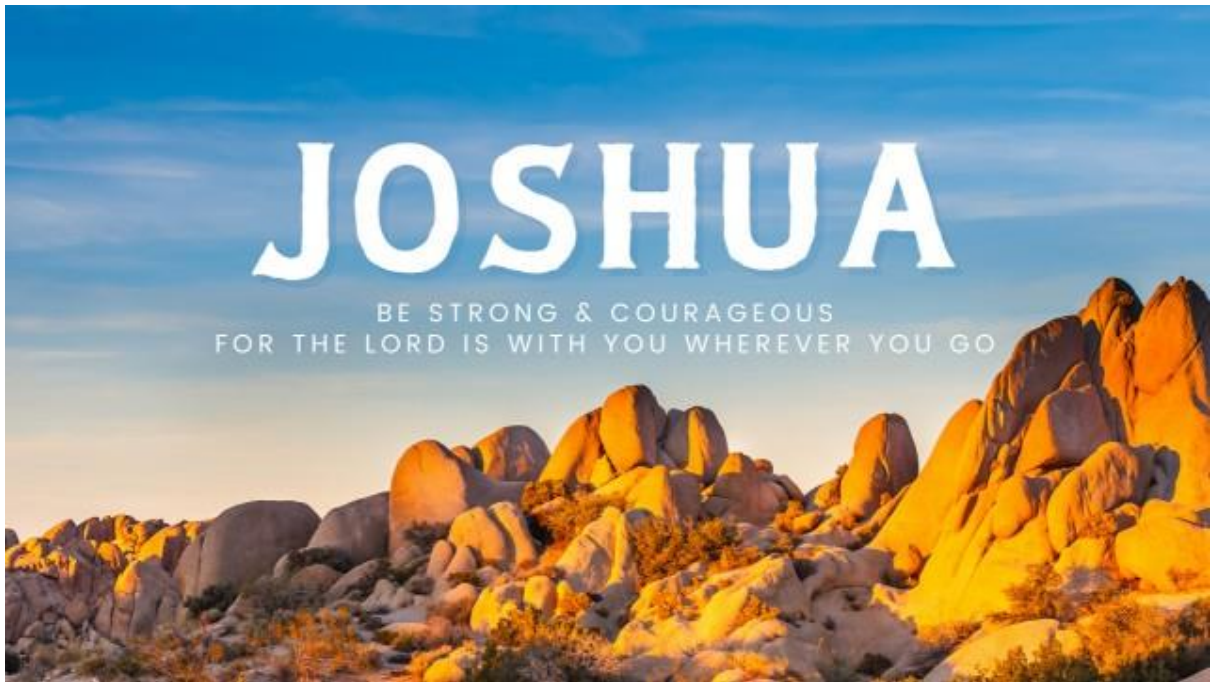


The book of Joshua



A Bible study for Followers of the Way

By Philip Quenby

Introduction

Since ancient Israel was called to perform in the physical what present-day believers are called to do in the spiritual, the book of Joshua is part of our handbook for spiritual warfare. It contains vital lessons on leadership transition, training and discipline, battlefield command, strategic priorities, operational efficiency, tactics, and plenty more.

It must be acknowledged that some find this a difficult book. Modern sensibilities shy away from some of its bloodier episodes, yet the plain fact is that God has no truck with evil and wishes it to be completely expunged from His kingdom and His people. Mindful that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12), we need to look full in the face the realities this Scripture puts before us.

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Session 1: Transition and preparation

Joshua 1:1-18

1:1-2 The narrative starts at twin points of transition – (1) passing the baton from Moses, who had led Israel for 40 years, to Joshua; and (2) preparing to cross the Jordan into the Promised Land. At such a critical juncture, things could easily have gone badly wrong. God made sure they did not, but for this to be the result, Joshua had to have the right character, ability, training, and experience, and be obedient. In what follows, we see the interplay between God-ordained outcomes and the contribution required from human beings. The Israelites were entering “the land I [God] am about to give them,” yet they still had to fight for it.

The LORD specifically chose Joshua for this task, telling Moses to, “Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand on him. Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence.” (Numbers 27:18-19), and to “commission Joshua, and encourage and strengthen him, for he will lead this people across [the Jordan] and will cause them to inherit the land” (Deuteronomy 3:28). Later, God said to Moses, “Call Joshua and present yourselves at the Tent of Meeting, where I will commission him.” (Deuteronomy 31:14). Hence, Joshua had the clearest divine mandate for what he was asked to do. This commissioning by God, prophet and people meant there was no dissent over Joshua’s leadership: he “was filled with wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses.” (Deuteronomy 34:9). What kind of man was Israel’s new leader?

Name and character

Joshua (meaning *the LORD is my salvation* or *the LORD saves*) was originally called Hoshea (a variant of Hosea, meaning *salvation*), before Moses changed his name (Numbers 13:16). He was son of Nun, a name which in Aramaic means *fish* (with the derivative meaning, *fruitfulness*), and in Hebrew means *eternal* or *posterity*. As the fourteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, it represents the number fifty, each fiftieth year being a Jubilee.

Joshua, son of Nun is a forerunner and type of Christ, Jesus being the Greek form of Joshua (or Yeshua). The Old Testament Joshua is referred to 30 times in the Bible as “son of Nun” – not simply to set him apart from other people of the same name, but to remind us that the salvation of the LORD is eternal, brings (and demands) fruitfulness, and ushers in freedom from slavery (Jubilee). A fish was one of the earliest symbols of Christianity. Through this Joshua, God brought Israel into the Promised Land. Later generations of believers are brought to salvation by Jesus, the greater Joshua.

Joshua’s family history (his genealogy is given in 1 Chronicles 7:20-27), shows he came from the half-tribe of Ephraim, with “misfortune in his family” (1 Chronicles 7:23). Until the Exodus, he was a slave, and (though he might have learned to read later) was probably illiterate to start with. After battle with the Amalekites, “the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it’” (Exodus 17:14), presumably since Joshua could not read it for himself.

Like Caleb, Joshua was a man who “followed the LORD wholeheartedly” (Numbers 32:12). So much so that, even when “Moses would return [from the Tent of Meeting] to the camp ... his young assistant Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.” (Exodus 33:11).

Age and ability

The Bible does not in terms say how old Joshua was at the time of the exodus or when the conquest of Canaan began. But it speaks of Caleb as his near contemporary, and Caleb was forty when Moses sent him “to explore the land.” (Joshua 14:7). If Joshua were the same age, then important turning

points in his life (his entry into Canaan first as a spy and then as leader of Israel) would have come at the ages of forty and eighty, as equivalent moments did for Moses (his flight to Midian and return to Egypt). For Joshua to have been forty when he was commissioned to scout out the Promised Land is consistent with his being described at one point as Moses' "young assistant" (Exodus 33:11) and yet being of sufficient age and experience to be Israel's battle commander against Amalek (Exodus 17:9-10). In *Antiquities of the Jews*, V, 1:29 the 1st century AD Jewish historian Josephus estimates Joshua to have been forty-five at the time of the exodus and eighty-five on leading the Israelites into Canaan.

The Bible's first reference to Joshua is when "Moses said to [him], 'Take some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites.'" (Exodus 17:9). Both then and throughout the conquest of Canaan, Joshua showed himself to be an inspired battlefield commander. If this seems improbable, consider Spartacus or "Black Napoleon" and former slave Toussaint Louverture (1743-1803), who had no military training, but proved a natural general, winning freedom for the slaves of Saint Domingue (a French colony on Hispaniola), which led ultimately to creation of Haiti as an independent state.

Training and experience

Moses invested heavily in discipling Joshua, who became the prophet's "assistant" or "aide" (Exodus 24:13 and 33:11), right-hand man and trusted companion. Joshua went with Moses when he climbed Horeb, the "mountain of God" (Exodus 24:13) to receive the Ten Commandments, though the people "trembled with fear ... [and] stayed at a distance" (Exodus 20:18). Along with Caleb, Joshua was among the twelve spies sent to scout out Canaan (Numbers 13:1-13).

Moses was raised as a prince of Egypt and "educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22). Josephus says that, before Moses fled Egypt, he commanded an Egyptian military expedition to the south. Though the Bible does not specifically say so, we can assume Moses did all he could to pass on his knowledge and experience to Joshua during Israel's forty years of desert wandering.

God's assurances

Knowing what a huge task Joshua was being asked to take on, and what big shoes he had to fill, God graciously gave him five promises – promises of:

Power: "I will give you every place where you set your foot" (Joshua 1:3);

Possession: "Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from ... the Euphrates ... to the great sea" (Joshua 1:4);

Prevailing: "No-one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life." (Joshua 1:5).

Purpose: "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you." (Joshua 1:5).

Presence: "I will never leave you or forsake you." (Joshua 1:5).

God's requirements

In return, God required from Joshua utter commitment (Joshua 1:6, 1:7, and 1:9) and full obedience (Joshua 1:7-8) – note repetition of the words strong, courageous, and careful. For good measure, the exhortation to be strong and courageous is repeated in negative form: a reminder that we too should not be "terrified ... [or] discouraged" (Joshua 1:9). Strength, moral courage, and care are all ultimately issues of the will since they come down to trust in God. We must choose (resolve) to take hold of these things, and can only maintain them by reliance on Him.

There is a conditional element to being "successful wherever [we] go" (Joshua 1:7) and "prosperous and successful" (Joshua 1:8), since these results will only follow if we do everything according to God's

commands. Joshua was called to “meditate day and night” (Joshua 1:8) on the Book of the Law (that is to say, on the books of Moses, the Pentateuch, the Torah). This was the only Scripture then available, but it contained the whole of the Gospel, as confirmed by the writer of Hebrews speaking of Israelites of this generation as being “those who formerly had the gospel preached to them” (Hebrews 4:6).

Joshua had to provide godly leadership, but the people had to be godly followers.

Order and discipline

Just because God is in a work does not mean we can dispense with proper order and discipline. Israel was organised as the army of God. They had quit Egypt “by their divisions” (Exodus 6:26, see also 7:4, 12:17, 12:41, 12:51), “marching out boldly” (Exodus 14:8). By the time they left Horeb after receiving the Ten Commandments, they had a set “order of march” (Numbers 10:28), comprising four corps of three tribes each, with each tribal division “under its standard” (Numbers 10:25). High-ranking officers were then sufficiently established in their posts to be recorded by name (Numbers 10:25, 26 and 27), and there was a designated “rear guard” (Numbers 10:25).

Maintaining discipline is fundamental, since an army that loses it becomes a rabble, and will easily be defeated. Here, the command structure did its proper job as Joshua gave orders to the officers (Joshua 1:10), who in turn organised the people to ready their supplies (Joshua 1:11) for crossing the Jordan and taking the land. This is the view they would have seen as they did so:



View from Mount Nebo towards the Promised Land

Note that the people were going to “inherit” the land (Joshua 1:6). It was coming to them as of right, by virtue of family and blood ties, since it was the land God “swore to their forefathers to give them.” (Joshua 1:6).

Diligence and support

Joshua spoke separately to the tribes whose allotment of territory lay on the eastern side of the Jordan (Gad, Reuben and Manasseh) to make sure their troops would join the rest of the army (Joshua 1:12-15). Conquering the land was to be a collective endeavour, in which each tribe should help the others and not look to their own narrow interests. It is a credit to them and to the high regard in which Joshua was held that the men of Gad, Reuben and Manasseh replied, “Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go.” (Joshua 1:16).

