

SESSION TWENTY-TWO

THE TAKING OF THE LAND

Joshua 1:1–12:24

I. INTRODUCTION

In the Hebrew canon of the Bible, Joshua heads the second division of the OT called "The Prophets." This would include some of the historical books as well as the writing prophets.¹ As such, Joshua is distinguished from the previous five books which form the Pentateuch. The title of the book reflects the main character of the narrative material, not necessarily the author. The author of the book is nowhere mentioned in Scripture, although Joshua certainly could be responsible for the material (note 24:26). Most conservative scholars admit the evidence of some later editorial work (e.g., 24:29-31).

There is, however, slight evidence that some measure of time may have passed between the events of Joshua and the composition of the book. The author's reference to the "book of Jashar" in 10:13 could suggest his dependency on an earlier source for his data (though we really cannot establish a date for this source). Furthermore, the recurring phrase "to this day" might suggest that some time had passed before the book of Joshua was composed (note 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28-29; 9:27; 10:27; 13:13; 15:63; and 16:10). All things considered, the authorship and dating of the book should remain an open question.

II. RELATIONSHIP TO THE PENTATEUCH

Joshua is a very fitting sequel to the first five books of the OT. Once again, the key to the understanding of the OT is the Abrahamic covenant. This was Yahweh's divine plan to bring blessing to the families of the earth. In doing so, He chose one nation through whom He could mediate His blessing. To work out the purposes with this nation, three things were needed: a people, a constitution to bind the people, and a land in which the people could dwell. In Ex 1–18, we see the acquisition of a people. In Ex 19–Num 12, we are introduced to the constitution binding Yahweh together with His people. The material in Leviticus and Deuteronomy supplements the basic constitution, with the cultic regulations enabling Him to rule as King in the midst of His people. The third element is the land, and this is the concern of the book of Joshua. The book of Joshua will show how Yahweh accomplished His divine intention to give Israel the land of Canaan. This was the long expectation of possessing the land that had been associated with the

¹The section comprised of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings is known as the "Former Prophets." This "comprises Israelite annals presenting a theological interpretation of Hebrew history in view of the covenant relationship with Yahweh and the attendant national blessings and curses conditioned by obedience to his covenant stipulations" (Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 201). For a discussion of the "Deuteronomist school," see Hill and Walton, 203. Cf. Gordon Wenham, "The Date of Deuteronomy: Lynch-Pin of Old Testament Criticism," *Themelios* 10:3 (1985):15-20, and 11:1 (1986):15-18.

nation since its inception with Abraham. Thus, the primary concern of the book is with the covenant faithfulness of Yahweh. Of course there are many lessons that go along with that, for the realization only came with obedience.

III. PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

Joshua was written to trace the historical fulfillment of Yahweh's promised blessing of a national homeland, as had been anticipated in the Pentateuch. As this represents Yahweh fulfilling His purpose, success is the central focus. The principle in the occupation of the land is that Yahweh uses the obedience of the people to fulfill His promise. Each promise believed is realized. The element of success and fulfillment is seen in Josh 11:23 and 21:43.

Josh 11:23 - "So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD has spoken to Moses, and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. Thus, the land had rest from war."

Josh 21:43-45 - "So the LORD gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it. And the LORD gave them rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their land. Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass."

Dr. Waltke has formulated a purpose statement of the book that essentially reflects the comments above:

The book of Joshua intends to show the historical fulfillment of Yahweh's promise made to the patriarchs and Moses to give Israel the land of Canaan by holy war.²

IV. CONDITIONS OF THE LAND OF CANAAN

At the time of Joshua (around 1406 BC), the land of Canaan was dotted with a number of "city-states", each of which had its own king and independent government. In many ways, this paralleled the feudal system that characterized Europe in the middle ages. These city-states were not completely free, however, for they existed under the hegemony of Egypt. Egypt had divided the land up into geographical units and had established administrative centers throughout this whole area. Tuthmose III, pharaoh of Egypt (1479-1424 BC) had faced an organized revolt from a number of Palestinian and Syrian states early in his reign, but was able to retain Egyptian power which continued throughout the remainder of the fifteenth century. By the time of Joshua, however, Egyptian control was weak: "Early in the fourteenth century, however, comes the episode known as the Amarna period, in which Hittite pressure and the revolt of Amorite towns in the north fatally weakened Egyptian power, to be followed by incursions into Palestine of the warlike bands known as the Khabiru."³ Israel's entrance into and occupation of Canaan was very timely in that Egypt's interest in Canaan was at a lull.

²Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982), s.v. "Joshua, Book of," by Bruce K. Waltke, 2:1134-35.

³The Cambridge Ancient History, II Part 1, 527.

The religious situation of Canaan was despicable to say the least. The high god of the Canaanites was El, a sort of senior deity. Under El was Baal (meaning "lord"). In practicality, however, Baal was more significant, for he was the fertility god *par excellence*. Furthermore, Baal is to be equated with Hadad, the storm god. Baal was responsible for fertility, not only of wives but also of crops and cattle. For this reason, he was extremely significant to the Canaanites.

Canaanite religion involved many more deities, among whom were the goddesses Anath, Asherah, and Astarte (goddesses of sex and war). Joshua's prayer to have the sun and moon stand still (10:12-14) was theologically significant, for the sun and moon were Canaanite deities. This is substantiated by place names such as Beth-shemesh ("temple of the sun") and Jericho ("temple of the moon").

Canaanite religion involved offerings to the deities and even cultic functionaries such as priests, consecrated persons, singers, and women who were part of the temple personnel in association with the fertility cult. The whole cult was very debased, barbarous, and thoroughly licentious. It needed to be obliterated, for the Israelites would be contaminated by it. Those Israelites who stumbled and participated in the heathen worship soon gravitated to the moral level of the sordid gods they worshipped. This would include sacred prostitution, child sacrifice and snake worship.⁴ An understanding of this is fundamental to an understanding of Israel's holy war.

V. ISRAEL'S FOREIGN POLICY

The Israelites were instructed by God on how to deal with foreign affairs. The plan is revealed in Deut 20:10-18 and involved two phases (cf. 7:1-26; 21:10-14; 25:17-19).

- (1) The Cities a far-off (i.e., non-Canaanites) - the policy was to offer conditions of peace and bring them under the rule of Yahweh and subjection to Israel (Deut 20:10-15).
- (2) Canaanite City-states - the policy for these was annihilation (Deut 20:16-18).

A few comments are in order regarding Israel's conquest of Canaan as holy war. Some scholars have denounced such a practice and said that it is out of keeping with the God of love and mercy revealed in the New Testament (e.g., H.H. Rowley). To such ones, Israel appears to be acting very unjustly in their invasion of the land of the Canaanites. Isn't this unchristian and cruel to destroy the homes, families, cities, and livestock of an innocent people? Such a question only presupposes that the Canaanites are an innocent people. In actuality, God was bringing judgment upon the Canaanites. These wars were moral in nature, and in holy war God was destroying Canaanite religion. This was no more unjust than God's moral judgment upon the wicked world by the flood, nor upon wicked Sodom and Gomorrah, nor the judgment that shall come with the great white throne when the wicked are assigned to hell. God had given the Canaanites time to repent, and the period of grace ended for them with the coming of Joshua. Recall that Abram had made proclamation about Yahweh in the midst of a Canaanite worship center

⁴Merrill F. Unger, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1954), 167ff.

when he came to the land (Gen 12:4-9). Despite Abram's proclamation of the truth, Yahweh allowed the Canaanites time to repent. Note Gen 15:16 -

"Then in the fourth generation they shall return here (i.e., Canaan), for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete."

VI. THE PERSON OF JOSHUA

Joshua's name was very fitting for the role he would play as the leader of the conquest. The original form of the Hebrew name was *hōšēa*^c "Salvation" (Num 13:8; LXX *Ausē*), but was changed by Moses to *y^hhōšua*^c, "Yahweh saves" (Num 13:16; LXX *Iēsoun*), . . . later shortened to *yēšūa*^c (Neh 8:17; LXX *Iēsous*).⁵ Our Lord Jesus Christ would take the same name, for in an even more fitting way He is the leader of the greater conquest.

