

Joshua (April 7)

Reading Joshua

A bronze blade growls and yawns as a young man draws it across the whetstone. Its edges glimmer copper-bright, like ripples on the Jordan at dawn. He turns over the broad blade, nearly as long as his forearm, and eyes it carefully. The grinding has smoothed out the dents caused by helmets and shields. The blade whistles as he wields it in mock combat. His thumb feels the letters of his father's name and his grandfather's name, etched along the blade's spine. Another year, and the young man will leave the sharpening to his younger brother. Another year, at age 20, he will join the men in battle.

The conquest of Canaan did not happen overnight, nor was it completed during Joshua's lifetime. The book of Joshua covers only seven years and three campaigns against the people of Canaan, a struggle that would last until David's reign approximately 400 years later. Yet Joshua's account anticipates full success and shows the people the way to ultimate victory: trust in the Lord, for he always fulfills his promises.

Title and Theme

Joshua is a story of conquest and fulfillment for the people of God. After many years of slavery in Egypt and 40 years in the desert, the Israelites were finally allowed to enter the land promised to their fathers. Where Deuteronomy ends, the book of Joshua begins: the tribes of Israel are still camped on the east side of the Jordan River. The narrative opens with God's command to move forward and pass through the river on dry land. Then it relates the series of victories in central, southern, and northern Canaan that gave the Israelites control of all the hill country and the Negev. It continues with a description of the tribal allotments and ends with Joshua's final addresses to the people. The theme of the book, therefore, is the establishment of Israel in the Promised Land.

In the Hebrew Bible the book of Joshua initiates a division called the Former Prophets, including also Judges, Samuel, and Kings – all historical in content but written from a prophetic standpoint. They do more than merely record the nation's development from Moses to the fall of Judah in 586 BC. They prophetically interpret God's covenant ways with Israel in history – how he fulfills and remains true to his promises (especially through his servants such as Joshua, the judges, Samuel, and David) and how he deals with the waywardness of the Israelites. In Joshua, it was the Lord who won the victories and “gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers” (Joshua 21:43).

Joshua's remarkable life was filled with excitement, variety, success, and honor. He proved to be not only a military strategist in the battles to conquer the Promised Land, but also a statesman in the way he governed the tribes. Above all, Joshua was God's chosen servant to bring Moses' work to completion and establish Israel in the Promised Land. In that role, he was a striking Old Testament type (foreshadowing) of Christ.

Blessings for Readers

As you study the book of Joshua, consider how the Lord prepared Joshua to lead Israel. He succeeded, not because he was a brilliant strategist or charismatic genius, but because he believed this “book of the Law” – that is, God's holy word. Joshua continually emphasizes that the Lord gave them the land according to his promise, that the Lord fulfills his word and so grants success. Even the name Joshua is a word of promise, anticipating the appearance of a later and greater leader for God's people who would give them decisive victory.

Just as the Lord called Israel to remain steadfast in the physical and spiritual struggle they faced among the Canaanites, he calls us today to be spiritually steadfast. Christ won salvation for us on the cross, and through his word, he continues to quip us and rally us for challenges today.