

Book of Joshua



Lesson 1: Introduction

A Strong National Leader

The story of *Joshua* begins with God choosing and blessing Joshua, son of Nun, to succeed the faithful prophet and leader Moses who recently died.

Born into the tribe of Levi, Moses was chosen by God to lead his people out of slavery in Egypt and to realize the promise God made to Abraham—that his descendants would possess the land of Canaan (known later as Israel). With tremendous power and miracles, Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt through the Red Sea and into the wilderness of Sinai. In the wilderness God gave his people manna to eat, established his law (called the Law of Moses), and provided his presence among them in a tabernacle containing the ark of the covenant. But time and again, the people proved difficult to shepherd. They grumbled against God and Moses, and God condemned them to wander in the wilderness until the wicked generation died out.

After forty years the descendants of that generation arrived at the threshold of the Promised Land. Moses died before entering the land but not before laying his hands on his faithful servant Joshua and passing on his authority to him, including the mandate to begin the conquest of Canaan.





Joshua means “Yahweh is Salvation.” The name Joshua is the Hebrew equivalent of Yeshua, Jesus, which means “savior.” While wandering in the wilderness of Sinai, Joshua had been one of the twelve spies sent by Moses to survey the land of promise they were to inherit. In spite of the fact that a formidable enemy occupied the land, Joshua trusted God and gave a faithful report to Moses. He was zealous to obey the law of God and to serve Moses. As a result, God chose him to lead the people after the death of Moses:

“Moses said to the Lord, ‘Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord may not be as sheep which have no shepherd.’ And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand upon him; cause him to stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation, and you shall commission him in their sight. You shall invest him with some of your authority, that all the congregation of the people of Israel may obey. And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the Lord; at his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the people of Israel with him, the whole congregation.’ And Moses did as the Lord commanded him; he took Joshua and caused him to stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole congregation, and he laid his hands upon him, and commissioned him as the Lord directed through Moses.” (Num 27:15-23)

Described as “full of the spirit of wisdom” (Deut 34:9), Joshua would faithfully lead the people in obedience to God and settle in the land of promise after years of battle for conquest. His story is one of total trust in God and great perseverance amidst challenges that would be overwhelming if not for God’s constant intercession. During Joshua’s lifetime Israel stays on track. Though they are not perfect, they still follow their leader, unswerving to left or right. This continues even beyond Joshua’s death among those who would live under his leadership through the elders. (In the book of *Judges*, which immediately follows *Joshua*, we see what happens when the people of Israel lack strong leadership.)

Joshua Prefigures New Testament Realities

Typology is a delightful and illuminating study of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New. In the Old, there are people, things, and events that prefigure future realities in the New Covenant. For example, crossing the Red Sea with the cloud overhead is a type or prefiguring of Baptism by water. The children of Israel were delivered from the Pharaoh, Egypt, and slavery through the death of a passover lamb and then by Moses through the sea with the cloud above. They were then given manna which was the miraculous food from heaven, the food for the journey. This is fulfilled in the New Testament. We Christians are like the Israelites in Egypt. We are in bondage to the devil, the world, and sin. Our deliverance begins with the death of our Passover lamb, Jesus Christ. Jesus then leads us like Moses through the waters of Baptism with the Holy Spirit over and in us. It is how we are born again through water and Spirit (Jn 3:3-5). Once baptized we need food for the journey, which is given to us daily, like manna, in the Eucharist of the Church. What a beautiful comparison!

In this study, we will see rich examples of typology in all its glory. Joshua is indeed a prefigurement of Jesus leading us out of the wilderness into the Promised Land! Joshua’s journey also prefigures the faith journey of all the baptized faithful who must “pick up their cross” and endure to the end as they work to build up the kingdom of God.



Purpose in its Contemporary Setting and in Light of Further Revelation

The purpose of the book of *Joshua* is to provide an important link in the historical chain of continuity—a significant chapter in the history of salvation. It demonstrates God’s faithfulness to his promises and the fulfillment of his covenants. When the people cross the Jordan River into the land of Canaan, God’s promise to Abraham is realized. *Joshua* also recounts the battles by which the children of Israel possess the land, so crucial and central to God’s plan, a plan that would be fulfilled finally when the second Joshua, Jesus the Savior of the world, would be born in the very land conquered by Joshua, son of Nun.

Another important purpose of *Joshua*, especially in light of the sins that plague the people later in the time of *Judges*, is the importance of a strong national leader. Both Moses and Joshua provided centralized authority in their times—direction, unity, and obedience to God’s laws. After their presence was no longer felt, the leaderless Israelites “did what was right in their own eyes,” often with disastrous results. *Joshua* begins with the triumphant crossing of the Jordan and ends with the death of Joshua after he orchestrates the conquest of the land and delivers a rousing speech.

Authorship

We are not told who the author of *Joshua* is, though the most ancient tradition holds that Joshua himself wrote the main account and that Eleazar the priest added the ending, which covers Joshua’s death. This view was held until modern times. Many modern scholars believe the account was written much later.

However, others believe a strong case can be made that it was written by a single author prior to the monarchy (which began around 1,000 B.C.) and was later edited into the final version. Phrases used throughout the text such as “until this day” (Josh 8:28, 13:13, 14:14, 15:63, etc.) imply that a later editor (or editors) were involved with shaping the final text. In other words, something from the days of Joshua remained to a later time, “until this day,” when the editor was compiling the material. In conclusion, we can accept the theory of a single original author whose work was later edited to provide the tight narrative we read today.

Outline of the Book of Joshua

The book of *Joshua* contains 24 chapters that document the events related to the Israelites’ invasion, conquest, and possession of the Promised Land under Joshua’s leadership.

- **The Invasion of Canaan (Josh 1:1-5:12)**
- **Commission of Joshua and Preparation**
- **Spying Out the Land**
- **Meeting and Promise to Rahab the Harlot**
- **Crossing the Jordan River**
- **Memorials, Circumcision, and the First Passover**
- **The Conquest of Canaan (Josh 5:13-12:24)**

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- **Appearance of Divine Commander**
 - **Conquest of Jericho and Ai**
 - **Conquering Southern Territories**
 - **Deceit of the Gibeonites**
 - **Conquering the Northern Territories**
 - **Review of Victories**
 - **Division of the Land (Josh 13:1-21:45)**
 - **Portions Allotted to 2 ½ Tribes East of the Jordan River**
 - **Portion to Caleb**
 - **Portions Allotted to 9 ½ Tribes West of the Jordan River**
 - **Portion for Joshua, Manslayers, and Levites**
 - **Summary of the Conquest and Distribution of Territories**
 - **Conclusion and Death of Joshua (Josh 22:1-24:33)**
 - **Border Dispute**
 - **Initial Problems between Tribes**
 - **Joshua's Final Exhortations to Israel**
 - **Death of Joshua**

As the outline shows, the book of Joshua contains four key sections: (1) the initial invasion of Canaan, (2) the conquest of Canaan, (3) the division of the land to the tribes of Israel, and (4) the conclusion and death of Joshua. Throughout this amazing story of battle and conquest in the Promised Land, we will see that Joshua demonstrates an obedience and submission to the will of God that one day will be fully realized in the divine person of Jesus Christ.

As you prepare now to enter the Promised Land with Joshua and confront the enemies within, be “strong and of good courage,” for God is with you.