

Major Ideas in Joshua

I. *The Covenant (Deut. 7)*

- A. **Centrality.** The Mosaic Covenant is foundational for everything that occurs in the book of Joshua. The way that they enter the land, fight their enemies, and apportion the land is explicitly grounded in the instructions that God had given through Moses. Their mission is centered around whether they will obey the commands that the Lord gave through Moses or not (**Josh. 1:7; 8:35; 11:15**).
- B. **Focus on God.** Though there are many things promised and commanded in the covenant we miss the mark if we think that the point of all this is providing a land for Israel or meeting Israel's needs. The covenant is about God's determination to establish a people who will worship Him.
- C. **Relation to faith.** The covenant requires faith and faithfulness from the people. God requires them to cross the Jordan in faith and receive His covenant sign. He requires them to follow His commands by faith in order to expel the peoples. When they prove to be faithless, God brings judgment upon them. Faith in covenant with God is His requirement for living in the land.
- D. **Relation to conquering.** Understanding the covenant and the necessity of faith helps explain some of the difficult questions concerning the conquest. God is not doing a form of ethnic cleansing. He is eradicating all from the land who will not worship Him, whether Canaanite or Hebrew. He receives and spares the Canaanites who submit, and He executes Hebrews who turn from following Him.

II. *The Land*

- A. **Belongs to God (Lev. 25:23).** The whole world is God's creation and it is His to give to whom He will (**Deut. 32:8; Acts 17:26**). Although God previously gave the land of Canaan to the Canaanites, He has now decided to give it as a gift to the Hebrews according to the promise He made to Abraham (**Josh. 1:1-13; 21:43**).
- B. **Pictures Eden.** Eden and the Promised Land share many things in common.
 - 1. Places set apart from the rest of the earth for God to meet with His people.
 - 2. God's people are called to faithfulness to remain and would be cast out for breaking His covenant. In both cases, this is pictured as choosing life or death (**Deut. 30:15-20**).
 - 3. The dominion that God exercises over His people in these places is to be extended to the rest of the world. Both places are provisional, looking forward to when God's reign through His people has covered all the earth.
- C. **Points to the new creation (Heb. 4:1-11).** Canaan was never the final goal of the covenant and the rest that God gave to the people there was not the final rest He intended. The land points the people to the new creation to come and the everlasting rest that is to be found in Christ.

Cleansing God's People to Enter the Promised Land (Josh. 1-5)

I. *Commissioning Joshua (Josh. 1)*

With the death of Moses, there is nothing left to keep the people from beginning the campaign to enter the Promised Land. The Lord establishes Joshua as the new leader of the people and calls them to walk in exact conformity to His commands.

II. *Sending the Spies (Josh. 2)*

- A. **Redeeming the first expedition.** Spies are sent ahead of the people to spy out the land just as they were 40 years before. This time, two spies are sent, perhaps relating to the two faithful spies from the first expedition. These spies do not bring back a bad report to discourage the people but a positive one to encourage them to take the land according to God's command.
- B. **The faith of Rahab.** Rahab serves at the outset of the book as a testimony to God's grace that is not only reserved for those who descend from Abraham. The whole of the land has heard of what God has done, but only she has decided to cast her lot on the side of God and His people. For this reason, Rahab, who is not only a Canaanite but also a prostitute, is spared from the destruction and takes her place among the people of God, even becoming part of the line of Christ.

III. *Crossing the Jordan (Josh. 3-5)*

- A. **Splitting the waters again.** God continues to recapitulate the Exodus as the people enter the land with this call back to the Red Sea crossing. Whereas in the crossing of the Red Sea the people were escaping from danger to enter into covenant, the people crossing the Jordan renew covenant to face danger.
- B. **Worship.** The people are called to cross the river as an act of worship. The ark and the priests go before them into the river and the people are not to come anywhere near them. When they have finished crossing over, they set up a memorial to what God has done.
- C. **Baptism and circumcision.** Paul explicitly links the crossing of the Red Sea to baptism (**1 Cor. 10:2**) and we can make the same connection to this crossing. The connection is strengthened by the fact that the people are circumcised immediately after crossing the river and Paul also connects circumcision to Baptism (**Col. 2:11-12**). As God's people enter into this new land and era, they must be properly set apart according to God's command, similar to the need for the people to be baptized at the time of the coming of Christ.
- D. **The Lord's presence with the people.** With all the preparations for the people to enter the land made, the Lord demonstrates His presence and favor upon them going forward if they follow Him. This is seen in the people celebrating the Passover for the first time in the land. The Passover calls to people to remember and worship God for what He had done and reminds them that He will save all who will submit to Him. The ceasing of the manna in that same day, when they first eat the fruit of the land is also a sure testimony to God's presence. He has supernaturally provided for the people during their 40 years in the wilderness, now He will continue to provide for them according to His providence by feeding them in the land. It is also demonstrated the appearance of the commander or prince of the Lord's hosts, who we can recognize as a preincarnate appearance of Christ. He is neither for or against Israel but will rule over and defend those who worship Him and will war against and expel those who oppose Him.

