



Joshua

Transcript

Introduction

00:00-01:04

The book of Joshua. Let's back up and remember the story so far. So God chose Abraham, and then his family became the people of Israel, who are then enslaved down in Egypt. And so through Moses, God rescued Israel out of Egypt, he made a covenant with them at Mount Sinai, and he brought them through the wilderness. So Israel then camped outside the promised land, and Moses called them to obey God's commands so that they could show all the other nations what God is like. The book of Joshua picks up right after Moses has died and Israel is ready to enter the land.

So the story of Joshua is designed with four main movements. Joshua first leads Israel into the promised land, and then once they're there, they meet all this hostility from the Canaanites, and so they engage them in battle. Then after their victories, Joshua divides up the promised land as the inheritance for the 12 tribes, and then the book concludes with these final speeches that Joshua gives to the people. So let's dive in, and we'll see how all of it flows together.

Chapters 1-4

01:04-01:48

The first section begins with Moses' death, and Joshua is appointed as Israel's new leader. And the author intentionally presents Joshua as a new Moses. So like Moses, Joshua calls the people to obey the Torah, which means the covenant commands that they were given at Mount Sinai. And then Joshua sends spies into the land just as Moses did back in Numbers chapters 13 and 14, except it goes way better this time. In fact, even some Canaanites turn and follow the God of Israel.

Joshua then leads all Israel across the Jordan River and into the land. Just like the sea parted for Moses in the exodus, so here the river Jordan parts, and the priests carry the ark of the covenant across, leading all Israel with them.

Chapter 5

01:49-02:38

Now, in chapter 5, the story transitions. So the people look back to their roots as God's covenant people, and so the new generation is circumcised, and they celebrate their first Passover in the land.

But then they turn and prepare to go forward, and Joshua has this crazy encounter with a mysterious warrior, who, it turns out, is the angelic commander of God's army. And Joshua asks, "Are you for us? Or are you for our enemies?" The warrior responds, "Neither," which shows that the real question here is whether Joshua is on God's side.

It makes clear that this whole story is not about Israel versus the Canaanites. Rather, this is God's battle. And Israel is going to play the role of spectators or sometimes supporters in God's plan, which leads to the next section.

Chapters 6-8

02:38-04:18

We find stories about all these conflicts that Israel had with different Canaanite groups. And the first part retells the story of two battles in detail, and that is followed by a series of short stories that condense years of battles into a few brief summaries.

So the first two battles are against Jericho and then Ai, and they offer these contrasting portraits of God's faithfulness versus Israel's failure. At Jericho, Israel is to take a completely passive approach, so they let God's presence in the ark lead them around the city to music for six days. And just like Rahab turned to the God of Israel, maybe the people of Jericho would do the same—but they don't. And so on the seventh day, the priests blow the trumpets and the walls come falling down, leading Israel to victory. The point of the story is that God is the one who will deliver his people; Israel simply needs to trust and wait.

Now, the next story of the battle at Ai makes the opposite point. So there's this Israelite named Achan, and he steals from Jericho some of the devoted goods that were to belong to God alone, and then he lies about it. It's a pretty lame move after all that God has done for Israel. And so Israel goes into battle with the city of Ai, and they're totally defeated. And it's only after humble repentance and severely dealing with Achan's sin that Israel gains victory.

And so together these two stories, they're placed right up front to make an important point. If Israel is going to inherit the land, they have to be obedient and trust in God's commands. They don't get special treatment.

Chapters 9-12 and God's Justice

04:18-07:26

Now, the second part of this section begins with the Gibeonites, a Canaanite people group. And they do just as Rahab did, as they turn to follow the God of Israel, and they make peace with Israel. This is in contrast to all of these other Canaanite kings who start to form alliances and coalitions, and they want to destroy Israel. So Israel engages them in battle, and they win by a landslide. And so this whole section concludes with this summary list of all of these victories won by Moses and then by Joshua.

Now, let's stop for a second, because odds are that these stories and the violence in them, they're going to bother you. And if you're a follower of Jesus, you're bound to wonder, like, didn't Jesus say to love your enemies? Why is God declaring war here?

So first, why the Canaanites? The main reasons are actually given earlier in the biblical story. It's that the culture of the Canaanites had become extremely morally corrupt, especially when it comes to sex—go check out Leviticus chapter 18. And they also widely practiced child sacrifice—go see Deuteronomy chapter 12. And so God didn't want these practices to influence Israel. The Canaanites had to go.

Which raises the second question: Did God actually command the destruction of all the Canaanites, like a genocide? So at first glance, you know, you look at the phrases used in these stories. They "totally destroyed them," they "left no survivor or anything that breathed." But when you look a second time, more closely, you'll see that these phrases are clearly hyperbole and not literal.

So go back to the original command about the Canaanites in Deuteronomy chapter 7. Israel is first told to drive out the Canaanites, but then to totally destroy them. And then that's followed by commands to not intermarry with them or enter into business deals with them. So you can't marry someone that you've destroyed. I think you get the point. The same idea applies to the stories in Joshua. Look closely. So for example, we're told in Joshua chapter 10 that Israel left no survivors in the cities of Hebron or Debir. But then later, in chapter 15, we see these towns, and they're still populated by Canaanites.

And so what we're seeing is that Joshua fits in with other ancient battle accounts by using nonliteral, hyperbolic language as part of the narrative style. And so the word "genocide" doesn't actually fit what we see here, especially in light of the stories

about the Canaanites who did turn to the God of Israel, like Rahab or the Gibeonites. God was open to those who would turn to him.

The last thing to think about is that these stories mark a unique moment in Israel's history. These battles were limited to the handful of people groups living in the land of Canaan. With all other nations, Israel was commanded by God to pursue peace—go read Deuteronomy chapter 20. So the purpose of these battle stories was never to tell you, the reader, to go commit violence in God's name. Rather, they show God bringing his justice on human evil at a unique moment in history and how he delivered Israel from being annihilated by the Canaanites.

Chapters 13-22

07:26-08:00

Now, let's go back to the book's design. After years of battles, we see an aging Joshua, and he starts dividing up the land for the 12 tribes of Israel. And most of this section is like lists of boundary lines, and let's be honest, it's kind of boring. It's like reading a map that has no pictures. But for the Israelites, these lists were super important. This was the fulfillment of God's ancient promises to Abraham that his descendants would inherit the promised land. And so now, it was all coming to pass right down to the detail, which leads to the final section.

Chapters 23-24

08:00-08:42

Joshua gives two speeches to the people. They're very similar to the final speeches of Moses in Deuteronomy. Joshua reminds them of God's generosity, how he brought them into the land and rescued them from the Canaanites. And so he calls them to turn away from the Canaanite gods and be faithful to the covenant they made. If they do, it will lead to life and blessing in the land, but if they're unfaithful, Israel will call down on itself the same divine judgment that the Canaanites experienced. They'll be kicked off the land into exile.

And so Joshua leaves Israel with a choice. What is Israel going to do? That's the big question that looms as the story ends. And that's the book of Joshua.