

# UNIT TWO

## THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

### THE ORIGIN AND DATE OF THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

- While the Former Prophets as a series was probably not completed until 587BC, an early version of Joshua may have been written much earlier.
- Much of the book is attributed to Joshua, but some was certainly written later.
- The repeated use of the expression 'to this day' suggests a time lapse since the events described.
- A date of composition early in the period of the monarchy is a reasonable supposition.

### THE NATURE OF THE CONQUEST

- **THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNT**
  - The expression 'all Israel' is frequently used – all the fighting men of the twelve tribes under Joshua's command.
  - There are two main sections in the book – the conquest itself (chapters 1-12) and the division of the land (13-24).
  - The conquest unfolds in three distinct phases:
    - A bridgehead in Canaan, from where a wedge is driven into the centre of the land.
    - A major thrust southwards (chapters 9-10).
    - A similar thrust northwards (chapter 11).
  - Despite all this, the Canaanites were not completely eradicated from the land and the Israelites would have to do further fighting.
  - Each tribe sought to consolidate its own position, sometimes with support from one or two other tribes.
  - Total occupation was not completed until the time of David (2 Samuel 8).
  - In the book of Joshua, the conquest is viewed as a 'holy war' – it is Yahweh's war and Israel is only successful because of his help.
  - Many scholars struggle to accept this account at face value have tried to reconstruct what 'really' happened.
- **CRITICAL RECONSTRUCTIONS**
  - Some have alleged that Joshua and Judges give different account of the conquest, with Judges describing a series of wars involving different tribes rather than all of Israel.
  - This line of thought has been extended to suggest that there was no conquest, but rather a gradual infiltration of tribes which later merged to form Israel.
  - The bulk of the book of Judges is said to describe the struggles of this newly formed league to survive, with the final triumph of Israel not achieved until the time of David.
  - Another more radical view sees the conquest in terms of a 'peasant revolt' given greater impetus by the influx of desert tribes.

- **EVALUATION**

- Despite these reconstruction theories, the books of Joshua and Judges are still the most ancient sources we have which deal directly with the events.
- Archaeological evidence of large scale destruction of strategic sites is more compatible with the Biblical account of a military campaign.
- The idea that Joshua and Judges are alternative accounts of the same event does not really fit the Biblical text – of significance is the absence of the Philistines in Joshua compared to their appearance in Judges.
- As Christians, our grounds for accepting the Biblical account is the attitude of Jesus to the Old Testament.

## **LITERARY STRUCTURE**

- **PROLOGUE (1:1-18)**

- **ENTERING THE LAND (2:1-5:12)**

- The promise and a Canaanite prostitute (chapter 2)
- The promise and the crossing of the Jordan (chapters 3-4)
- The promise remembered in the land (5:1-12)

- **CONQUERING THE LAND (5:13-12:24)**

- The commander of the LORD's army (5:13-15)
- Perishing and surviving under the promise: Jericho & Rahab (chapter 6)
- Presuming on the promise (chapter 7)
- Promised victory: Ai (8:1-29)
- The people of the promise (8:30-35)
- Canaanite fear and Israelite failure: Gibeon's treaty and curse (chapter 9)
- The conquest of the south (chapter 10)
- The conquest of the north (chapter 11)
- List of defeated kings and conquered territory (chapter 12)

- **RECEIVING THE PROMISED LAND (13:1-21:42)**

- The command to allocate the land (13:1-7)
- East of the Jordan: the land given to Reuben, Gad and Manasseh (13:8-33)
- West of the Jordan (chapters 14-19)
  - Introduction (14:1-5)
  - Caleb: example of faithful obedience (14:6-15)
  - Judah (15:1-63)
  - Ephraim and Manasseh (chapters 16-17)
  - The other tribes (18:1-19:48)
  - Joshua: example of faithful obedience (19:49-50)
  - Conclusion (19:51)
- Justice in the Promised Land: cities of refuge (chapter 20)
- Towns for the Levites (21:1-42)
  - The Levites' request (21:1-3)
  - The allocation of towns (21:4-8)
  - Lists of towns (21:9-40)
  - Conclusion (21:41-42)

- **CONCLUDING SUMMARY (21:43-45)**

- **EPILOGUE (22:1-24:33)**

- Unity of Israel: its basis and its threat (chapter 22)
- Joshua's first farewell speech: the demands of God's faithfulness (c. 23)
- Joshua's second farewell speech: covenant renewal at Shechem (24:1-28)
- The end of an era: the deaths of Joshua and Eleazar (24:29-33)