It must have been a massive encouragement for Joshua when the men echoed back precisely the words he had already heard from God, saying, “Only be strong and courageous!” (Joshua 1:18). The rank and file have the duty and responsibility of supporting and upholding leaders, just as Aaron and Hur held up the arms of Moses (Exodus 17: 10-12).

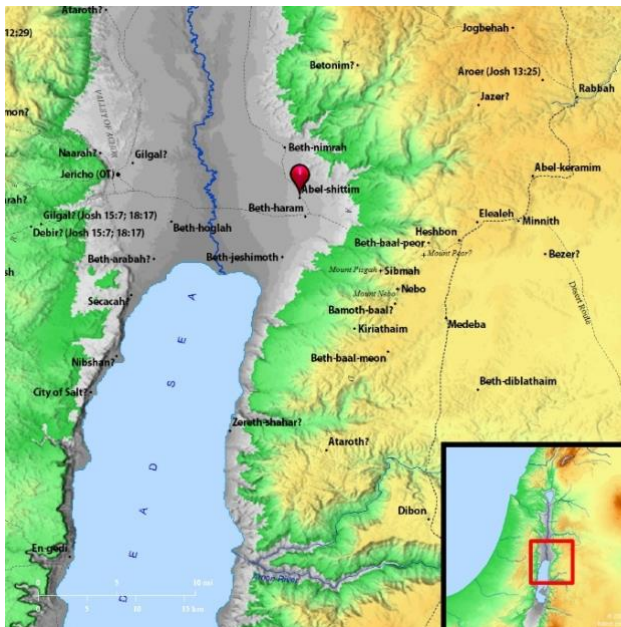
Session 2: Redemption and salvation

Joshua 2:1-24

2:1 Shittim, meaning *Acacia trees* or *sticks of wood*, shows God’s redemptive hand at work. A place where Israelite men had previously fallen into sexual sin with Moabite women (Numbers 25:1-5) now became the jumping-off point for two spies sent out by Joshua – men who “entered the house of a prostitute” with godly rather than sexual intent. Secrecy often has a negative connotation in the Bible, but in war scouting, reconnaissance and disinformation are necessary evils. Though God can perfectly well reveal the enemy’s plans to His servants (see 2 Kings 6:9-12), proper measures must still be taken. At all points, Joshua showed himself a careful and well-prepared commander. He did not allow God’s promises of power, possession, prevailing, purpose and presence to make him presumptuous.

2:2 The people of Jericho were jumpy, and suspicious of strangers. The report to the king of Jericho may have been a lucky guess rather than based on hard information.

2:3-5 Rahab’s report to the king echoes the Hebrew midwives Shiphrah and Puah’s replies to Pharaoh: see Exodus 1:15-19. Like theirs, her refusal to comply with ungodly state demands was lawful, and was rewarded (compare Exodus 1:20-21). Rahab put the demands of Israel’s God above those of clan and country. Self-preservation was obviously a factor, but later Bible writers were clear that her choice was motivated first and foremost by faith: “In the same way [as Abraham, whose faith was credited to him as righteousness], was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?” (James 2:25, and see also Hebrews 11:31). Rahab was the great-grandmother of King David and is one of five women named in Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:5).



Location of Mount Nebo, Shittim and Jericho

Though there was a change of leadership from Moses to Joshua, there was no fundamental change of course or direction for Israel, as this was set by God. Neither was there an attempt to bypass a formidable obstacle between them and the land of Canaan by seeking to enter the Promised Land via a different route. The point at which they were to cross the river Jordan in full flood (Joshua 3:15) lay on the direct line of march between Jericho and Mount Nebo, where Moses had recently died (Deuteronomy 34:1 and 34:5). The LORD had brought Israel to precisely where He intended them to be, and He gave Joshua instruction and encouragement accordingly (Joshua 1:2, 1:7 and 1:9). God was working to a plan that ultimately was about redemption and salvation – not just for Israel, but for all mankind. War in the physical was part of a greater outworking in the spiritual.

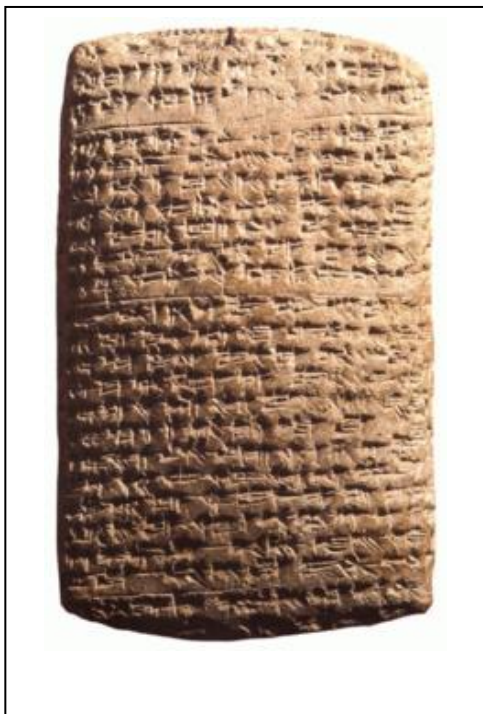
2:6 Stalks of flax had been laid on the flat roof to dry after being harvested. Joshua 3:15 confirms that it was harvest time.

2:7 Reference to fords across the Jordan and stating that the spies forded the river (Joshua 2:23) is not inconsistent with the river being “at flood stage” (Joshua 3:15) and Israel needing a miraculous parting

of the water in order to cross. There is a big difference between what two young, fit men can do when unencumbered by equipment, and what an entire people group laden with baggage and driving flocks and herds may be capable of.

2:8 Rahab's statement, "I know the LORD has given this land to you" is remarkable both in its prophetic understanding and for its use of the personal, covenant name of Israel's God. The Bible affirms that in this she was acting "by faith" (Hebrews 11:31).

2:8-11 Rahab provided valuable information about the morale of Israel's enemies, saying they were in "great fear" and "melting with fear" (Joshua 2:9), that they knew about the drying up of the Red Sea and destruction of Sihon and Og (Joshua 2:10), and that their "courage failed" (Joshua 2:11). All of this was important for Joshua to know, since it lessened the likelihood of offensive operations against the Israelite forces.



One of the Amarna letters

Clay tablets containing diplomatic correspondence from the reigns of pharaohs Amenhotep III and Akhenaten (the so-called Amarna Letters) include reports from Egyptian allies and vassals in Canaan, seeking urgent military help against invaders called Habiru, who are reported to be threatening the cities of Canaan and spreading terror. Letter EA 256, written by Mutbaal, king of Pella (a city lying just east of the Jordan between Lake Galilee and the Dead Sea), says, "Ask Benenima [Benjamin]. Ask Tadia. Ask Yishuya [Joshua]." That the name of Joshua, Israel's political leader and commander-in-chief, should appear is striking. So, too, is the reference to Benjamin, for this tribe had the honour of leading Israelite armies into battle (see Hosea 5:8). Tadia might conceivably be an attempt to render the name or title of another prominent Israelite, or of an identifiable group among the invaders. Pella fell within the territory allocated to the tribe of Gad. 'T' and 'G' sounds are easily transposed, as with 'T' and 'D' in the German 'Tochter' and its English equivalent, 'Daughter.' Letters EA 79 and EA 122 from Rib-Adda of Gebal speak of the "sons of Ebed-Ashera", which might plausibly refer to the tribe of Asher and its sub-klan of Heber (see Genesis 46:17, Numbers 26:45) since Gebal fell within the territorial allotment of Asher: see Joshua 19:24-31.

2:12-14 Joshua honoured this sworn agreement between Rahab and the spies in full (see Joshua 6:17, 6:23, 6:25), hence "the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient [or unbelieving]." (Hebrews 11:31).

2:15 Presumably, Rahab's house was not destroyed when the walls of Jericho fell, even though it was "part of the city wall." Saul (Paul) made a similar escape from Damascus: see Acts 9:25).

2:16 Rahab sent the spies in the opposite direction from their pursuers – the Judean hills lay west of Jericho and the Jordan (where men sent by the king of Jericho were watching the fords) to the east.

2:17-20 What the spies said appears almost to have been an afterthought. Seemingly, only once they had been lowered down the city wall and were about to head into the night, did they realise there had

to be an agreed mechanism for identifying Rahab and her family, and their earlier promises to her had to be qualified. What they proposed was straightforward common sense, however. Rahab agreed to it readily, and acted accordingly.

2:21 The scarlet thread of redemption is a theme running throughout Scripture. In the case of Perez and Zerah, the twin sons born to Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38:27-30), it marks the **designation and privileges of the firstborn, and the bloodline of Christ**. (Matthew 1:3 records that Jesus' family line is traced through Perez.) Scarlet thread in the tabernacle curtains (Exodus 26:1) and the ephod worn by the high priest (Exodus 28:6) signify the **priestly, atoning, and mediatorial work of Messiah**. With Rahab, the scarlet thread marked her home as the blood of the lamb marked the Israelites' doors in Goshen during the first Passover (Exodus 12:13), showing the **cleansing and protection of the blood of Jesus, applied through faith**. The shed blood of Christ is a constant from Genesis to Revelation, as "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." (Hebrews 9:22). By looking forward in faith to what Jesus did on the cross, Rahab and her family were redeemed (saved from death) and adopted into God's family. That they became part of Israel is confirmed by how "she lives among the Israelites to this day." (Joshua 6:25).

The treatment of Rahab and her family contrasts with God's response to Achan's sin in keeping for himself what God required to be destroyed (Joshua 7:1-26) and the Bible's evident disapproval at how the Israelites let themselves to be tricked into making a treaty with the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:1-27, see especially the failure to enquire of the LORD noted in 9:14). These episodes are discussed in more detail in later sessions, but for now, observe how Achan deliberately disobeyed a positive command from God, which the spies did not; and the Israelites failed to ask God about the Gibeonites, when they could and should have done so. In both instances, there was a lack of faith and obedience on Israel's part.

Rahab's story suggests the extermination of Canaan's inhabitants was not a foregone conclusion. They had the opportunity to make the same saving choice of faith as she, since they had all the information needed to make this decision. Rahab told the spies, "We [that is, the people of the land in general, not Rahab alone] have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed." (Joshua 2:10). Rahab, however, recognised what others did not, namely that "the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below" (Joshua 2:11), and she then acted on this revelation by offering help to the spies – a demonstration of what Paul describes, that it is "with [our] heart that [we] believe and are justified, and ... with [our] mouth that [we] confess and are saved" (Romans 10:10), followed by producing fruit in keeping with repentance (Matthew 3:8, Luke 3:8, see also Luke 13:6-9). See also comment on Joshua 9:24.

2:22 Periods of three days are often significant in the Bible, as with the three days Jesus was in the tomb before He rose again. Three signifies harmony, new life, and completeness.

2:23-24 The return of the two spies with accurate and positive reports is a further example of God's bringing His redemptive purposes to bear on what was previously marred by human sin and weakness. It forms a counterpoint to Moses sending twelve spies to scout out the Promised Land (Numbers 13:1-33), of whom ten returned fearful, and only Joshua and Caleb responded in faith. It might have been the recollection of that event that made Joshua send out only two men on this subsequent occasion.

The book of Joshua represents Israel's second bite at the cherry. Had they only been obedient, they would have taken the land forty years previously. This time they will (mostly) do better.

