadi Feiran, which is west of Mount Sinai and the site of the Sinai's largest oasis. Wadi Feiran was known**

**in Scripture as Rephidim and was the home of the Amalekites. Joshua led the Israelites in a battle against the Amalekites at**

**Rephidim. As long as Moses' arms were uplifted, the Israelites were successful in the battle. Hur and Aaron helped hold up Moses' arms.**

spoke with God face-to-face at the tent of meeting (33:11). Clearly God was already preparing Joshua for future leadership.

Joshua also served as one of the 12 men Moses sent to spy out Canaan (Num. 13:8,16). When the spies returned from their mission, 10 gave the people a bad report about the land (vv. 31-33). They did not believe that God, who had brought them so far, could give them the promised land (Heb. 3:19). Only Joshua and Caleb stood firm in their conviction that God would help Israel take the land despite the challenges (Num. 14:6-9). The unbelieving generation received God's judgment and wandered in the wilderness for 40 years until all those who were 20 years of age and older died (vv. 28-35). Joshua and Caleb lived on because of the faith they had shown in God's promise. One can only imagine their pain as they waited

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an additional 40 years to receive their inheritance (Num. 14:30; Josh. 14:7,10).

## Joshua's Work

Most of what we know about Joshua's life and work comes from the book that bears his name.<sup>1</sup> God earlier had designated Joshua as Moses' successor (Num. 27:18-23); and before Moses died, the Lord re-commissioned Joshua (Deut. 31:14,23). God did not allow Moses to enter the promised land due to his sin at Meribah (Num. 20:11-13).

Joshua had served Moses faithfully, but many perhaps wondered whether Joshua could lead as well as Moses had. The Book of Joshua highlights the steps God took to ensure Israel saw His hand on His new leader.<sup>2</sup> First, God appeared to Joshua after Moses' death, reassured Joshua of his mission, and promised to be with Joshua wherever he went (Josh. 1:1-9). Second, God parted the waters of the Jordan for Joshua, just as He had parted the waters of the sea for Moses (3:7-17; cf. Ex. 14:15-22). The Israelites certainly would have made this connection in their minds. Third, the Lord appeared to Joshua through a heavenly messenger (Josh. 5:13-15). God instructed Joshua to remove his sandals, just as He had instructed Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:5).

Joshua's work essentially involved two purposes: conquer the land of Canaan and allot it to Israel's tribes. The conquest of Canaan included three major campaigns: a central campaign, a southern campaign, and a northern campaign.<sup>3</sup> These campaigns lasted approximately five to six years altogether (Josh. 14:7,10); and as they concluded, Israel had achieved effective control of Canaan, though some groups of people remained in the land (13:2-7).<sup>4</sup>

The central campaign began with the famous battle of Jericho, in which God caused the city wall to collapse so Israel's army could take the city (6:12-21). After a temporary setback at Ai due to Achan's sin (7:1-26), the Israelites took Ai and Bethel (8:1-29). The Gibeonites, who lived in a major city on Canaan's central plateau, acted deceitfully and secured a covenant with Joshua and Israel's leaders, who failed to consult the Lord on this important matter (9:3-16). Nonetheless, this treaty meant Joshua had achieved control of the central plateau without a fight, and in doing so, had effectively cut the land in half, isolating northern and southern Canaan.

A southern coalition of kings recognized the threat Joshua posed and moved quickly to attack Gibeon (10:1-5). Joshua responded with a surprise attack at dawn after marching through the night to the edge of the plateau (v. 9). During the battle, God caused the sun to stand still all day.<sup>5</sup> Joshua and his army routed the coalition and then extended the battle southward, conquering the major cities and towns (10:16-43).



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**Left: Gate at Hazor, which was the largest city in northern Canaan. Hazor's King Jabin rallied the northern cities to oppose Joshua. The Israelites, though, were successful; they killed the Canaanite leaders and burned the city of Hazor.**

**Below: Valley of Aijalon; when battling the Amorites here, Joshua asked God for a miracle. The Lord lengthened the day, allowing the Israelites to defeat their enemies (Josh. 10:12-14).**

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# LATE BRONZE AGE Weaponry & Armor (1550–1200 B.C.)



**"About 40,000 [Israelites] equipped for war crossed to the plains of Jericho in the LORD's presence" (Josh. 4:13, HCSB). These objects give us**

**an idea about the military equipment the Israelites may have used.**

**1. Bronze arrowhead; from Tel Dan; Late Bronze Age (1550–1200 B.C.).**

**2. Bronze quiver fragment from Urartu. The relief illustrates the "tree of life" flanked by priests.**

**3. Hittite sickle sword.**

**4. Bronze dagger, with no handle, and sword dating from the Late Bronze Age II (1400–1200 B.C.).**

**5. Bronze Hittite helmet from Urartu.**

**6. Duck bill axe head.**

**7. Chisel-axe head.**

1. ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ DAVID ROGERS/ JEWISH MUSEUM/ NEW YORK (355/20A)

2. ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ DAVID ROGERS/ UNIVERSITY MUSEUM/ UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA (292/12)

3. ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ JAMES

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4. ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ DAVID ROGERS/ BRITISH MUSEUM/ LONDON (551/15)

5. ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ DAVID ROGERS/ ADANA ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM/ ADANA, TURKEY (245/28A)

6. ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BOB SCHATZ (35/43/32)

7. ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BOB SCHATZ (35/43/30)

To the north, Jabin, king of Hazor, assembled another coalition of kings to face Joshua (11:1-5). God again gave Joshua success as Israel's army defeated the coalition and then pressed the battle throughout the northern territory's cities and towns (vv. 7-23). Israel had achieved effective control of the promised land (12:1-24).

The task now remained for Joshua to lead Israel in allocating the land (chs. 13-21). Individual tribes would assume responsibility for removing the remaining people groups (13:1-7). Joshua, accompanied by Eleazar

the priest and Israel's elders, oversaw the division of the land (14:1). Fittingly, Caleb, who along with Joshua had believed God's promise (Num. 14:6-9,30), received the first recorded allotment (Josh. 14:6-14).

The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh had received Moses' and Joshua's blessing to settle east of the Jordan (Num. 32:29-30; Josh. 1:12-15). Joshua and Israel's leaders then allotted territory to the tribes of Judah (15:1-63) and Ephraim (16:1-10); Manasseh also received territory in Canaan because it was a large tribe (17:1-18).





**Left: Part of the western gate at Lachish, looking toward the outside of the city. In the conquest, Lachish was allotted to the tribe of Judah.**

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/DAVID ROGERS (4/6/11)

Joshua then gathered all of the people to Shiloh, where the Levites set up the tabernacle (18:1). Joshua sent delegates throughout the land to survey it, after which he distributed the land to the remaining tribes by lot (18:4-10). The leaders also gave Joshua a portion within Ephraim (19:49-50). Joshua designated 6 cities of refuge (20:1-9) and 48 cities (including the cities of refuge) as Levitical cities so the Levites could live among the people and instruct them in God's ways (21:1-42). Joshua's actions fulfilled Moses' instructions and highlighted the continuation of God's purpose for His people (20:2; 21:2).

Joshua's final speeches reveal his spiritual commitment (chs. 23-24). In the first, Joshua encouraged the people to remain faithful; God had given them the land, and He would continue to help them settle it (23:3-5). If they trusted in God, He would bring blessing; if they turned from Him, He would bring judgment (vv. 14-16). In the second speech, Joshua surveyed Israel's history, beginning with Abraham down to the conquest. He called on God's people to affirm the covenant and to commit themselves totally to the Lord (24:1-15).

### Joshua's Strengths and Weaknesses

The Lord gave Joshua many strengths. First, he was a good leader; the people saw God's hand on him and followed him. Second, he was a good general. He remembered the land well from when he surveyed it as one of Israel's 12 spies, and he used his knowledge of the

land to help Israel achieve victory. Third, he was a man of faith. He persevered for 45 years as he awaited the fulfillment of God's promise (14:7,10).<sup>6</sup> He also expressed his faith publicly on many occasions and led the Israelites in renewing their faith pledge to God (3:5-6; 6:16; 8:30-35; chs. 23-24).

All leaders have weaknesses. Joshua's failure to consult the Lord on the treaty with the Gibeonites resulted in some questioning his leadership (9:18). Why Joshua failed to consult the Lord on such an important matter is unclear. Joshua also may have demonstrated a momentary lack of faith when he

wondered why God had not helped Israel at the battle against Ai (7:7-9). All in all, however, Joshua followed the Lord faithfully.

### Joshua's Legacy

Israel served God faithfully throughout Joshua's days and during the period of the elders who survived him (24:31). Joshua led Israel in renewing the covenant during the conquest (8:30-35); and at the end of his life, he again reminded God's people that their future lay in faithful obedience to God and His commandments (24:25-27).<sup>7</sup> Joshua's legacy even has touched many Christian families today, who have Joshua's famous words adorning their homes: "As for me and my family, we will worship Yahweh" (24:15, HCSB).

1. See Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament: A Christian Survey*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 167-79.

2. David M. Howard, Jr., *Joshua*, vol. 5 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 62.

3. Arnold and Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament*, 172-76.

4. Donald H. Madvig, "Joshua" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebeline, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 311.

5. Arnold and Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament*, 174.

6. "The time periods referred to in vv. 7 and 10 give us an insight into the period of time covered by most of the Book of Joshua. Israel was sentenced to forty years of wandering in the wilderness after the spies came back with their report (Num 14:33-34). Verse 10 shows that forty-five years had elapsed since the time of this sentence, so the conquest to date had occupied some five years...." From Howard, *Joshua*, 329.

7. *Ibid.*, 445-46.

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