

Introduction to Joshua

Author and Date

While this book mentions Joshua writing (8:32; 24:26), it does not claim that he wrote this particular book. The repeated references to something existing “to this day” (see 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; etc.) seem to suggest that there was a lapse of time between the events recorded in the book (c. 1400B.C.) and the time when the writing of the book was completed. The final writing may have taken place in the time of the exile (after 586B.C.), but the writing probably began much earlier.

The Theological Message of Joshua

Genesis 1–11 makes it abundantly clear that God alone is the Creator and Ruler of the world’s peoples. Genesis 12–Deuteronomy 34 makes it equally clear that only God can give Abraham’s family a home. Yet God’s promises unfold slowly at times. By this point in the Bible, six centuries have passed since God first promised Abraham that his descendants would live in Canaan (Gen. 12:7). After an unnecessary delay of 40 years caused by unbelief (Num. 14:11–12), Israel stands ready to enter the land. Restless for a home of their own, they are about to receive their inheritance, the gift of good land. They do not deserve this gift (cf. Deut. 8:17), but God will now punish the sins of the Canaanites (Gen. 15:13–16; Lev. 18:1–30) and give their land to Israel.

As God tells Joshua, Israel’s rest depends on God, so they must trust him and obey his words given through Moses (Josh. 1:1–9). God gives Israel a strong foothold in Canaan in Joshua 1–12. He sends the commander of his army to stand with Joshua (5:13–15). Victories at Jericho, Ai, Gibeon, and southern and northern Canaan follow in chapters 6–12. Perhaps more importantly, the people learn not to take victory for granted. Covetous greed delays the victory at Ai (ch. 7). Only covenant faithfulness to God sustains Israel (8:30–35). But his power is not at their disposal; it is not theirs to use however they wish.

God divides the land among the Israelites in Joshua 13–22. The various clans must fight for their inheritance, trusting God to give them the victories they need (13:1–7). As an act of faith, the people receive their allotments and move ahead. Some find the going harder than they expected (17:14–18). All find that God is faithful to his promises. To keep the people close to his Word, God distributes Levites, the priestly teaching tribe, throughout the land (ch. 21). God’s Word will have a home in every community so that parents may teach their children to love God with all their hearts (cf. Deut. 6:4–9).

God renews his covenant with Israel in Joshua 23–24. In a fine summary speech, Joshua challenges the people to choose whom they will serve—the living God or the idols Abraham served before he knew God (24:14–15). The people choose wisely (24:16–24), and Joshua can rest in peace, having completed his work of helping Israel find God’s rest (24:29–33).

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Weekly Overview

It is important to note that Israel's rest occurs alongside God's punishment of the Canaanites' sins. Leviticus 18–19 had detailed some of those sins, which parallel sins Paul describes in Romans 1:18–32. The Canaanites had allowed violence of many sorts, including against women and children. God does not countenance such acts, no matter who does them. In Judges God will punish Israel for such deeds. God's gift of rest in a good land is not mere favoritism; it is part of his plan to bless all nations through Abraham (Gen. 12:1–9) by having his family live as a righteous kingdom of priests (Gen. 18:19; Ex. 19:5–6).

Outline

- Crossing into the Land (1:1-5:15)
- Taking the Land (6:1-12:24)
- Dividing the Land (13:1-21:45)
- Serving the Lord in the Land (22:1-24:33)

Introduction to Judges

Author and Date

The author of Judges is unknown. The events recorded in its pages took place in the period between Joshua's death and the rise of Samuel and Saul. Most of the book was likely written by David's time (1010–971B.C.).

The Theological Message of Judges

When the book of Joshua ends, Israel seems ready to fulfill its God-given role as a kingdom of priests ministering to the world (cf. Ex. 19:5–6). Now well-situated at the crossroads of the ancient world, Israel can bless other nations (Gen. 12:1–9) by loving God (Deut. 6:4–9) and their neighbors (Lev. 19:18, 33–34) while taking care of the land God gave them (Lev. 25:23; Deut. 8:17). Instead, for decades most of the people choose the opposite path. They consistently violate their covenant with God. Furthermore, their internal fighting presents a sorry spectacle to other nations. Sadly, the book shows time and again what happens when sin runs rampant, when people do what is right in their own eyes (Judg. 17:6; 21:25).

Judges 1–2 reminds readers that the root of all sin is rebellion against God. After Joshua's death, the people worship Canaanite gods (2:11–15). Although no sin is benign, abandoning God is the most fundamental transgression the Israelites could commit. Their relationship with God has been the key to their freedom, salvation, societal order, and future hopes. Forsaking him leads naturally to committing other sins and brings on the disciplinary processes Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27–28 described. Still, God's character never changes; he continues to be patient, merciful, and forgiving (Ex. 34:6–7). When Israel cries out to God, he faithfully sends men and women to deliver them from their enemies and act as their judges (Judg. 2:16–23).

Overall, however, the judges do little to arrest the downward spiral of apostasy, and Judges 3–16 reveals that these deliverers are hardly flawless. For example, Gideon defeats the invading Midianites with a very small army (chs. 6–7), yet he also makes a golden image the people worship (8:22–28). Jephthah defeat the Ammonites but breaks God's laws about human sacrifice (Lev. 18:21; 27:1–4; Num. 18:16) to keep an unnecessary vow (Judges 11). Samson is intelligent, strong, and savvy. He is also lustful and generally careless with his gifts (chs. 13–16). Perhaps only Deborah demonstrates exemplary character (ch. 4). God's ability to use these imperfect individuals for good purposes demonstrates his grace and power.

The book saves the worst for last. In chapters 17–18, a Levite, a member of the tribe God chose to teach his ways to Israel (Joshua 21), makes an idol and leads Israelites to worship it. In Judges 19:1–10, another Levite has taken a concubine, which was likewise contrary to God's law (Lev. 21:1–15). While they are spending the night at the home of a stranger, a mob forms outside the door. The Levite

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sends the concubine out to the crowd, who rape her to the point of death (Judg. 19:22–26). Eventually these heinous acts lead to a civil war in which thousands of Israelites perish (19:27–20:48). Afterward, more women suffer as a result (21:1–24). No wonder the author states twice that there was no king and everyone “did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6; 21:25). No wonder God kept disciplining the people.

When sin runs rampant, disaster abounds. All sorts of terrible things are possible. In Judges, God opposes sin while being patient with sinners. He exhibits mercy while holding the guilty accountable. Deborah’s life proves that people can choose to obey God even in such dismal times. That few others do so shows sin’s grip on human hearts.

Outline

- He Roots of Israel's Unfaithfulness (1:1-3:6)
- The Downward Spiral of Israel's Unfaithfulness (3:7-16:31)
- The Depths of Israel's Unfaithfulness (17:1-21:25)