Session 3: Stepping out and stepping in

Joshua 3:1-17 and 4:1-24

After 40 years of desert wandering, Israel's miraculous crossing of the Jordan River in full spate or "at flood stage" (Joshua 3:15) marked the nation's entry into the Promised Land. It replayed the crossing of the Red Sea, with God acting to part the waters in a similar way as He had on that previous occasion (Exodus 14:21-31, Joshua 3:15-17). A new generation that had not taken part in the rebellions against God and Moses in the wilderness was now ushered in, to start taking possession of the territory God had given them. Joshua 3 emphasises the importance of holiness, faith, and getting on the move – the three essential pre-requisites for what came afterwards.

3:1 "Early in the morning" speaks of prompt obedience, recalling how Abraham set out "early the next morning" (Genesis 22:3) in response to God telling him to sacrifice his son Isaac.

3:2 As in Joshua 2:22, there was a three-day period of waiting and preparation.

3:3-4 The ark of the covenant was sign and symbol of Israel's covenant relationship with the LORD. It contained the stone tablets of the Law (Ten Commandments), representing **divine revelation**; manna, demonstrating **divine provision**; and the rod of Aaron, evidencing **God's miraculous and life-giving power**: see Hebrews 9:4. Uniquely among the portable things Moses was told to build at the same time as the Tabernacle, the Ark's carrying poles were "not to be removed" (Exodus 25:15) – perhaps to signify that **God's Word and Presence is dynamic, not static**. On top of the Ark were two cherubim, and between them the mercy seat where God's Presence rested (Exodus 25:17-22). The Israelites had "never been this way before" (Joshua 3:4), and only the Presence of God could guide them into "which way to go" (Joshua 3:3).



The river Jordan in winter

When Joshua led the twelve tribes across the Jordan, the river was in full flood, maybe 100 ft wide and more than 10 ft deep. Though there were fords at several points, to all intents and purposes they were impassable to a large people group on the move. It seems the two spies were able to cross at these points, but they were young and fit, and unencumbered by baggage, flocks, and herds. The picture on the left shows that even in winter, the Jordan can be fast-flowing, and difficult to cross. After the Spring rains, the flow of water would have been even greater than shown here. God chose to take the people into the land by the most direct route to Jericho, which He had chosen as the first city to be attacked. But He also wanted to show His power, and to "begin to exalt [Joshua] in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses." (Joshua 3:7).

3:5 Consecration speaks of the need for **holiness**. The extent of our spiritual power will depend on our degree of holiness. The Bible first mentions consecration in the context of the exodus from Egypt, with the LORD saying, "consecrate to me every first-born male" (see Exodus 13:2). The importance of being consecrated to God is emphasised in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

3:6 Here, Levites carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of the people, whereas at Jericho, "the armed men went ahead of them and the rear guard followed the ark of the LORD" (Joshua 6:13). God

does not follow set formulas, but adapts His ways according to circumstances. Given the possibility of a sortie by Jericho's garrison, it was a sensible precaution to protect the ark in this way. When crossing the Jordan, there was no such threat and the ark could lead the way. Compare Jehoshaphat sending ahead of his army "men to sing to the LORD and to praise him" (2 Chronicles 20: 21). Above all, **it is God's Presence and power that determines the outcome, though holiness, faith, praise, and worship are also key.**

3:7-11 God spoke directly to Joshua, as He had to Moses. Consequently, Joshua was able to assure the people, "the living God is among you and ... will certainly drive out before you [the inhabitants of the land]." (Joshua 3:10).

3:12 The order to "choose twelve men ... one from each tribe" was given before the crossing, but only after the tribes had passed over did Joshua tell them to take stones from the river to build a memorial (Joshua 4:4-7). Most probably, they had a general supervisory role during the crossing itself, to help make sure order and discipline were kept and everyone got over safely.

3:13-15 There were two vital components required from Israel. One was holiness, the other faith, from which stemmed action. Only when "the priests [carrying] the ark of the LORD ... set foot in the Jordan [would] its waters flowing downstream ... be cut off and stand in a heap."

3:16 In 1927 a 6.8-magnitude earthquake struck Jericho and the surrounding area, causing landslides to block the Jordan near Damiya (the "town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan"), interrupting the flow of water downstream for 22 hours.

3:17 The priests stood on dry ground, just as "the Israelites went through the [Red Sea] on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left." (Exodus 14:22).

4:1-3 Previously, Joshua had given the order to choose twelve men, one from each tribe (Joshua 3:12). Now the command came from God, who explained what these men were to do. The stones they took from the river were previously untouched by human hand, and had been smoothed by water flowing over them. This mirrors the flow of the Spirit in us (personally and corporately), and speaks of bedrock truths and God's living truth flowing over our lives. All believers carry bedrock truths in terms of life experience, memory, vision and so on that are both pivot (hinge) between past, present and future, and an anchor in times to come.

4:4-5 Joshua relayed God's instructions. Though he may have added extra details on his own initiative, it is more likely these came from God. Since stones were to be carried on the shoulder, they must have been large. This was to be a substantial memorial, not a small cairn.

4:6 Remembrance is important to God. Knowing our tendency to forgetfulness, He provides symbols to help us remember, of which Passover and the Lord's Supper are prime examples. The purpose of a memorial is to "serve as a sign among you," not to become an empty monument.

4:7 Memorials have a didactic (teaching) function and are therefore dynamic. The purpose is to bring into the present an understanding of the past in order to inform and direct the future. Joshua's words to the twelve tribal representatives in this verse are different from what was said to the people later: see comment on Joshua 4:21-24.

4:8-9 These verses rehearse what is described in greater detail in verses 19-23. The crossing the Jordan narrative has a recurring pattern of description (or foretelling) followed by fulfilment, for example in Joshua 3:11-13 (description) and Joshua 3:15-16 (fulfilment). This builds a picture of God's reliability and faithfulness, as He (or His servant Joshua) say something will be done, and it is.

4:10-12 The faithfulness of God and Joshua was mirrored by the faithful service of the priests, who remained at their posts until all the people have passed over.

4:13 The tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh also proved faithful, honouring the commitments given in Joshua 1:16-18. **Faithfulness and faithful dealings are an outworking of faith in the one true God.**

4:14 What God foretold in Joshua 3:7 was fulfilled.

4:15-18 Timing is in God's hands, and prompt obedience is needed if things are to unfold according to His perfect (ordained) will. If Joshua had given wrong or premature orders, or the priests moved too soon, the waters of the Jordan could have returned to their place while the people were still crossing. For God's purposes to be outworked, it is necessary for the priests of the LORD (in the New Testament era, this being a priesthood of all believers) to hold the line against the flood tide of the enemy.

4:19 The fact the people crossed over "opposite Jericho" makes it most unlikely their camp at Gilgal was the modern town of that name further north, or the Tell Gilgal nearby. Probably it was somewhere in the Judean foothills, not far from the city that was to be the Israelites' first point of attack in Canaan. (The position marked on the map below is only indicative, as the remains of this camp have not yet been found.) Since Gilgal sounds like the Hebrew for *roll*, it could be applied to any hilly place.

Gilgal was "on the eastern border of Jericho" (Joshua 3:19). Canaan was not a unified entity politically or ethnically. It comprised various city states, some bound into loose alliances or federations, and some entirely independent. Jericho was one of these, and the villages and countryside for some miles around would have formed part of its territory. Canaan's ethnic mix was complex: God told Moses, "I will drive out before you many nations – the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites" (Deuteronomy 7:1 and 20:17).



Possible location of the Israelite camp at Gilgal

4:20 Setting up the stones at Gilgal was in accordance with God's command to "put them down at the place where you stay tonight." (Joshua 4:3). Though the Israelites started crossing the Jordan early in the morning, it could easily have taken them several hours to get across, and after a demanding day, they probably did not get far into the country round about before making camp. Someone reasonably fit might expect to make two and a half miles per hour over hilly or difficult terrain, but the Israelites had with them infants, the aged and infirm, as well as livestock of various kinds.

4:21-24 Compare Joshua's speech to the people in these verses with what was said to the twelve tribal representatives in Joshua 4:6-7. **Timescale** shifts from the immediate "when your children ask you" of Joshua 4:6 to the more distant: "When your descendants ask their fathers." **Emphasis** shifts from the priestly to the national, there being no mention of the ark in Joshua 4:21-24, but correspondingly, no mention of the Red Sea in Joshua 4:6-7. And **object (focus)** shifts from Israel alone, with the stones to be "a sign among you" (Joshua 4:6) and "a memorial to the people of Israel forever" (Joshua 4:7), to the wider world, with God's intent being that "all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God." (Joshua 4:24). This is of significance **for all people and for all time** – not the story of bloodthirsty conquest and ethnic cleansing at the behest of a pitiless deity, but a physical prefiguring and necessary stepping-stone in the LORD's plan to bring salvation to all mankind.

Session 4: Breaking in and breaking through

Joshua 5:1-15 and 6:1-27

God is a general of genius, who delights in doing the unexpected. Attacking Canaan from the south is difficult, as it means crossing the waterless Negev. In the First World War, the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (comprising British and Imperial troops) made several unsuccessful attempts to break through Ottoman Turkish lines from this direction prior to Allenby's successful 1917 campaign. Nevertheless, this southern route into the land was the one which Canaanites most probably expected Israel to take. Humanly speaking, trying to cross the Jordan at harvest time looked like madness, yet it was necessary if the Israelites were to live off the land rather than by God's miraculous provision of manna. Militarily, doing this also made possible a strategy which cut the land in two, enabling Joshua to confront and defeat his adversaries in detail, rather than facing united opposition from all Canaanite forces.

In the event, three great coalitions still formed against the Israelites: the "kings west of the Jordan ... came together to make war against Joshua and Israel" (Joshua 9:1), five Amorite kings joined forces (Joshua 10:5), and a confederation of northern kings was brought together by Jabin of Hazor (Joshua 11:1-5). Had the Israelites approached from the south, these disparate groups could conceivably have made common cause against Israel. Instead, Joshua gained strategic surprise, Israel had the initiative throughout, and opposition to their invasion was fragmented.

Doors have locks, and locks have keys. Jericho (meaning *city of the moon* in Arabic) was the gateway to Canaan. The city was probably the cultic centre for worship of moon god Yarikh, emphasising that the battle was spiritual as well as physical. God intended to defeat and take the strongholds of the false gods, just as He had brought "judgment on all the gods of Egypt" (Exodus 12:12) during the exodus. To open the door and enter in, the Israelites needed a key in the spiritual as well as a key in the physical. The key in the spirit was circumcision and the key in the physical was the battle plan given to Joshua by "the commander of the LORD's army" (Joshua 5:13, 5:15).

5:1-3 So, although they were now in enemy territory, God told Joshua to circumcise the menfolk. This would seriously affect their ability to fight (see Genesis 34:25-29), but their opponents posed no threat at this point, and the men were able to recuperate undisturbed (Joshua 5:8). The priority was for Israel to restore her covenant relationship with God, making His enemies their enemies, and their enemies His; and enabling Israel once again to become heir to His promise "to give [them] a land flowing with milk and honey" (Joshua 5:6).

5:4-8 These verses explain why this new circumcision was needed. Circumcision was God's covenant sign, commanded first for Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 17:10-14, 21:4, Leviticus 12:3), later extending to all in Israel who wished to eat the Passover meal (Exodus 12:44, 12:48). In the wilderness Israel was out of covenant relationship with God, which is why "all the people born in the desert had not ... been circumcised on the way." (Joshua 5:5 and 5:7).

5:9 Once circumcision was complete, God "rolled away the reproach of Egypt" – the stigma belonging to a generation which never quite got Egypt out of their hearts.

