



## Joshua

Joshua tells the story of the entry of God's chosen people into the Promised Land after they had wandered for 40 years in the wilderness. The book begins with the commissioning of Joshua as leader of God's people, after the death of Moses and their subsequent entry across the river Jordan into the land. The middle chapters describe the battles between God's people and the inhabitants of the land, beginning with Jericho, and the subsequent dividing of the land between the 12 tribes. The book ends with a renewed covenant between God and his people and the death of Joshua.



### How long will it take?

**Reading time:** 1 ¾ hours  
**Short of time?** Just read 1-2, 6-7, 9-10, 23-24



### Genre

History



### Anything tricky?

Well the whole book really. The book of Joshua contains what appears to the modern eye to be the command to kill everyone who lives in the land already. You could call this genocide. If you find it difficult, you are not alone. The challenge is to work out what you think is going on here. Did God really say this? If so why?



### Inspiring quotes

Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

*(Joshua 1.9)*

Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

*(Joshua 24.15)*



## About the Author

There is nothing in the book itself about who wrote Joshua. In style and theology it is very similar to Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings, and so it is often thought to form a collection of writings with them named by scholars the 'Deuteronomistic histories'.

### *What do we know about him?*

Next to nothing.

The name implies (and intends to imply) a theological connection with the book of Deuteronomy, since the outlook of all these books seems very similar. It is suggested that the author or, more likely, authors of these histories were influenced by Deuteronomy and told Israel's history from that perspective. The key feature here is that Deuteronomy stresses that God's people will only stay in the land if they remain faithful. Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings tell the story of how God's people failed to be faithful and so, eventually, went into exile from the land right at the end of 2 Kings.



## About the times

No one really knows when these books were written. It is thought that they reached their final form in the 6th century bc – in other words shortly after the Judeans went into exile – and were finalised then in order to explain why the exile had happened at all. It is clear, however, that these final documents were drawn together from already existing sources, many of which would have been written at or shortly after the event described.

### *What were people feeling?*

If it is right that these histories are written to explain why the exile happened then it is clear that the people would have been feeling hurt, despairing and lost. For a sense of what people were feeling then have a look at the book of Lamentations which provides an accurate insight into their emotions.

### *Other books set around this time*

Judges, Ruth



## What kind of Book is it?

This is a history book but it falls into the category of what you might call theological history – history with a purpose. It is not telling the events solely so that you can know what happened but so that you can understand why they happened. Many of the historical books of the Bible are like this.



### How is it structured?

1.1-18	The commissioning of Joshua as leader
2.1-12.24	Entry into and conquest of the Land
13.1-22.34	The division of the land among the tribes
23.1-24.33	Joshua's farewell and the renewal of the covenant



## Look out for...

In all the books of the Deuteronomistic histories, God's promises are very important. The idea you find time and time again is that God always does what he says he will. Look out for this theme as you read.

Another important theme in this book is identity – the questions of what made God's people who they were. As you read ask yourself what you can tell about who God's people were meant to be and what they were meant to do.

Right at the heart of this book lies the covenant – the one that has already been made through Moses with the people and the one that is reiterated at the end of the book by Joshua. Look out for the covenant and what it means to God, to Joshua and to the people.



## What could this mean for me?

A theme that bubbles away throughout Joshua is the theme faithfulness – God's faithfulness to his people and their unfaithfulness to him. What does faithfulness mean to you and can you learn anything about it from this book?



## Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did *you* think the book was about?
- The theme of covenant faithfulness is, obviously, very important in this book. What did you make of it and what can we learn from this today?
- What did you think about the command to kill all the inhabitants of the land? Does it trouble you or have you found a way that makes sense of it for you? Give yourselves lots of time to wrestle with this question!
- The Israelites won their battles when God was with them and fought for them. Today there are many people who claim that their God fights with them. Having read Joshua what would you want to say to someone who claims that God fights with them?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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