Joshua was a man of outstanding character:

- (1) unqualified courage (recall that he had been one of the 12 spies sent to spy out the land).
- (2) great faith (in spite of the size of the enemy, he was convinced that the LORD would give them the victory).
- (3) unqualified obedience (he was submissive to both his superior Moses and to the LORD; (cf. Exod 17:8-10; 24:13-18 and 32:15-18).

VII. THE STRUCTURE

The structure of the book is rather straight-forward (see chart, *Suppl. 22.1*). The first half of the book (1–12) concerns the taking of the land and the second half (13–21) concerns the allotting of the land to the various tribes. Chapters 22–24 form an epilogue instructing the people about how they are to stay in the land. This may seem to be rather dull narration of events with little spiritual significance, but that is hardly true. There are many spiritual principles to be found in these pages. Furthermore, the conquest narration sets the stage for our New Testament theology of gaining the inheritance that comes to the Christian who faithfully endures in his walk and service with Christ.

⁵Waltke, 2:1133.

VIII. THE BOOK OF WAR: TAKING THE LAND (Joshua 1–12)

A. Preparation for War (Josh 1–5)

This section deals with the spiritual preparation of the people and the leadership—an essential before the battle. The following chart depicts the organization, themes and purpose of these first five chapters:

		Charge To War		Reconnais- sance of Jericho		Crossing of the Jordan		Final Spiritual Prepa- ration	
		Ch 1		Ch 2		Ch 3:1—5:1		Ch 5:2-15	
THEME	Law (the Word)	Report of the Spies	Joshua Leads the People Across	The Pillar	Ceremonies and Confron- tation				
PURPOSE	To conso- lidate the leadership in Joshua who obeys the Word of God	To encourage the morale of Israel	To establish the leadership of Joshua	To remember what God has done	To focus their faith on Yahweh				

1. Charge to War (Ch 1)
 - a. Yahweh's Charge to Joshua (1:1-9)

Joshua was chosen and given a two-fold responsibility: (1) to be the leader, the one taking the initiative to lead the people in conquest and (2) to serve as the distributor of the land (which he begins to do in 13:7).

Yahweh had previously specified the dimensions of the land which the people were entitled to (cf. Gen 15:18; Ex 23:27; and Deut 1:7-8). However, a principle is established in Josh 1:3—"*Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you.*" Thus, there is a condition: walking. The relation of the promise to the condition is this: God uses the obedience of the people to fulfill His promise. The same principle is true of Christians today, and most Christians fall far short of appropriating the spiritual victory God has made possible for them now in Christ. We possess only that which we appropriate by faith.

This passage (esp. vv 7-8) is famous for its emphasis upon obedience to God's word. Any lack of success would not be due to God letting Joshua down, but success could be missed if Joshua was not careful to do everything according to God's word (the sin of Achan in ch 7 would substantiate this principle). This admonition would be demonstrated in the highest way in the life of Jesus (though it still remains an

example for us). We cannot get anywhere in the Christian life until we are committed to the will and Word of God. Alan Redpath declares:

I have no magic formula for your holiness; I have no hocus-pocus treatment to offer you; I have no short cut to spiritual power for any of you. All I can do is to say to you: Get back to your Bible; 'meditate therein day and night,' and go down before God on your face in prayer. For the greatest transactions of a man's experience are made, not in a church, but behind closed doors.⁶

b. Joshua's Charge to the people (1:10-18)

In this section the "2 million plus" people were mobilized to the state of readiness. Notice the elements in their spirit of devotion and cooperation (1:16-18): (1) obedience, (2) faith and hope, (3) intolerance of sin, and (4) support by encouragement. God's people must take time to prepare, must respond with an obedient spirit, and must be confident in their captain—the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Reconnaissance of Jericho (ch 2)

The chapter centers around the person of Rahab the harlot. Although she is a woman undeserving of favor from God (as we all are), she becomes a remarkable portrait of faith (cf. James 2). Furthermore, she is included in the Messianic line (cf. Ruth 4; Matt 1). The chapter also reveals the real attitude of the inhabitants of the land: they are afraid of the Hebrews because of the fact that Yahweh God is with them (2:9-11). The realization of this is a boost to Israel's morale. Young Christians today should realize the wonderful grace of God that is available to the vilest sinner; clearly we are saved by faith alone! Also, we must not fear our spiritual enemies, for we are now on the side of Christ, and that strikes fear in every demon (cf. 1 John 4:4).