5:10-12 Celebrating Passover was a reminder that God had brought Israel out of Egypt with the intent of taking them into the Promised Land. After a (wholly unnecessary) delay of forty years, His purposes would at last be fulfilled. Now they had crossed the Jordan, God expected the people to stand on their own two feet – no longer as spiritual babies, but as mature adults, with obligations and responsibilities to match – and to take possession of the land by force. The same principles apply to the spiritual warfare to be waged by present-day believers: as Jesus said, "From the days of John the Baptist until

It seems that up to till this moment, Joshua was undecided whether this city should be Israel's first point of attack, though he was aware of its strategic significance – when sending spies into Canaan, he told them to “Go, look over the land ... especially Jericho” (Joshua 2:1). Now God gave Joshua both his target and the operational plan that would ensure success.

6:2-7 The narrative sequence again emphasises faithfulness, as God's orders were relayed by Joshua to the people, the people did as he instructed, and events turned out as God promised.

6:8 Seven priests carrying seven trumpets prefigures the seven trumpets that will sound at the end of the age (Revelation 8:2, 8:6, 8:7, 8:8, 8:10, 8:12, 8:13, 9:1, 9:13, 9:14, 10:7, 10:15).

6:9-11 Joshua enforced strict discipline to ensure the LORD's commands were followed to the letter, and the people obeyed.

6:12 Again, “early next morning” speaks of prompt obedience: see comment on Joshua 3:1.

6:13-15 The Israelites' daily procession around the city must have been wearing in the extreme on the nerves of Jericho's defenders, sapping their will to fight. Unsurprisingly, it seems there was little or no organised resistance when the walls fell.



Blowing a rams-horn trumpet (shofar) has enormous spiritual significance. In the Bible it is used to (1) summon a sacred assembly (Numbers 10:7) and issue a call to worship (Isaiah 27:13); (2) herald the presence of God (Exodus 19:16); (3) mark the start of a season or year (Leviticus 25:9); (4) be a call to departure or battle (Numbers 10:5-7); (5) sound the alarm (Joel 2:3); (6) bring down strongholds or walls (Joshua 6:20); and (7) announce the coronation of a king (1 Kings 1:34). Jewish tradition has it that the one blowing the shofar should be a righteous man. The Feast of Trumpets is prescribed as one of the LORD's feasts in Leviticus 23:24.

6:16-18 Joshua clearly warned Israel that taking anything “devoted” to the LORD – an expression that includes giving things over for His service, or destroying them – would itself bring destruction.

6:19 Gold, silver, bronze, and iron were to “go into [the LORD's] treasury” for common use.

6:20 The walls collapsed or “fell down flat” (KJV). Excavating the ruins of ancient Jericho from 1930-36, archaeologist John Garstang noted the city's walls had not fallen inward (as they had at other sites, where they had been battered by attackers from outside), but outward.

6:21-25 Apart from Rahab and her family, every living thing in the city was destroyed, both man and beast, and the city burned to the ground. Writing about her excavations at Jericho in the late 1950s, archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon said, “The destruction was complete. Walls and floors were blackened or reddened by fire, and every room was filled with fallen bricks, timbers, and household utensils; in most rooms the fallen debris was heavily burnt, but the collapse of the walls of the eastern rooms seems to have taken place before they were affected by fire.”

6:26 Archaeological finds at Gezer, Megiddo, Jericho and elsewhere show foundation sacrifices were widespread in Canaan, with children killed and their bodies encased in walls of newly-built houses to bring good luck to the occupants. We may not much like how God told Joshua to deal with defeated foes, but after giving the Canaanites 430 years to change their ways, the LORD would stay his hand no longer. The sin of the Amorites had reached its full measure (see Genesis 15:16).

Session 5: Backsliding and destruction

Joshua 7:1-26 and 8:1-29

7:1 The Israelites acted unfaithfully and the LORD's anger burned against Israel: it was only the sin of one man, yet this tainted the whole nation. Sin anywhere in the Church has the same effect.

7:2 Again, Joshua conducted careful reconnaissance by sending men to spy out Ai. Beth Aven means *house of nothingness, house of wickedness, or house of idols*. God later complained Bethel (the *house of God*, where Abraham pitched his tent, Jacob dreamt of angels ascending and descending, and the ark was kept until King David brought it to Jerusalem) had become like Beth Aven because of the idols worshipped there (Hosea 4:15, 5:8, 10:5).

7:3 Since "about forty thousand armed for battle crossed over before the LORD to the plains of Jericho for war" (Joshua 4:13), the spies recommended attacking Ai with less than ten per cent of the army.

7:4-5 The spies' advice was not necessarily wrong, but they understandably failed to take account of the spiritual dimension, since none of the Israelites yet knew what Achan had done. Though casualties were not high (about thirty-six killed, only just over one per cent of the total), this shock defeat was a serious blow to morale.

7:6 Rending garments and sprinkling dust on the head were traditional signs of mourning, repentance, and abasement.

7:7-9 What Joshua said is reminiscent of how Moses spoke on similar occasions: see Exodus 32:11-14. In each case, Israel's leader appealed to God's reputation (in the case of the Golden Calf, to what the Egyptians would say about God's motives, and to His covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and in Joshua's case simply to the LORD's "own great name."

7:10 Joshua was prostrate before God "till evening" (Joshua 7:6), but there comes a point when prayer must give way to action. Hence God saying, "Stand up! What are you doing on your face?"

7:10-11 In telling Joshua what was happening and why, God underlined collective responsibility: in His eyes, it was Israel that had violated God's covenant, stolen, and lied.

7:12 The more we become out of alignment with God's ways and purposes, the less we will be able to stand against our enemies, and the more we will be made liable to destruction. If we persist in error, there will come a point at which God will cease to be with us altogether.

7:13 As Israel was preparing to cross the Jordan, Joshua ordered the people to "consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you." (Joshua 3:5). The tone here was different, heavy more than excited, as God told Joshua to consecrate the people "in preparation for tomorrow" – the removal by destruction of "that which is devoted [to God from] among you."

7:14-18 Casting lots was a pagan method of divination (as with Nebuchadnezzar deciding whether to attack Jerusalem: see Ezekiel 21:21-23), but also has a good biblical pedigree (see Jonah 1:7). The issue is whether it is done at the command and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, or of demons.

7:19 Though Achan means *trouble*, there was nothing obvious in his family line to hint at why he should have acted so foolishly. His father's name Carmi means, *God is my vineyard*, his grandfather's Zimri means, *my music, my praise*, his great-grandfather's Zerah means *break out or arise*, and the tribal name Judah means *praised*. Joshua perhaps picked up on the idea of praise when he said, "give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give him praise."

7:20-21 Achan fell prey to the lure of Babylon, not just the “beautiful robe from Babylonia”, but also the gold and silver. The Babylonia monetary system is one of the networks of control holding people in bondage to the present day, and such things will send them to everlasting destruction unless they escape by the grace of God.

7:22-23 Stolen items retrieved from Achan’s tent were “spread ... before the LORD”, as Hezekiah later did with the letter he received from Babylon (2 Kings 19:14) – a way of presenting them to God for His consideration and judgment.

7:25-26 Achan lived up to his name, bringing trouble on Israel, and ultimately on himself. The deaths of his family members and livestock may seem harsh, but the issue is the same as it was in the case of Jericho, as God demands no lesser standard from His people: see comment on Joshua 6:26. As in Joshua 4:20. “a large pile of rocks” formed a memorial to what had happened.



The Valley of Achor

The Valley of Achor today remains a desolate place worthy of its name (see picture to the left). The name Achor is closely related to Achan, and likewise means *trouble*. The Valley of Achor was part of the northern boundary of the land allotted to the tribe of Judah (Joshua 15:7). Despite the events of Joshua 7 and its present appearance, however, God has other plans for this valley. His redemptive purposes are shown by His promise that “the Valley of Achor [will become] a resting-place for herds, for my people who seek me” (Isaiah 65:10) and He “will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.” (Hosea 2:15). We need to bear in mind that much of what we read in Joshua as a negative will be turned to good by the LORD in the days to come.

8:1 God repeated His earlier encouragement for Joshua not to be afraid or discouraged (see Joshua 1:9), presumably since these were precisely the emotions Joshua was experiencing at this point.

8:2 This time God allowed the Israelites to take plunder and livestock from a captured city. Ambush is a tactic that features often in Israel’s warfare (with ten references in Joshua, seven in Judges, one in 1 Samuel and two in 2 Chronicles). On occasion, God sets ambushes Himself: see 2 Chronicles 20:22.

8:3 Though God told Joshua, “Take the whole army with you” (Joshua 8:1), Joshua chose only thirty thousand of the best men out of the forty thousand or so available. This was not disobedience, as a sizeable contingent would have been needed to guard the Israelite camp, and there would have been some who were sick and wounded, so unable to join the attacking force.

8:4 As in Joshua 4:5-7, the extra detail contained in Joshua’s orders to his men may have been his own addition, but more likely had already been revealed to him by God.

8:5 Joshua was a man who led from the front, putting himself in harm’s way by joining the detachment that were to advance on the city of Ai. The fact an eighty-year-old was physically capable of doing this suggests Joshua, like Caleb, was “still as strong today as when Moses sent [him] out [to spy out Canaan] ... [and] just as vigorous to go out to battle now as [he] was then.” (Joshua 14:11).

8:6-8 Though the Israelites were allowed to take plunder, the city of Ai was still to be set on fire.

8:9 Joshua was careful to “[spend] the night with the people” to help keep morale high.

Session 6: Deception and overcoming

Joshua 9:1-27 and 10:1-43

9:1-2 Only six of the seven Canaanite tribes are listed here. The Girgashites are omitted, though they appear in Joshua 3:10 and 24:11. Some think they may have fled to escape Israel's invasion, connecting them with Phoenician settlers in the western Mediterranean spoken of by Procopius (a Greek historian of the 6th century AD). All we know for sure is, they were displaced by Israel one way or another.

9:3 Gibeon means *hill town* or *high hill*. It was large, important, and militarily capable (Joshua 10:2), with territory that included the towns of Kephirah, Beeroth, and Kiriath Jearim (Joshua 9:17).

9:4 The word ruse appears only here in the Bible. Together with trickery, stratagems, subterfuge, and lies, it is a tactic favoured by Satan. He will use every underhand trick in the book to further his ends, but among his most favoured weapons are deceit, deception, concealment, and fear. We must be on the alert for these tactics in the spiritual realm, no less than in the physical.

9:5-6 A great deal of thought and effort went into making the deceit as believable as possible.

9:7-9 The Israelites were suspicious, and having received an evasive answer to their initial question, Joshua then probed more deeply. Hivites refers to the people of Gibeon, as this was their tribe.



El Jib (Gibeon) from a Palestine Exploration Fund map circa 1880. The well is marked Ain, and cisterns marked Cis.

Middle Bronze Age shaft tombs to the west of the city of Gibeon contain crude pottery. Its lack of sophistication has led archaeologists to think the people it belonged to were nomads living in an unfortified camp. Unusually, the site has what look like multiple burials in the same tomb, instead of the single burials that would normally be expected. Multiple burials often indicate sudden death on a significant scale (as from war or disease), when large numbers of bodies need to be interred quickly. Similar remains have been found at Jericho (Joshua 6, passim), Lachish (Joshua 10:3, 5, 23, 31-35, 12:11, 15:39) and Megiddo (Joshua 12:21, 17:11).

9:9-13 The hoax was elaborate, but would not have stood up to proper investigation.

9:14-15 Cursory sampling of provisions was not enough. The Israelites failed to do basic due diligence, entering a binding agreement that held no obvious advantage without even asking God's advice.

