

VISION FOR THE WORD OF GOD:
JOSHUA

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Date of Composition: Exact date unknown. Most scholars in the second half of the 20th century have viewed the book as part of a series which includes Deuteronomy, Judges, Samuel and Kings, making up the “Deuteronomistic History” of Israel. Those who ascribe to this view believe that partition of the history into individual books such as Joshua was a later development. The prevailing view of modern scholarship is the author or authors of this book worked in the time of Josiah or the Babylonian exile or both. There are also portions of the text that are ascribed to a post-Exilic priestly revision.

Author: The authors or authors, like the exact date of its composition, like the books of the Pentateuch, and like so many of the other biblical books we will study, are basically unknown. The book takes its name from Joshua whose leadership and conquest of the land comprises the content of this biblical narrative.

Contents of the Books of Joshua:

Chapters 1: 1-18	Joshua receives his commission.
Chapters 2: 1- 12: 24	Joshua conquers Canaan and destroys its people.
Chapters 13: 1- 21: 45	Joshua redistributes the land.
Chapter 22: 1- 34	Resolving the issue of a second altar.
Chapters 23: 1- 24: 28	Joshua bids farewell.
Chapter 24: 29 – 33	Joshua is buried.

Significant Themes:

- Worship of God alone through a single central shrine (identified with the sanctuary at Shiloh)
- Holy war (notably the insistence on total destruction of all non-Israelites at the command of God)
- Joshua is the fulfillment of the promise made to Israel (the crossing of the Jordan mirrors the crossing of the Red Sea).
- The gift of the land is conditional on continued obedience to God.

Difficulties with the Book of Joshua:

Interpreter’s Bible: “Much about the books of Joshua is repulsive, starting with ethnic cleansing the savage dispossession and genocide of native people and the massacres of women and children---all not simply condoned but ordered by God.... [Disgraceful] deeds and many others of at least questionable justifiability have been committed with the sanction of the book of Joshua, such as the decimation of the Native American people.” These passages stand in direct contradiction to the Christian understanding of a loving, forgiving and sacrificial God who sent his only begotten Son into the world to redeem and save all of humanity.

Understanding Joshua:

When we read Joshua, we must always remember that the bible is the evolving and growing story and relationship of the people of Israel with God. Our understanding of who God is grows as we mature. How we view God in our adulthood is much different than how we view God in our infancy or as children. The same can be said of any faith community. In our time, we would not advocate the Crusades or the persecution of the Jews that took place in earlier stages of Christian history.

Joshua, like others passages of the scriptures, must be read from the perspective of the people of that time. Although God never changes, our understanding of whom God is changes as we mature and as times change.

Joshua reminds us that we can all read our own perspectives into the character of God and interpret God from our own narrow understandings. The Book of Joshua is a reminder that who God really is is much bigger than any human understanding. The Book of Joshua reminds us that none of us---none of us as individuals, none of our traditions and interpretations ---can comprehend God in all of God's totality. Jesus Christ came as the manifestation, revelation, incarnation and presence of God in human flesh to "show us the Father" or as much of God as we can comprehend as we view God through Christ. Even, we, sincere people of faith, can misread and misinterpret God. That is why we must always rely upon the Holy Spirit to help us understand the will of God and the word of God for our times and us.

Other Lessons from Joshua:

Joshua's crossing of the Jordan River that mirrored the crossing of their ancestors of the Red Sea reminds us that every generation must cross its own rivers and seas, as we live out the meaning of our faith in the historic times in which we find ourselves. In doing so, we must decide whom we will serve, the God who speaks to us in our own contexts or the notions of God that were held in times past by another generations who faced different issues at another time or point in history.

Our constant prayer is that God will equip us with a true revelation of God's word and purpose for our lives and in our times so we can hand to the next generation a healthy, wholesome and true revelation of the nature and character of God as revealed in Christ and grasped through the ministry and presence of the Holy Spirit who abides among us and lives within us.