Cleansing the Promised Land of Idolatry (Josh. 6-12)

I. *Jericho and Ai (Josh. 6-8)*

- A. **Jericho.** The conquest of Jericho is the first test of the people and is a vivid illustration of how the entire conquest centers on fidelity to God.
1. **Conquering by worship.** The people are not called to devise a brilliant strategy or valiantly charge against Jericho's stronghold. The Lord calls them to march around the city in obedience to His command and in worship of Him. It is a stunning testimony to the Hebrews and the Canaanites that the worship of God is all-important, and that God is the one who will give the victory. The ark and the priests are prominently paraded around the city and they do this for seven days, and seven times around the city on the seventh day. All this points to the worship of the tabernacle and the Sabbath as the what are necessary for the people to inherit and remain in the land.
 2. **Saving Rahab.** Rahab and her family are delivered from the destruction by her faith in the Lord. True faith and worship of God would not only deliver the Hebrews but also the Gentiles.
 3. **The ban.** The centrality of worship is solidified by the fact that the people are not to take anything from the city. It all belongs to the Lord and will be used for the worship of the tabernacle or will be destroyed as a kind of offering to God.
- B. **Achan and Ai**
1. **Achan's sin.** Achan, a man from Judah, does not follow the command of the Lord and takes some of the treasures of Jericho. It is because of this sin that the Hebrews are defeated at Ai. The Lord reveals his sin and calls for him and his family to be executed. We must not regard this sin simply as stealing, this was rebellion against the Lord and defiling His worship.
 2. **The stakes.** Achan has not regarded the Lord as holy and, like the Canaanites, is unfit to dwell in the land God is making holy. He is not only executed, but his family is cut off so there is no inheritance for them and continuation of his line. Achan becomes a mirror image of Rahab. Rahab's faith delivers her and her family from destruction and gains her an inheritance in Judah and remembrance in the line of Christ, Achan's unbelief brings utter destruction upon him and his family and dispossesses them of inheritance and seed.
 3. **Covenant renewal.** With the taint of Achan removed, Israel conquers Ai. After defeating Ai, Joshua writes and recites the law of Moses before all the people, emphasizing the inclusion of non-Hebrews among them (**Josh. 8:33, 35**). The people renew their commitment to the Lord and are reminded of the blessings that come from faith and the curses for faithlessness.

II. *The Gibeonites (Josh. 9)*

- A. **The deception.** The account of the Gibeonites provides an interesting test for Israel. They come acting as if they are from a distant country when they are actually Hivites living in the land. They ask for refuge with Israel and Israel makes a covenant with them to protect them. However, Israel neglected to seek the Lord in this matter and so were deceived by a people that they were supposed to war against. It is not right for Israel to break the covenant they made with the Gibeonites; thus, they are made slaves of Israel according to the stipulations for conquering a city (**Deut. 20:10-12**).
- B. **The exception.** The Gibeonites are different from Rahab in that, although they have heard of the acts of God and seek to escape His wrath, they do not have faith. Therefore, although the Lord allows for such to be spared, they will not inherit and must serve the people He has redeemed.

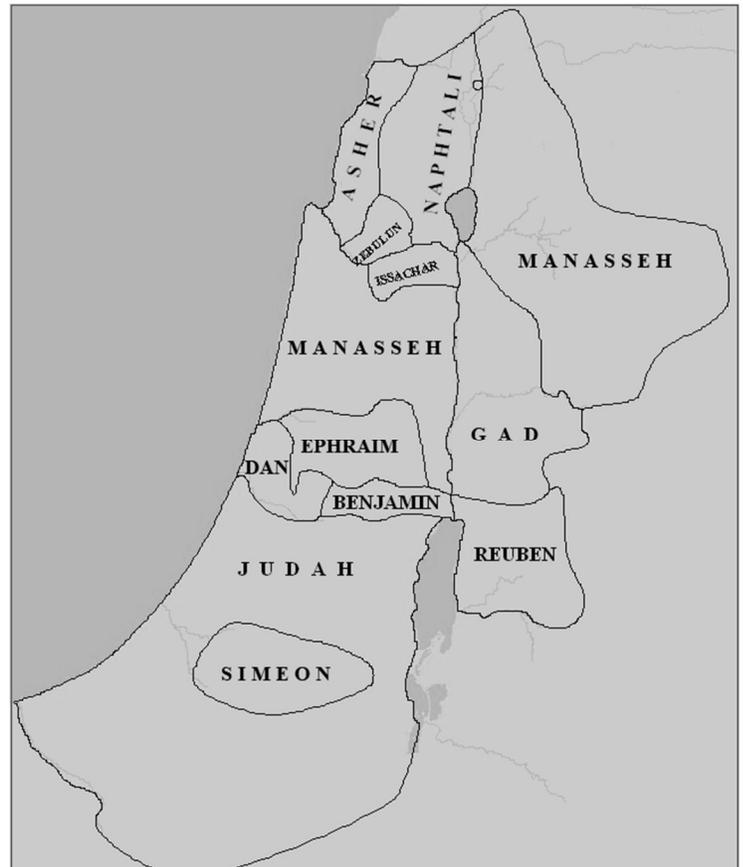
III. *The Southern and Northern campaigns (Josh. 10-12)*

In response to the treaty made with the Gibeonites, the king of Jerusalem unites with the other cities of the south to attack Gibeon. Israel marches all night to defeat the united army and then pursues and destroys their cities. In similar fashion, the northern cities unite to try to defeat Israel, but the Lord gives Israel the victory over all their foes.