9:16-23 An oath sworn in the name of the LORD must be honoured, even if it is a poor deal. Israel was trapped, and had no option but to make the best of a bad job. We should be careful what we agree, and with whom. Being on God's business is no excuse for not taking proper precautions.

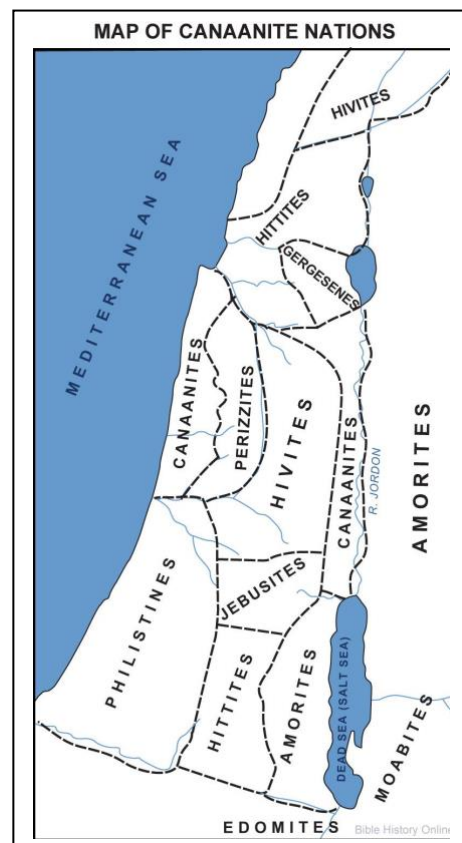
9:24-27 Like Rahab, the Gibeonites were "clearly told" of God's plans and purposes, causing them to fear for their lives. She and they illustrate different levels of response to this knowledge. Rahab chose to align herself with God's people, and so was adopted into His family and is one of those "commended for their faith" (Hebrews 11:39). She has life in all its fullness. By contrast, though the Gibeonites' lives were spared and they lived among Israel, they did so as second-class citizens. Again, the implication is that other Canaanites need not have died, had they responded to circumstances differently.

10:1 Adoni-Zedek means *my lord is righteous* or *lord of righteousness*. In Abraham’s time, Jerusalem was ruled by Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18-20), whose name means *king of righteousness* or *my king is righteousness*, and who appears in the context of an earlier alliance of five kings (Genesis 14:8). There is an ongoing biblical theme pointing to the spiritual significance of Jerusalem and its rulers.

10:2-6 Though the treaty between Israel and Gibeon is not called a covenant, it may have had terms relating to mutual defence – though regardless of treaty obligations, Israel was compelled to intervene in this fight. Allowing Gibeon to fall would have handed the advantage to the enemy.

10:7 The Israelites were still using Gilgal as their main base. As with the attack on Ai, some men would doubtless have stayed behind to protect the camp.

10:8-9 Even taking God’s wonderful assurances into account, Joshua still showed astounding boldness. Night marches across rugged terrain are difficult for any army, and it is a measure of the discipline and proficiency of his troops that Joshua attempted it. The map below left shows the unfolding of Joshua’s southern campaign, while the one on the right gives a sense of the ethnic mix and fragmented political allegiances of Canaan.



Amarna letter EA 286 from Abdu-Heba of Jerusalem to the Egyptian Pharaoh reads: “The Habiru are capturing our fortresses ... taking our cities ... destroying our rulers ... plundering all the country of the king. May the king send soldiers quickly. If no troops come this year the whole country is lost to the king.”

10:10 Beth Horon means house of the hollow, Azekah means *cultivated ground*, and Makkedah means *place of herdsmen*.

10:10-12 The LORD fought for Israel (Joshua 10:14) by “[throwing the enemy] into confusion,” hurling “large hailstones down on them” and “[giving] them over to Israel”: compare Moses at the crossing of the Red Sea, who said, “The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.” (Exodus 14:14).

10:12-13 Joshua's growing boldness in physical warfare was matched by growing boldness in prayer. Commanding the sun and moon to stand still shows the power and authority believers can and should aspire to. We cannot know what mechanisms God used to give effect to Joshua's prayer. Ideas include an eclipse and refraction of light in the atmosphere that made the day appear longer than normal; a local miracle that allowed light in the specific area around Gibeon (as when there was light in Goshen, but not elsewhere in Egypt: see Exodus 10:23); or the rotation of the earth stopping. All possibilities should be held lightly. The fact is, it happened, and God decisively demonstrated his superiority over the sun and moon gods worshipped in Canaan.

Aijalon has a complex series of meanings, derived from something that protrudes or sticks out. Positive connotations point to leadership, neutral ones to an object like a tree, and negative ones to failure in meeting standards or codes of conduct. The Book of Jashar means *book of the victorious*, *book of the upright*, or *book of the just man* – a lost source text referred to here and in 2 Samuel 1:18.

10:14 Other utterly unique days or events are described in Ezekiel 5:9 and Matthew 24:21. What took place was an entirely different order of magnitude from the time "the LORD made the shadow go back ... ten steps" (2 Kings 20:9-11) for King Hezekiah.

10:15 This concludes an overview of the battle, with more detail being given in Joshua 10:16-27, much as Genesis 2:7-25 expands on Genesis 1:27-31. The exact same wording appears in 10:43, in each case drawing a line under a distinct aspect of Joshua's campaigns.

10:16-20 The Amorite kings were walled up inside the cave so Joshua could deal with them at leisure once the battle was over.

10:21-23 Whereas the mouths of Israel's enemies were stopped up, Joshua ordered the mouth of the cave to be opened. The five kings were respectively rulers of Jerusalem (*in awe of peace or teaching peace*), Hebron (*place of joining*), Jarmuth (*fearing, seeing, throwing down, death*), Lachish (*invincible or impregnable*) and Eglon (*place of the calf*).

10:24 Having the army commanders put their feet on the defeated kings' necks was about more than simply humiliating them, and no other defeated leaders were treated like this. It was a symbolic taking of spiritual dominion over all that the places they ruled represented. Since God has "subdued nations under us, peoples under our feet." (Psalm 47:2-3, see also Psalm 100:1, Matthew 22:44, Mark 12:36, Luke 20:43), we are to manifest this reality. Through this act, Israel took dominion over fear and death (Jarmuth), over sin and false worship (Eglon), and over the enemy's claims to invincibility (Lachish). At the same time, they proclaimed that God's people are bringers of true peace (Jerusalem), and they alone can determine what should be joined/open and what should be separated/shut (Hebron).

10:25 Though he previously needed reassurance from God, now Joshua became an encourager. As he stepped out in faith and obedience, Joshua moved in increasing power. It is the same for us.

10:26-27 Anyone hung on a tree is cursed (Deuteronomy 21:23). Joshua followed the Mosaic law by not leaving the bodies hanging there overnight.

10:28-42 The Israelites dealt with each city the same way – Makkedah, Libnah, Lachish, Eglon, Hebron, and Debir. On the way, they annihilated the army of Horem king of Gezer. By close of the campaigning season, they had "totally destroyed" the enemy and made their territory "subject" to them.

10:42 This overwhelming victory came about for one simple reason: "because the LORD, the God of Israel, fought for Israel."

Session 7: Dividing and conquering

Joshua 11:1-23 and 12:1-24

11:1 Jabin (meaning, *he who understands* or *he who discerns*) was maybe a title rather than a personal name. There was another Jabin in Hazor in the days of Deborah and Barak (Judges 4:2).

11:1-3 This was a powerful coalition, encompassing pretty much all the Canaanites who had not so far been beaten in battle by Israel.

11:4 No attempt was made to place a figure on the numbers involved, presumably since the Israelites were unable to make an accurate count. Using a standard expression for a large multitude suggests that, where precise figures appear elsewhere in the book of Joshua, they should be treated as reliable. The enemy force may have outnumbered Israel by some margin.

11:5 The Waters of Merom (meaning, *high place*) is a lake ten miles north of the Sea of Galilee. Its precise identification is disputed. The spot was doubtless chosen to allow deployment and manoeuvre of the coalition's horses and chariots (Joshua 11:4). These theoretically gave a huge advantage against Israel's army, which consisted entirely of infantry.



Gate of the royal fortress at Hazor

Hazor had great power, wealth, and influence. It “had been the head of all these kingdoms [named in verses 1-3]” (Joshua 11:10). Archaeological research has so far revealed 22 layers of occupation, spanning 2,700 years from the early Bronze Age in the twenty-ninth century BC to the Hellenistic period of the second century BC. The city was strategically placed, controlling the point where trade routes from north, east and west converged in the north of Canaan. Hazor was important in the trading of tin (one of the components of bronze). Cuneiform tablets from the reign of King Zimri-Lin of Mari in the eighteenth-century BC show that his contemporary King Hammurabi of Babylon thought Hazor important enough to warrant keeping two ambassadors there. Its site covers 225 acres, twice the size of Canaanite Megiddo, and its population was perhaps twenty times greater than Jerusalem's at that time. The cities which united under the leadership of Hazor fielded “a huge army, as numerous as the sand on the seashore” (Joshua 11:4).

11:6 God's encouragement included specific instructions for dealing with enemy horses and chariots. Both were to be put beyond future use.

11:7 A surprise attack suggests Joshua caught his enemies off balance by speed of manoeuvre, maybe using forced marches. Jabin's men evidently failed to carry out proper reconnaissance: over-confident and complacent, they trusted in their large army, advantageous position, and superior equipment.

11:8 As before, it was God who was ultimately responsible for Israel's victory. The defeated foe fled north-west towards Sidon and Misrephoth Maim, and north-east towards the Valley of Mizpah (see map overleaf). The pursuit was furious, and may well have taken place over several days. Sidon is over forty miles from the Sea of Galilee and Misrephoth Maim is on the Mediterranean coast between that city to the north and Tyre to the south.

11:16-20 This provides a summary of the situation so far. Joshua took “all this land” (that is, the land described in these verses), not all the land Israel was entitled to: see Joshua 13:1-7.

11:21-22 This is an additional campaign, separate to the ones described earlier. No duration is given, but dislodging stubborn defenders from the hill country could have been a lengthy process.

11:23 As to the entire land, see comments on 11:15 and 11:16-20. The inference of the land having rest is that Joshua was able to rule peacefully over Israel for some years before his death “at the age of a hundred and ten” (Joshua 24:29). The process of ensuring the twelve tribes occupied their allotted territory, and making all the associated administrative arrangements connected with being a settled rather than a nomadic people, would presumably have taken some time. Conceivably, God’s reminder to Joshua of the land that still needed to be taken was given towards the very end of his life.

12:1 This provides a summary of Israel’s conquests to date.

12:2-3 The Arnon rises in the mountains of Gilead (in modern Jordan), flowing westward into the Dead Sea. Israel overran Sihon’s territory before Joshua led the twelve tribes across the river Jordan to begin the conquest of Canaan proper (Numbers 21:21-31). The Sea of Kinnereth is Lake Galilee.

12:4-5 The territory of Og was also conquered before crossing the Jordan (Numbers 21:32-35).

12:6-7 The fact the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh already had their allotment of land east of the Jordan explains why Joshua spoke to them separately prior to crossing the river (Joshua 1:12-15).

12:8 The Girgashites are omitted from this list of conquered tribes: see comment on Joshua 9:1-2.

