

Week Thirteen: Covenant, Conquest, and Control of the Land - Joshua 1-24



Overview

The Book of Joshua records the conquest of the land of Canaan from the crossing of the Jordan River to the death of Joshua. Significant events include the renewal of the covenant, the salvation of Rahab and the defeat of Jericho, the failures at Ai and Gibeon, and the division of the land among the twelve tribes. The book begins with God's promise to be with Joshua (1:5) and His announcement that He has already given the land to the children of Israel (1:3—"Every place that the sole of your foot will tread I have given you"). The book ends with Joshua's challenge to the nation to forsake the small gods of the surrounding peoples and follow the LORD (24:15—"Choose you this day whom you will serve . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD").

The key verse of the book may well be Joshua 1:8—"This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success"—for here God establishes the need for Bible literacy in the mouths and minds of His people. During Joshua's leadership, God fulfills the promise of the Abrahamic covenant regarding the land, "To you and your descendants I will give this land" (Gen. 12:7), and begins to exert Abraham's godly influence on the nations, "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3b).

Lesson Objective:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to connect Israel's entry into the land of Canaan with the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3; 15:13-16. Students will recognize Rahab's faith in the Living God as a partial fulfillment of His promise, "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3).

Key Truths

God fulfills His promise to give Canaan to Abraham's descendants.

God's promise to Abraham about blessing all the families of the earth begins to see fulfillment as Rahab believes in Israel's God, joins Israel's family, and becomes part of Jesus' lineage.

God's guidance and blessing do not mean that His people will not have battles; without battles, there can be no victory

God's ways may not always line up with human logic, but trusting and following Him lets His people see mighty victories.

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One person's sin can affect the entire covenant community.

Prayerlessness in decision-making can lead to destructive decisions.

Lesson Outline

1. Fulfillment of the promise—God proves Himself as the Promise Keeper, fulfilling a 400-year old promise He made to Abraham, when He brings the twelve tribes into the land of Canaan.

- **A New Leader:** After Moses dies, God raises up a new leader—Joshua—to lead the nation into the Promised Land. God promises to be with him, guide him, and give him victory (Joshua 1).
- **A New Land:** God leads the children of Israel across the Jordan by parting the river miraculously (Joshua 3-4). He then calls Israel to renew the covenant of circumcision and keep the Passover, at which time He causes the manna to cease (Joshua 5).
- **A New Lord:** The Captain of the LORD's host appears to Joshua and gives him instructions for taking Jericho, the key city of the Jordan region. Israel's spies have already seen the city and heard that the Canaanites are living in fear by the testimony of Rahab; she confesses her faith and becomes part of the covenant community. Israel defeats Jericho by God's intervention, and Rahab is saved (Josh. 2, 6).

2. Failures of the People

- **Personal Failure:** Achan takes and hides plunder from Jericho in direct violation of biblical commands (Deut. 7:25-26; Josh. 6:18). His actions (and Israel's presumption to go up to Ai without praying) lead to the deaths of thirty-six soldiers; God exposes his sin and judges him and his family for this sin to teach Israel the high cost of sin. Israel then defeats Ai (Josh. 7-8).
- **Communal Failure:** The Gibeonites deceive Israel by pretending to be from a far country; once again, Israel fails to pray (Josh. 9:14-15), so they make a covenant with one of the tribes that inhabits the land (Josh. 9).

3. Faith in the Power of God

- **A Woman of Faith:** Rahab, a harlot from Jericho, expresses great faith in the living God by her testimony (Josh. 2:8-13); she and her family are spared, blessed by God, and eventually included in the genealogy of Christ. Her knowledge about God is limited, but her faith is genuine, and she is accepted by God on the basis of faith (Heb. 11:31).
- **A Prayer of Faith:** Joshua and the tribes, disciplined by their wilderness journeys, fight a series of crucial battles to take control of the central portion of Canaan (Josh. 10-11). In the major battle, Joshua sees God perform the miracle of extended daylight (10:12-14), so that he and the people are able to subdue five kings. Joshua eventually defeats thirty-one kings in all (Joshua 10-12).

4. Faithfulness to God's Command

Joshua divides the land among the tribes of Israel, giving a special portion to Caleb because he "wholly followed the LORD God of Israel" (14:14). The various tribes move to take their portions (13-19), and Joshua fulfills all of Moses' commands (11:15) as he sets aside cities of refuge (20) and cities for the Levites (21). The two and a half tribes return to the other side of the Jordan after erecting an altar of witness to keep unity between the tribes on both sides of the river (22). Before his death, Joshua calls the tribes together to remind them of God's promises (23) and to challenge them to choose to follow the LORD only (24). After burying the bones of Joseph, which they had brought up from Egypt, Joshua and the elders of the people die.

Application -What does this lesson teach us about God? Man? Sin? Redemption?

- God's promises are still applicable today, but just as in Joshua's day, they must be appropriated by faith.
- People have to hear the Word of God to believe it; God's Word and His work are so mighty that others from the nations will believe in Him when they hear of His work. Will your life be a highway for others to believe in the living God?
- God delights to forgive the repentant harlot, but judges harshly the one who by deliberate sin brings destruction to the covenant community.
- God's people will fight battles in this life to gain what God promises by faith; without battles there can be no victory
- God's ways run contrary to human logic, but God's ways are always best.

Summary

God speaks by revealing at the outset the victory He has promised and by giving specific commands for the taking of the land.

God acts powerfully for Israel by parting the Jericho River, by receiving a believing harlot and her family, by preventing the sun from setting for almost a full day, and by defeating Israel's enemies.

God reveals Himself to Joshua as the Captain of the LORD's host (5:13-15) and as Covenant-keeper by fulfilling the promise of giving Canaan to Israel.

Discussion Questions

How much time had elapsed between the crossing of the Red Sea and the crossing of the Jordan? When did the hearts of the Canaanites melt (Josh. 2)?

Isaiah says that "God's ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts" (Is. 55:8-9); how does the Book of Joshua reveal some of God's unusual ways?

What happens today when Christians deliberately sin; how does their sin affect churches? Do churches today take sin as seriously as God does?

The Gibeonites deceived Israel by pretending to be from a far country and leading them to make a covenant; how do Christians today make covenants with the world that compromise their witness?