Establishing God's People in the Promised Land (Josh. 13-24)

I. *God gifts the land to Israel*

- A. **God provides.** One thing that is essential for us to see is the way that God provides for His people. He has called them to live in this land and He gives it to them for their good. This is especially seen in two cases. He provides specifically for Joshua and Caleb, demonstrating that the Lord rewards those who prove faithful to Him. He also provides for the Levites who have no inheritance in the land but must subsist from their work ministering to the people.
- B. **Partial completion.** Although the Lord by and large gives Israel victory over the Canaanites, there are some of the peoples that are left over. The obedience of Israel to dispossess the peoples was incomplete, meaning that the Lord would no longer drive them out, but would make them a thorn to Israel (**Judg. 2:20-23**).
- C. **Fulfilling the promises.** The Lord is true to His promises to care and provide for the people according to His covenant. There is nothing that is left unfulfilled (**Josh. 21:43-45**).



II. *The First Jubilee*

- A. **Significance of Jubilee (Lev. 25).** One often overlooked aspect of the conquest and apportioning of the land is how it effectively serves as the first year of Jubilee for the people. Every 7 years was to be a Sabbath year and with the 7th Sabbath year would come the year of Jubilee. Just as with the other Sabbath years, the people were not to work the land and all debts were to be forgiven, but the Jubilee was also a time for the people to be freed from all forms of bondage and all the lands were to be restored to the families and tribes to which they originally belonged.
- B. **Establishing Jubilee.** We should be able to see how this year fits as a first Jubilee. First of all, this is when the Lord first distributes the land among the tribes and families, so these records are vitally important for all future observances of the Jubilee. Second, bringing the people into the land is the culmination of delivering the people out of their slavery in Egypt. Finally, the Lord provides for the people from the land throughout the conquest without them working it.

III. Guarding the Covenant in the Land (Josh. 22-24)

The book ends with calls to the people to be faithful now that the Lord has given them the land. There are encouraging signs of faithfulness among the people. They show zeal for the worship of God in the dispute over the altar set up by the 2 ½ tribes (**Josh. 22**) and the writer says that this generation served the Lord (**24:31; Judg. 2:7**). However, there are also indications that the people have not fully given their hearts to the Lord, as evidenced by the fact that they have not fully driven out the Canaanites and by Joshua's negative evaluation of them and that he has to call them to put away the false gods among them (**Josh. 24:13-28**). This becomes a call, not only for the people of that generation, but for every subsequent generation after to forsake idolatry and be true to God that they may live at peace in the land.

Applications from Joshua

I. Worship and faith

The Christian life is defined by loving God. Joshua shows us how vital true faith and worship is to that love. God is jealous for His worship and will not allow it to be a secondary thing in the lives of His people. Neither will God abide by those who worship only with their lips and not their hearts. We need always to evaluate ourselves to see if we are giving proper priority to God in our worship and lives. God is gracious to His people but will bring His judgment upon hypocrites.

II. Faith and households

Joshua gives some vivid portrayals of how faith relates to families in God's redemptive purposes. On the one hand, we see that one's descent from Abraham is not what is important but following the commands of the Lord by faith. On the other hand, we see that the faith or unbelief of one person has implications for one's household. This is why Paul can call the children of believers holy (**1 Cor. 7:14**). We need to recognize the privileges and responsibilities that come with belonging to the household of God. We must recognize the purpose of God in working through families but never presume upon our position. Our status as God's people requires faithful lives.

III. Obeying God's commands completely

God calls us to complete obedience in all things. Obeying only insofar as things make sense to us or are beneficial as we perceive them indicates a mistrust in the Lord's power and goodness. Our obedience will never be perfect in this life but there is a difference between falling short when trying our best and neglecting to do what we know we ought to do. The commandments of God are given for our good and not seeking to obey them completely can have dire consequences. Though, sometimes, the Lord graciously covers over these deficiencies in our obedience, we should not be surprised if He withholds His blessing when we withhold our complete submission to His commands.

IV. The battle belongs to the Lord

All that the Lord calls us to do He accomplishes in us by His grace (**Phil. 2:12-13**). So, in all that we do, but particularly in the Christian life, we are to recognize and depend upon the power of the Lord to bring about His purposes in us. Our confidence in serving the Lord by witnessing to others, living with integrity, or fighting against sin should be with a prayerful confidence that God Himself will fight for us and give us the victory as we seek to glorify Him according to His will.