12:9-24 This list of thirty-one kings contains fifteen not mentioned previously in the conquest narrative – Geder, Hormah, Adullam, Tappuah, Hopher, Aphek, Lasharon, Shimron Meron, Taanach, Megiddo, Kedesh, Jokneam, Dor, Goyim and Tirzah. (The destruction of Arad appears in Numbers 21:1.) There may have been other totally separate military actions against these kings, or their involvement in the events of Joshua 6-11 may have been too peripheral to have merited mention earlier.

19: 24 Thirty-one is the number value of El (God). El means *the strong one* or *the primary authority*. Overcoming thirty-one kings therefore underlines the superiority of Israel’s God over all false gods of the Canaanites. Fifteen (the number of kings not previously mentioned) is the number of rest (coming after deliverance, represented by fourteen) and sixteen (15 + 16 = 31) stands for God’s perfect love.

Some claim the accounts in Joshua and Judges are inconsistent, since the former describes a sudden and mostly successful Israelite incursion into Canaan, whereas the latter suggests piecemeal conquest alongside frequent setbacks and periodic oppression of Israel by surrounding peoples. But there is no reason why both cannot be true. History provides countless examples of initial success later undone by insurgency, infiltration, and a resurgent enemy. Later generations of Israelites suffered precisely because under Joshua they failed to carry out to the letter the instructions which God gave, making an unauthorised treaty of peace and friendship with the men of Gibeon (Joshua 9:14-15) and omitting to occupy “very large areas of land” (Joshua 13:1-7). Failure to subdue “all the regions of the Philistines [and] ... of the five Philistine rulers in Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron” (Joshua 13:2-3) was particularly serious, as this nation proved a thorn in Israel’s side ever afterwards.

Nevertheless, by Joshua’s death, Israel had made a good start. The land had been divided and (largely) conquered, and the issue was whether momentum would be maintained. For a short while it was, and further territory taken (Judges 1:1-20), before national unity began to fray, the people turned away from God, and the enemy was allowed to recover ground.

Session 8: Taking and holding ground

Joshua 13:1-19:51

Division of the land among the Twelve Tribes took place once the field armies of the enemy had been decisively defeated. In open battle, Israel proved invincible – cutting to pieces the forces sent against them by five Amorites kings (Joshua 10:9-15), Horem king of Gezer (Joshua 10:33), and a coalition of cities headed by Hazor (Joshua 11:7-14). These victories were the necessary (though not sufficient) condition for being able to take and hold ground. The fortified places of the enemy nevertheless had to be seized one by one, and continuing resistance rooted out. In this, Israel proved less successful.



Allotment of land to the Twelve Tribes

The narrative carefully records how many towns and villages each tribe received, presumably as this is significant. In the order they appear, the numbers given are: twenty-nine (Joshua 15:32), fourteen (Joshua 15:36, 18:28), sixteen (Joshua 15:41, 19:22), nine (Joshua 15:44 and 15:53), eleven (Joshua 15:51), ten (Joshua 15:57), six (Joshua 15:59 and 15:62), two (Joshua 15:60), thirteen (Joshua 19:6), twelve (Joshua 19:15), twenty-two (Joshua 19:30), and nineteen (Joshua 19:38). These stand for:

- 29: Partnership, cooperation.
- 22: Chaos, confusion, light.
- 19: Faith, God's perfect order.
- 16: Love, loving, following the full intent of God's laws.
- 14: Deliverance, salvation, double spiritual perfection.
- 13: Lawlessness, change.
- 12: Government, authority.
- 11: Disorder, chaos, judgment.
- 10: Wholeness, law, discipline, integration, God's authority, and divine government.
- 9: Completeness or completion, fulfilment, success.
- 6: Sin, human weakness.
- 2: Union, division, verification of facts by witnesses.

Similar considerations apply in prayer warfare. There will be big set-piece battles, yet much more that will need to be worked out at local level, in cities, towns and villages, and individual lives. This is street fighting, in which each stronghold of the enemy must be taken house by house. It is time-consuming, costly, and lacking in glamour, yet without it, there will only be a job half-done. Bypassing or ignoring enemy defences means people remain in captivity, and there is a springboard for counterattack.

The seven chapters describing allocation of territory to Israel (Joshua 13-19) identify three main areas where God's people fell short: by allowing mixture; by failing to act in concert and support each other; and by accepting less than total victory (half-heartedness).

On the positive side, they also show the radical inclusiveness of God's kingdom, and what the army of God can achieve when it works together without competition or self-interest, moving in the ordained will of the LORD. By the time Joshua died, there was much still to be done, but a powerful start had been made towards exercising God-given dominion in the land.

The new phase: a war of attrition

13:2, 13:3, 13: 5 Having concentrated until now on broad ethnic groups and region-wide events, the narrative now moves to the more granular level of clans and sub-groups like the Geshurites (Joshua 13:2), Avvites (Joshua 13:3) and Gebalites (Joshua 13:5). The switch mirrors a change in emphasis from big set-piece battles to a war of attrition. In this new phase of war, Israel had to grind down the remaining resistance, and take localised enemy strong points.

13:6 Echoes of Exodus continue throughout this new phase. God says, "I myself will drive them out," just as He had told Moses He would drive out the inhabitants of the land (Exodus 23:28-30).

13:7 Nine tribes and half a tribe are mentioned here – that is, the Twelve Tribes, minus the ones east of the Jordan.

13:15, 13:24, 13:20 This land was given by Moses, since these areas were conquered before he died.

Spiritual dynamics

13:12 There were still giants in the land – physical representations of spiritual powers, authorities and rulers confronted by present-day believers. Nephilim were encountered by the spies Moses sent into Canaan (Numbers 13:33) and, though these are not mentioned in Joshua, remnants of the equally fearsome Rephaim are (see also Deuteronomy 2:10-11).

13:22 The killing of Balaam is described in Numbers 31:8. Balaam's practice of divination merits special mention not simply because it is abhorrent, but since it was a sin still practised by the inhabitants of the land: see Deuteronomy 18:9-13.

Mixture and half-heartedness

13:13 and 16:10 are examples of mixture. Israel "did not drive out the people of Geshur and Maacah, so they continue to live among the Israelites to this day" (Joshua 13:13), whilst "to this day the Canaanites live among the people of Ephraim but are required to do forced labour." (Joshua 16:10). Mixture dilutes, lowers the level of holiness, and causes us to get out of alignment with the plumb line of God's Word (Amos 7:7-8).

15:63 Judah could not dislodge the Jebusites, though Joshua defeated and killed the king of Jerusalem (Joshua 10:5, 10:9-13, 20-26). The implication of this king being listed as one of the five Amorite kings in Joshua 10:5 is that the Jebusites were an Amorite sub-tribe or clan. At all events, they seem to have had enough defensive capability to hold out in Jerusalem even after this earlier defeat.

17:12-13 Again, Canaanite resistance resulted in the Israelites "[subjecting] them to forced labour but [not driving] them out completely." As with the instances given in Joshua 13:13 and 16:10, this was a failure of will, faith and obedience. The reality is that, if Israel were able to make these people carry out forced labour, they were able to drive them out of the land.

18:3 In view of all this, God unsurprisingly asks how long Israel will wait before taking possession of what He has given? That same question applies to us.

19:47 The failure of Dan to take their allotted territory in Philistia compounded all Israel's other errors and omissions, in that they failed to enlist (or were not offered) help from the other tribes. United and acting in accordance with God's commands, Israel was unbeatable. Divided and disobedient, she fell short time and again.

The Levites set apart

14:4 The Levites received no allotment of land, since their inheritance was different from that of the other tribes. This inheritance consisted of offerings made by fire to the LORD (Joshua 13:14), the LORD Himself (Joshua 13:33) and the priestly service of the LORD (Joshua 18:7).

Cooperation and getting it right

14:1 Distributions were decided by Joshua, Eleazar the priest (son of Aaron) and the heads of the tribal clans. Ancient Israel was not a dictatorship, and power was exercised through a network comprising the executive ruler or head of government (in this case, Joshua), the religious authorities (at that time, the high priest Eleazar), and the people's representatives (here, the heads of the clans).

14:2 Inheritances were assigned by lot: see comments on Joshua 7:14-18. Aside from removing any taint of partiality from the process, this also gave space for God to guide the allotment as He wished. God intended Israel to exemplify both representative government and impartial administration.

14:15 In recording that "the land had rest from war" (the same formula as used in Joshua 11:23) we are reminded that the Creation groans waiting for the sons of God to be revealed (Romans 8:22).

18:4-9, 19:9 Alongside Israel's mistakes, these chapters also record where they got it right. In carefully mapping and surveying what they conquered (Joshua 18:4-9), they enabled proper distribution and use of the land, exercising dominion authority over it. (Compare Adam exercising dominion by naming each living creature in Genesis 2:19).

19:51 The phrase "and so they finished dividing the land" echoes this dominion mantle.

Radical inclusiveness

14: 6 Caleb was a Kenizzite, not a Hebrew – the Kennizites lived in Canaan at the time of Abraham: see Genesis 15:19. When Moses led Israel out of Egypt, "many others went up with them" (Exodus 12:38), and Caleb was one of these. The Old Testament repeatedly shows what the New Testament affirms – that "there is neither Greek or Jew, slave or free, male nor female, for [we] are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28) and likewise, "there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all." (Colossians 3:11).

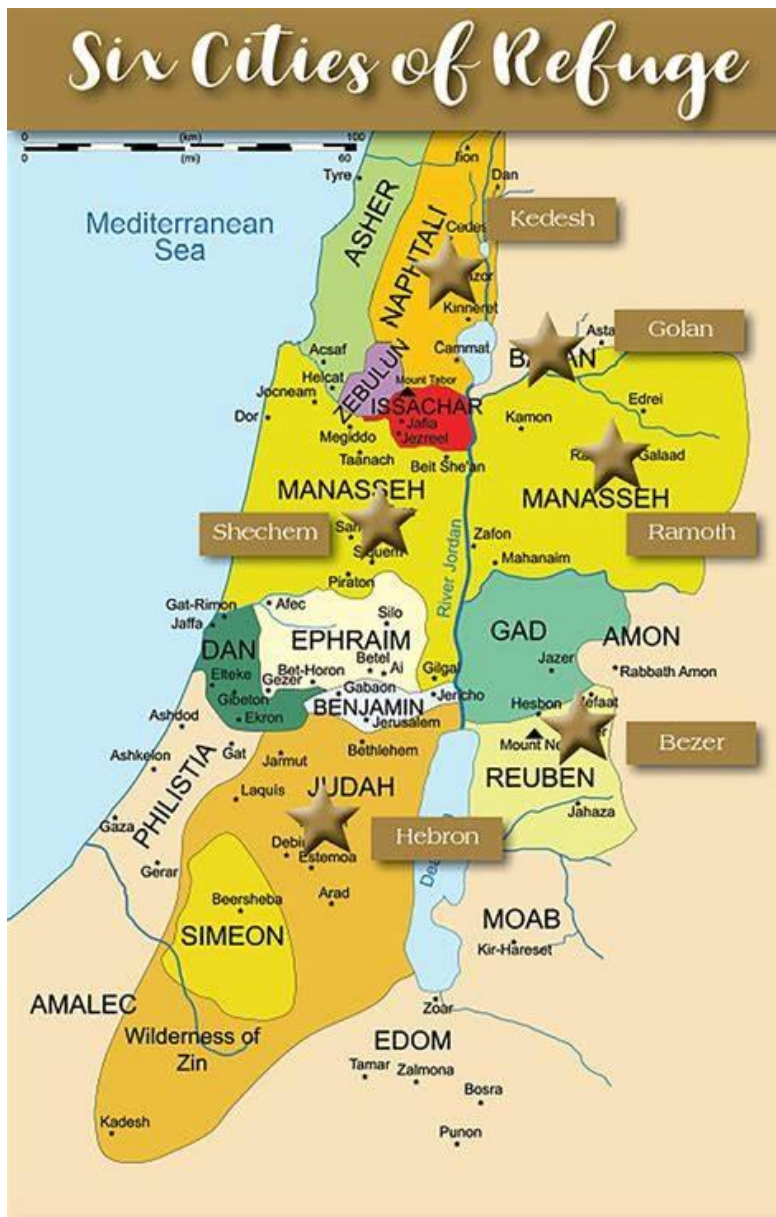
14:6-14 Caleb's representations to Joshua are reminiscent of how Zelophehad spoke to Moses about an inheritance for his daughters (Numbers 36:1-12). Joshua 15:13 confirms God commanded this allotment to Caleb, who was therefore adopted into the tribe of Judah (see 1 Chronicles 4:1, 4:15). He is an example of God's radical ethnic inclusiveness at a time when pagan gods were seen in territorial and racial terms.