Notice the report of the two spies in 2:24, "*Surely the LORD has given all the land into our hands . . .*" This should be contrasted to the report of the majority of spies at Kadesh-Barnea (Num 13:31).

3. Miraculous Crossing of the Jordan (3:1–5:1)

Chapter 3 involves the confident leadership of Joshua to the Jordan where God parts the waters (a parallel to the Exodus from Egypt). The point seems to center on the divine establishment of Joshua's leadership before the people of God (see 3:7). Though God promised Joshua that He would exalt him, notice how Joshua communicates to the people in 3:10, "*By this you shall know that the living God is among you . . .*" Joshua said nothing to the people about God's promise of exalting him. That was not necessary; it never is with a man of humility. Our part is to focus on giving God the glory . . . His part is to exalt whom He wants. When we seek to exalt ourselves, the reward is never as pleasant!

The second aspect of the crossing involved the memorial stones (ch 4) which were erected to perpetuate the memory of the miraculous crossing. This not only helped the Israelites to remember what God had done for them but would be a means of testimony to their children in perpetuating the faith (4:21), as well as to the other peoples of the earth (4:24).

The crossing of the Jordan river was certainly a miracle. In Joshua 4:19, we are told the time—in the "first month," i.e., in March-April. This would have been in the spring when the river was at its peak; a miracle indeed was needed to cross it at this time of the year. God did part the Jordan for them to cross,

⁶Alan Redpath, *Victorious Christian Living*, 32-33.

but notice that there was no provision to turn back. God is always willing to lead us forward and make provision for every obstacle to be encountered. Dr. Don Campbell points out:

For believers today, a symbolic crossing of the Jordan represents passing from one level of the Christian life to another. It is a picture of entering into spiritual warfare to claim what God has promised. And it should mean the end of life lived by the principle of human effort and the beginning of life lived by the principles of faith and obedience.⁷

4. Final Spiritual Preparations (5:2-12)

With the crossing of the Jordan, the Israelites were probably anxious to begin the conquest immediately. But this was not God's plan. He is never in a hurry, although His children sometimes are. But from God's point of view, Israel was not yet ready to fight. Spiritual preparation was essential, even far more so than the physical aspects: consecration must precede conquest!

The events of this chapter helped the people (including Joshua) to focus their faith on Yahweh. The practice of circumcision had been abandoned during the wilderness years, but now the people had to testify to their faith in the covenant with Yahweh by their submission to circumcision. Furthermore, there were spiritual overtones that the rite of circumcision reminded them of. As the bearers of the covenant, they were to have lives of holiness and submissiveness unto the LORD (Deut 10:16). Merrill observes, The whole sequence—circumcision, Passover, and theophany—emphatically declared that the Israel of conquest was the Israel of exodus. The God who had saved his people out of Egypt would now save them in Canaan.⁸

IX. THE CAMPAIGNS OF WAR (Joshua 5:13–12:24)

Success is the key thought in these chapters. There are two predominant interruptions in the conquest episodes: (1) where Israel learns from her disobedience at Ai and (2) where Israel is allowed to be taken in trickery by the Gibeonites as a result of ignoring the counsel of Yahweh. The conquest of cis-Jordan is divided up into three major campaigns: the central campaign, the southern campaign, and the northern campaign.⁹

A. Meeting the Commander of the Lord's Host (Josh 5:13-15)

Upon meeting the captain of the Lord's host, Joshua is also reminded of the need to fix his faith on Yahweh. [A trust in self or human implements of warfare would be insufficient for the warfare ahead]. We, too, cannot serve our God without an attitude of viewing Him as holy and set apart (a reverential awe). An awareness of His divine and holy presence with us to fight our battles makes a vast difference in the way we face life's problems.