## JOSHUA AND THE BIBLE AS A WHOLE

- **MAIN THEMES OF JOSHUA**
  - The main theological idea in Joshua is God's promise to give the land of Canaan to the descendants of Abraham.
  - The book of Joshua testifies to God's faithfulness to his promise by recounting the successful conquest.
  - There is also a recognition that much of what was promised is still to come and that the land could be lost through disobedience.
- **JOSHUA AND THE PENTATEUCH**
  - The Pentateuch ends with the Israelites still outside the promised land, and the generation who came out of Egypt have fallen under God's judgement.
  - In this context, the book of Joshua speaks of God's faithfulness to his promise despite the people's rebellion.
- **JOSHUA AND THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL**
  - Joshua must be understood in relation to the rest of the Former Prophets, a story which ends tragically.
  - Israel was all but destroyed by God's judgement in the form of assaults by the Assyrians and Babylonians.
  - Joshua makes it clear that this was not due to a lack of power or faithfulness on God's part.
- **JOSHUA AND THE NEW TESTAMENT**
  - The promise of God, which is central to the book, is the gospel announced in advance.
  - The promise to Abraham, to which God proves himself to be completely faithful in Joshua, finds its ultimate realisation in Jesus – the book points ahead to Jesus and beyond Canaan to the promised rest that awaits us.

## SIGNIFICANT THEOLOGICAL SUB-THEMES

- **A THEOLOGY OF LEADERSHIP**
  - Joshua's name was changed from *Hoshea* ('salvation') to *Joshua* ('the LORD is salvation') by Moses (Numbers 13:16).
  - He was one of the two spies who explored the land and encouraged the Israelites to trust God and go on – therefore sparing him the judgement faced by the others.
  - As noted in study 1, there are significant parallels between the life of Joshua and the life of Moses.
  - In a very real sense, Joshua is an extension of Moses – his character and actions bear the stamp of Moses.
  - Joshua's role however is still subordinate to Moses, shown through his submission to the law and commandments given to him by Moses.
- **A THEOLOGY OF THE LAW**
  - The law is proclaimed in Deuteronomy and applied in Joshua – we see Joshua and the Israelites grappling with the problems of application.
  - The basic principle is one of obedience leading to blessing and disobedience leading to curse, but some account is taken of motivation.

- The Achan incident of chapter 7 is a deliberate violation and leads to disaster, whereas the covenant with Gibeon in chapter 9 is an unintentional breach of the law.
- The book of Joshua shows us a God who takes account of inward motivation as well as outward action and who dispenses judgement accordingly.
- **A THEOLOGY OF THE LAND**
  - The basic subject matter of the book is the land, and how Israel came into possession of it.
  - It is not simply a history of the war, it is ultimately concerned with religious matters and how the conquest is understood in terms of God's relationship with Israel.
  - This dimension is particularly prominent at certain points:
    - Yahweh's speech to Joshua (1:1-9)
    - Joshua's speech to the Transjordan tribes (1:10-15)
    - The reading of the law at the Shechem pass (8:30-35)
    - Summary review (11:23)
    - Another summary review (21:43-45)
    - A second speech by Joshua to the Transjordan tribes (22:1-6)
    - Joshua's farewell speech to all Israel (23:1-16)
    - Covenant ceremony at Shechem (24:1-28)
  - Each half of the book includes a summary review, a ceremony at Shechem and an address to the Transjordan tribes.
  - These passages make it clear that the conquest was not Israel's achievement but God's.
  - The land is not Israel's by right, or because they have always lived there, or even by conquest as the conquest was God's and not theirs.
  - The land is God's gift to Israel, it comes with an obligation to be obedient to the commands given at Mount Sinai and God reserves the right to take it away if Israel disobeys.

## **THE SLAUGHTER OF THE CANAANITES AND THE JUSTICE OF GOD**

- The reverse side of God's gift of the land to Israel was his judgement on the Canaanites for idolatry.
- This shows that religion in itself is no protection against God's judgement – the Canaanites were religious but their religion was an abomination to God.
- God's judgement does not mean that he holds human life cheap – humans are made in the image of God and anything that degrades people is an abomination to God.
- The Canaanite religion was such an abomination and so corrupting to others that it could only be dealt with through wholesale destruction.
- The judgement of the Canaanites came after a long period of forbearance by God – since the time of Abraham.
- As a special act of God's judgement in history this serves as a warning of the final judgement.
- The story of Rahab shows that, even at the eleventh hour, God's mercy is available to those who turn from their false gods and towards him.