17:3-4 Joshua was called on to make good Moses' promises to Zelophehad and his daughters, which he did: see Joshua 17:6. The primary concern was to act justly, rather than produce an unfair result by legalism. Radical inclusiveness for women was the result.

Session 9: Revenge curtailed and misunderstanding resolved

Joshua 20, 21, and 22

The culture of the ancient Near East was one in which family members were habitually allowed (even, expected) to avenge the killing of a relative, becoming an “avenger of blood” (Joshua 20:3) and taking the killer’s life in turn. There was little room for nuance in this environment, and the motivation behind the original death was not treated as an excuse. God put in place a radical new approach for Israel, in which not only the act of killing (what English law calls *actus reus*) was taken account of, but also the criminal state of mind of the killer (*mens rea*). To make sure there was a proper trial, anyone killing “accidentally and unintentionally” (Joshua 20:3) “without malice aforethought” (Joshua 20:6) could seek sanctuary in one of six designated cities of refuge. See also Deuteronomy 4:41-43.



Cities of refuge were positioned so they were within a few days’ journey from anywhere in Israel. The places God chose as cities of refuge illustrate His redemptive purposes being worked out in and through His chosen nation. Each had links to abuse, loss, or violence – a legacy God wanted to turn for good.

Rape, revenge, murder

In Shechem, Dinah’s brothers revenged her rape (Genesis 34).

War, state-sponsored violence

Kadesh was the site of many battles. The most famous was between Pharaoh Ramses II and the Hittites in 1274 BC.

Death, loss, and grief

Hebron is where Abraham’s wife Sarah died (Genesis 23:1).

Slavery, abuse, exploitation

Golan (meaning, their captivity, captive, their rejoicing).

False prophecy

Bezer (another form of Beor, father of Balaam) was originally a place for travellers to rest.

Defeat, wasted potential

Ramoth Gilead (meaning, *the heights of Gilead*) is where Ahab was fatally wounded in battle (2 Chronicles 18:28-34, see also 1 Kings 22:9-17).

Places of refuge were all Levite cities: Kadesh (Joshua 21:32), Shechem (Joshua 21:21), Hebron (Joshua 21:13), Bezer (Joshua 21:36), Ramoth (Joshua 21:38), and Golan (Joshua 21:27). In a further example of radical inclusion, anyone living in Israel could seek refuge, not just Israelites (Joshua 20:9).

As in chapters 13 to 19, the total number of towns and villages allocated to the various Levite clans is recorded. These are: 13 (Joshua 21:19 and 33), 12 (Joshua 21:40), 10 (Joshua 21:26), 9 (Joshua 21:16), 4 (Joshua 21:18, 22, 23, 28, 30, 36 and 39), 3 (Joshua 21:32), and 2 (Joshua 21:25, 27). The overall total is given as 48 (Joshua 21:41). Forty means transition and eight means new beginnings. Three stands for completeness, growth, and reproduction. See text box on page 23 for other meanings.

The statements in 21:43-45 need to be put in context. Wherever Israel obeyed God's command to go in and take possession, He did indeed give them "all the land he had sworn to give [them]" (Joshua 21:43) and "handed all their enemies over to them" (Joshua 21:44). His promises were contingent as regards the "very large areas of land [still] to be taken over" (Joshua 13:1), but it is nevertheless true to say that "every one [of His promises to Israel] was fulfilled" (Joshua 21:45).

Israel "took possession and settled" (Joshua 21:43). They were required to use the land profitably, just as Adam and Eve were to "be fruitful and multiply." (Genesis 1:28, 9:7). The book of Joshua sees Israel replaying God's original dominion mandate for humanity, as forerunners of God's people taking back and remaking the original earthly paradise in the Millennial reign of Christ.

Although "the LORD gave them rest on every side" (Joshua 21:44), this was temporary and imperfect, "For if Joshua had given them [Israel] rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God" (Hebrews 4:9-10), and He is shepherding us into this rest.

The tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh had done all they promised (Joshua 1:16-18). In telling them to "be very careful to keep the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you" (Joshua 22:5), Joshua repeated what God had told him immediately before crossing the Jordan (Joshua 1:7). When crossing over from one place to another, we often need such reminders.

Joshua gave a five-point summary of the Law's 632 commandments: love the LORD, walk in His ways, obey His commands, hold fast to Him, and serve him with all your heart and soul (Joshua 22:5). Later, Micah synthesised this down to three: to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly before the LORD your God (Micah 6:8). Jesus reduced it to two: love God and love your neighbour (Matthew 22:37-40, Mark 12:29-31, Luke 10:27).

Geliloth (Joshua 22:10) appears only in this book and in Joel 3:4, where it is translated "regions" (as also in Joshua 13:2). It means *circuit*, *boundary*, or *territory*, and derives from the same root (meaning, *to roll*) as Gilgal. Geliloth was "near the Jordan on the Israelite side" (Joshua 22:11), and most probably was on high ground overlooking the river valley. This gave a suitable vantage point from which to show off the "imposing altar" (Joshua 22:10) to maximum advantage.

Though the tribes west of the Jordan assumed the worst about the altar built by those to the east of the river, and "gathered at Shiloh to go to war against them" (Joshua 22:12), they had the good sense to send a diplomatic mission before acting. The incident shows how easily misunderstandings can arise even among God's people. It also provides a model for how to deal with such situations.

"Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest" (Joshua 22:13) was the grandson of Aaron (Exodus 6:23-25), and no shrinking violet. During Israel's desert wandering, he drove a spear through an Israelite indulging in sexual sin with a Moabite woman, killing them both (Numbers 25:6-8). He must have lived to a good age, as he was still ministering as priest before the ark of the covenant in Judges 20:28.

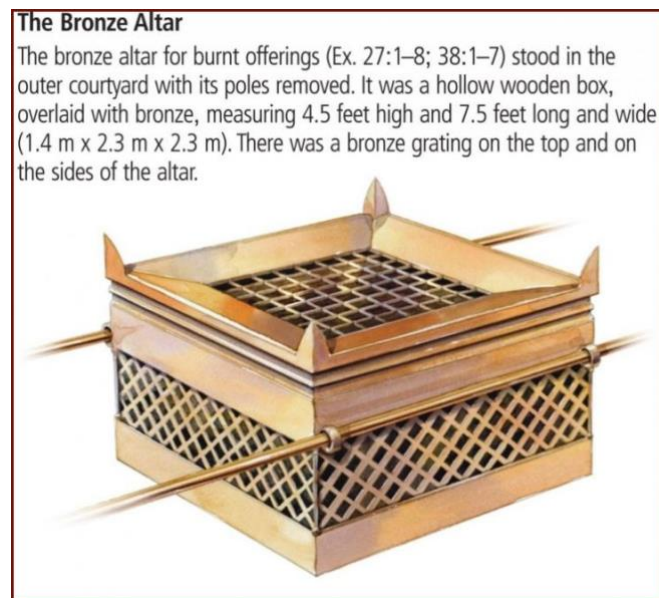
The delegation headed by Phinehas included representatives from the ten tribes west of the Jordan (Joshua 22:14). After Solomon died, there was a similar split between two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) and ten: see 1 Kings 12:1-19, 2 Chronicles 10:1-19.

The Israelites west of the Jordan assumed Reuben, Gad and Manasseh were “[breaking] faith with the God of Israel ... [turning] away from the LORD ... [and acting] in rebellion against him” (Joshua 22:16), as Israel had done by worshipping the Baal of Peor (Numbers 25:3-5, Deuteronomy 4:3, Psalm 106:28-31). This shows the danger of interpreting people’s motives by reference to past events.

Peor means *to open wide*. Balak took Balaam to the top of the mountain of Peor, hoping he would open his mouth wide to speak against Israel (Numbers 23:28). The name also has sexual connotations, as when Israelite men “began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women” (Numbers 25:1).

The memory of Achan’s sin (Joshua 7:1-26) was fresh in people’s minds. Israel understood they bore collective responsibility, as “he was not the only one who died for his sin.” (Joshua 22:20).

Reuben, Gad and Manasseh twice invoked the names that signify God is the Mighty One (El), Creator (Elohim) and God of the covenant (YHWH), appealing to His knowledge of their motives (Joshua 22:22) and calling for His judgment of the situation (Joshua 22:23). The number two indicates verification of facts by witnesses. Effectively, they were asking God to verify the facts, going on to explain why they acted as they did (Joshua 22:24-28).



The Bible says the tribes of Reuben and Gad (but not Manasseh) “gave the altar [they built at Geliloth] this name: A Witness Between Us that the LORD is God.” (Joshua 22:34). They called it a “replica of the LORD’s altar” (Joshua 22:28), which suggests it was a precise representation of the original’s shape. But as their copy was specifically said to be “imposing” (Joshua 22:10), it may conceivably have been larger than life size. Or perhaps it was set on a plinth that raised it up in an imposing way. For the dimensions of the original, see the illustration to the left (shown with the poles used to carry it when the tribes were on the move during their years in the wilderness).

The idea of an inanimate object as a witness (Joshua 22:27, 28) appears elsewhere (Genesis 31:45-48, Joshua 24:27, 1 Samuel 6:18, Isaiah 19:19-20 and 30:8). Distinctions between animate and inanimate may not be as clear-cut as we imagine since, as John the Baptist observed, “out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.” (Matthew 3:9, Luke 3:8).

The assumptions made by the tribes west of the Jordan were wrong, but not unreasonable. Since what had been built was a “replica of the LORD’s altar” (Joshua 22:28), it would ordinarily be expected that it would be used for sacrifice – which would necessarily be a counterfeit of and challenge to the true worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. His worship was centred on the original “altar of the LORD ... that stands before his tabernacle” (Joshua 22:29), of which this was a copy.

The potentially explosive situation was defused by a face-to-face meeting, straight talking, and honest sharing (Joshua 22:30-34). Compare Jesus’ recipe for resolving conflict (Matthew 18:15-17).

The Israelites were “rescued from the LORD’s hands” (Joshua 22:31) by being spared civil war.

Session 10: Covenant renewal and ending well

Joshua 8:30-35, 23 and 24

23:1 After a long time had passed. Joshua “died at the age of a hundred and ten” (Joshua 24:29), and was around eighty when the conquest began, so (allowing for the fact “Joshua waged war ... for a long time”: Joshua 11:18) this phrase may point to something like two decades going by.

23:2-5 Joshua’s farewell echoes Moses’ last sermon (Deuteronomy 29-31). His call to the people was for them to remember what they had personally witnessed, how this fulfilled God’s promises, and so to know they could continue to rely on those promises for the future.