B. The Central Campaign (Josh 6–9)

⁷Don Campbell, *No Time for Neutrality* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1981), 32.

⁸Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 109.

⁹For a reliable survey of the conquest of the land, see Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 108-121. He also includes a brief survey of alternative models for Israel's occupation (pp 122-28).

The central campaign involved Jericho (Tell es-Sultan) and Ai (possibly Khirbet el-Maqtir). These two are an interesting contrast: Jericho appeared to be the impossible task and Ai appeared to be a "push-over". Not even mighty Jericho could oppose the Israelites as they obeyed the LORD and trusted in Him. With inferior Ai, however, they were a bit presumptuous. The sin of Achan held them back from what otherwise appeared to be an easy victory. The Israelites were told to keep themselves from the things under the ban (6:18).¹⁰ Yahweh would not tolerate Achan's sin, for disobedience was not the way to victory: "*You cannot stand before your enemies until you have removed the things under the ban from your midst*" (7:13). There are things belonging to the world that the child of God must leave alone. The way of Achan must be avoided: "I saw . . . I coveted . . . and I took" (7:21). Before God would allow the people to go any further, the sin problem had to be dealt with and removed. Jericho was victory through faith, but Ai was defeated through sin. However, the latter could be turned to victory and restoration once properly dealt with.

Following the defeat of Ai, Joshua led the people up to Shechem where they built an altar to Yahweh on Mt. Ebal in obedience to the instructions that had been given in Deut 27:2-8. Interestingly, from the top of Mt. Ebal, one could get a glimpse of nearly the entire land of Canaan. As they worshipped Yahweh and dwelt upon the Law (His Word), they also were blessed with a vision of all that could be theirs if they continued in obedience to Yahweh. Apparently, they were met with little opposition at Shechem, which had been destroyed in the mid-sixteenth century BC in the Egyptian conquest of Palestine, and not rebuilt until early in the fifteenth century.¹¹

The second interruption in the conquest occurred with the trickery of the Gibeonites. Although they were caught off guard, their mistake is evident from Josh 9:14: "*So the men of Israel took some of their provisions, and did not ask for the counsel of the LORD.*" This blunder was one they would have to live with.

C. The Southern Campaign (Josh 10)

The Southern campaign (Josh 10) was initiated in the open between the cities of Gibeon and Aijalon. The opponents were the kings of five of the strategic administrative centers that existed under Egyptian sovereignty: Jebus (i.e., Jerusalem), Hebron, Eglon, Lachish, and Jarmuth.

D. The Northern Campaign (Josh 11)

The Northern campaign (Josh 11) was centered at Hazor (Tell *el-Qedah*) to the north of the sea of Galilee. Not only was Hazor the largest city of the north (covering over 110 acres and housing perhaps as many as 40,000 people), but it was a strategic site in view of its control of one of the main routes from the coast

¹⁰The "ban" refers to that which is singled out by Yahweh as a special object of His judgment. Merrill notes, "When a place or a people were thus designated, they were said to be 'devoted' to Yahweh, that is, put under the ban. The technical Hebrew verb is *hāram* ('to devote to destruction'). Objects under the ban had to be annihilated (if living) or given to Yahweh for his own use. In no case could such an object be retained without the express permission of Yahweh" (*Kingdom of Priests*, 110).

Actually, only three cities suffered the full extent of *hāram*, namely, Jericho, Ai, and Hazor.

¹¹The Cambridge Ancient History, II:1:542.

towards Damascus. Throughout these campaigns, the Israelites used Gilgal (Khirbet el-Mefjer) as a base camp rather than continually moving. Since Gilgal was situated near the Jordan, this protected them from rear attack by the Canaanites and gave them a source of supplies since this was a fertile area.

The key verse of ch 1–12 is in 11:23: "So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD had spoken to Moses, and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. Thus the land had rest from war." Note that in the author's thinking, the "rest" coincides with the reception of the inheritance.