23:6 Joshua repeated almost word for word what God had told him as Israel was about to cross the Jordan (Joshua 1:7).

23:7-11 Joshua spoke prophetically to future generations. Earlier, he foretold we “*will* take possession of [the] land, as the LORD [our] God promised” (Joshua 1:5, emphasis added). He also affirmed, “one of [us] routs a thousand, because ... God fights for [us], just as he promised.” (Joshua 23:10).

23:12-16 As previously, God’s promises to Israel were contingent on obedience, and covenant curses would apply in the event of disobedience.



Tell Balata, identified with ancient Shechem

At two key points earlier, Israel renewed her covenant relationship with God – through the second circumcision at Gilgal immediately after crossing into the Promised Land (Joshua 5:1-12), and through reaffirmation of obedience to the Law on Mount Ebal after the sin of Achan and destruction of Ai (Joshua 8:30-35). Shechem is the valley that runs between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, so for the covenant renewal of Joshua 24:1-27, Israel returned to where they reaffirmed obedience to the Law previously.

24:1 Flanked by Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, the valley of Shechem (meaning, *shoulder*) lies about forty miles north of Jerusalem. Earlier, Joshua had “summoned all Israel – their elders, leaders, judges and officials” (Joshua 23:2), but this time it is specifically said that “they presented themselves before God.” Moses’ instructions for Israel to come to this place appear in Deuteronomy 11:29, 27:1-26. The covenant blessings were to be pronounced from Mount Gerizim and the covenant curses from Mount Ebal, a distinction reflected in the landscape itself, for abundant sources of water make Mount Gerizim pleasant and fertile, whereas the lack of it makes Mount Ebal desolate and barren. Ebal means *stone, stony, heap of barrenness*, and Gerizim means *cutters* (as in, to cut the covenant).

24:2-13 Joshua rehearsed Israel’s history as a precursor to the main point of his message, his call for Israel to renew covenant with her God (Joshua 24:14-15). The martyr Stephen similarly recalled God’s dealings with the nation (Acts 7:2-47) to set the scene for telling the people they had killed the Messiah

(Acts 7:51-53). In this instance, what Joshua said formed a preamble to the renewed covenant Israel was being asked to confirm.

(Stephen referenced Shechem in Acts 7:16. The town of Shechem is the Sychar of John 4:5.)

Joshua had no need to read out the covenant terms on this occasion, since he had earlier followed the command in Deuteronomy 27:4-8 to “[copy] on stones the law of Moses” (Joshua 8:32), meaning Israel stood in the presence of the covenant terms, blessings, and curses. What is said about copying on stones does not necessarily imply Joshua was literate, as almost certainly he did not personally write out the words. He “copied” them, in the sense of having them copied.

24:12 The hornet is also referred to in Exodus 23:28 and Deuteronomy 7:20. The precise meaning of this word is uncertain. Some believe it should be understood figuratively, and so render it as *terror* or *despair*. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that it may refer to a person. The Amarna Letters speak of a brigand-type figure called Labayu, who was not himself one of the Habiru, yet nevertheless aided their invasion. Letter EA 289 rhetorically asks, “Are we to act like Labayu when he was giving the land of Shechem to the Habiru?” Labayu (or Labaya) means *great Lion of God*.

24:14 Joshua’s plea for Israel to “throw away the gods your forefathers worshipped beyond the River [Euphrates, or possibly the Jordan] and in Egypt, and serve the LORD” shows backsliding and mixture were already present.

24:15 Joshua’s challenge for Israel to “choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve” was echoed by Elijah on Mount Carmel, when he said, “How long will you waver between two opinions?” (1 Kings 18:21). God makes choices and He wants us to have freedom to choose – ideally, to choose Him, but at all events, freedom to make our own minds up. Compare Moses saying, “Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice and hold fast to him” (Deuteronomy 30:19-20), and Solomon advising, “Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her.” (Proverbs 8:10-11).

24:16-18 The people made their choice, acknowledging all God had done, before concluding, “We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God.” (Joshua 24:18).

24:19 Responding to this expression of spiritual allegiance, Joshua made statements that hold true for all believers, for all time: like ancient Israel, we are not able to serve God in our own strength because He is holy, jealous for His name, and abhors sin. It is only by virtue of having the righteousness of Christ imputed to us that we can stand before such a God.

24:20-22 Joshua declared the Israelites to be “witnesses against yourselves.” Through Christ, we are no longer witnesses against ourselves, but His witnesses to the world (Isaiah 43:10, 12, Isaiah 44:8).

24:23 The call to “throw away the foreign gods that are among you” shows how easily the people were seduced by the gods of Canaan, just as God had warned. The issue – then, as ever, concerns our heart condition. Whether we are prepared to “yield [our] heart” is the crux of it. Except when speaking of crops, the Bible uses “yield” on only four other occasions. God cautions that we should not “yield” to anyone who tries to get us to follow false gods (Deuteronomy 13:8). Wisdom says what she yields “surpasses choice silver” (Proverbs 8:19). God says he “will not yield [his] glory to another” (Isaiah 48:11), but that he will “yield to the plea of the house of Israel” (Ezekiel 36:37).

24:24 This affirmation by the people is the same as was given when Moses set the Law before Israel: here, serve and obey; there, hear and obey.

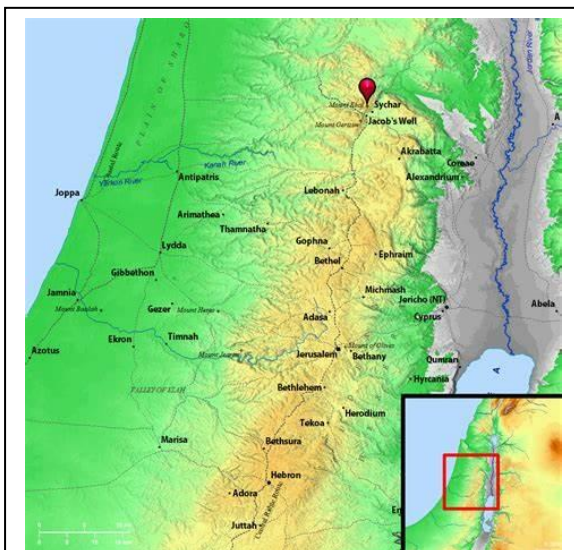
24:25 The decrees and laws Joshua made for the people are not specified. The likelihood is that these were administrative in nature. There was no need to add to the Law already given through Moses.

24:26 The Book of the Law of God is also referred to in Nehemiah 8:8.

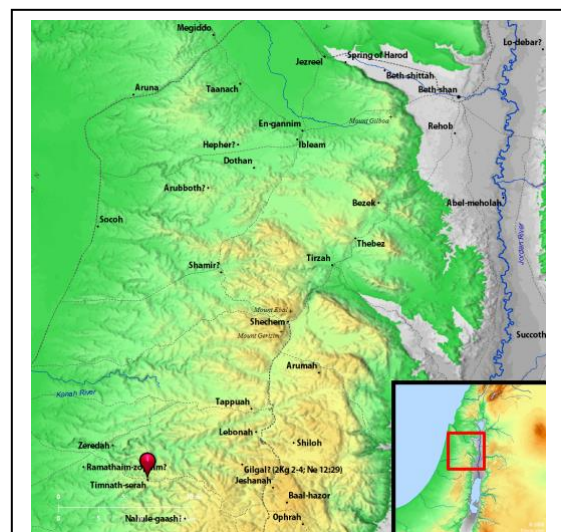
24:27 Joshua's statement that the memorial stone "has heard all the words the LORD has said to us" refers to his opening words, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says" (Joshua 24:2). The people were left in no doubt that God had been speaking through Joshua, and that the cutting of this covenant had been duly witnessed.

24:28 Substantially repeated in Judges 2:6, with the exception that the later verse adds that they went "to take possession of the land."

24:29-30 Joshua is called "the servant of the LORD," like his predecessor Moses (Deuteronomy 34:5). But whereas God Himself buried Moses in Moab, outside the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 34:6), the Israelites laid Joshua to rest "in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Serah ... north of Mount Gaash." (Joshua 24:30). These verses are substantially repeated in Judges 2:8-9, where Timnath Serah is called Timnath-heres.



Mount Ebal, Mount Gerizim and Shechem (marked by its later name, Sychar)



Timnath Serah (also called Timnath-heres, marked Thamnatha on the map to the left), the burial-place of Joshua

24:31 Substantially repeated in Judges 2:7. But, as noted above, the seeds of the future turning away from God recorded in Judges 2:10-13 were already apparent.

24:32 On his deathbed, Joseph had made his brothers promise to take his bones with them when their descendants left Egypt (Genesis 50:25). The keeping of this promise is recorded in Exodus 13:19.

24:33 Eleazar was buried at Gibeah, concluding the series of three burials (Joshua, Joseph, and Eleazar) recorded in Joshua 24:30-33, and the passing of a godly generation.

Questions for discussion

Session 1

1. What are the key lessons from Joshua about successfully navigating times of transition?
2. How have we been commissioned, and how should we go about commissioning others?
3. How does Joshua's life emphasise the importance of making disciples rather than just converts?

Session 2

1. What can we learn from Rahab's reply to the king of Jericho, and when is disobedience to earthly authorities justified?
2. What does the "scarlet thread of redemption" running through the Old Testament mean for New Covenant believers?
3. Was the extermination of Canaan's inhabitants a foregone conclusion? If not, does this change our understanding of the book of Joshua?

Session 3

1. What does crossing the Jordan look like for us, as individuals and as the Body of Christ?
2. What can (should) we do to help raise the preparedness of the Church for the Joshua era?
3. How can we show people what it looks like on the other side of the Jordan?

Session 4

1. Which doors does God wish (require) us to go through in our nation, and what keys has He given us to unlock them?
2. For what purpose do we need to sound the trumpet in Church and/or nation, and how should we do this?
3. What are the things we need to give over totally to God or destroy (personally and collectively)?

Session 5

1. What is the sin in the camp of the present-day Church, and how should we deal with it?
2. How do we fall prey to the lure of Babylon, and how can we avoid doing so?
3. How should we be raising our staff or holding out our javelin?

Session 6

1. How can we alert people to the tactics used by the enemy, and do a better job of uncovering his schemes?
2. What is our Gilgal and when do we need to return to it?
3. How can we move from a place of deception to a place of overcoming?

Session 7

1. When the enemy seemingly has the advantage of numbers, resources, and position, how can we nevertheless put ourselves in position to attack?

2. In failing to pursue the enemy properly, do we let the fullness of victory slip from our grasp? What should pursuit look like?

3. How do we strike the right balance between not trusting in horses and chariots, whilst taking proper advantage of what God has supplied for our use?

Session 8

1. How can we avoid our combat effectiveness being compromised by mixture, lack of unity, and half-heartedness?

2. What action should we take against the giants and false prophets in the land?

3. Are we failing to take possession of what God has given us? If so, how can we change this?

Session 9

1. How does seeing God repeatedly act with redemptive purpose change our perception of the book of Joshua?

2. Does Joshua provide a helpful picture of how God's people should exercise their dominion mandate, and what should we do in response?

3. What does Joshua teach us about dealing with misunderstanding and conflict?

Session 10

1. Do Joshua's prophetic statements about taking possession of the land and routing the enemy apply to us? If so, how – and how do we take hold of them?

2. Is it helpful for us to study the history of God's dealings with our nation? What do we gain by doing so and risk losing if we do not?

3. Do we need to renew covenant with God? If yes, how can (should) we do this?