

JOSHUA

- 1) The first half (ch 1-12) describes a systematized conquest of Canaan and is a continuation of the Pentateuch, perhaps by the same editor, and with it constitutes the Heptateuch.

Writings finalized seven centuries later, during the Babylonian exile. Covers the time from 1250-1225 BC, but it is now recognized that there was not a total conquest of the Land by one hero, Joshua. Hebrew tribesmen had been entering Palestine for centuries. These groups were therefore already present and were admitted to the Israelite tribal league at the covenant at Shechem (Ch 24), even though they hadn't taken part in the major assault. ///

It is also recognized that it took decades, perhaps 2-3 centuries -- up to David's time, perhaps -- for all of Palestine to be conquered. (See Deut 7:22 and Judg 2:20-23). For example, we read in 10:40-41 and 11:16-22 that no claim is made for the coastal plain, the Plains of Jezreel, Gezer, or Jerusalem. Robert Coote (NIB) finds no evidence that **any** large group of pastoral nomads **ever** entered Palestine at one time. ///

Joshua is part of the Deuteronomic History, composed during the reign of Josiah and Hezekiah to support the House of David's claim to the sovereignty of Israel. The deuteronomists composed the myth of a promise from God that Palestine would be theirs because Noah cursed Canaan in Gen 9:25-27. This was related to the myth of a unified nation descended from a single family (Abraham's). Joshua appears in an important role only twice in the Tetrateuch, both times to defeat the Amalekites (Exod 17:8-16, Numb 13-14), and probably was inserted there artificially by the deuteronomists in the court of Josiah and/or Hezekiah as part of the overall plot of the myth. (See NIB pp. 558-561). He is also mentioned parenthetically in Ex 24:13, 32:17, 33:11, and five times in Numbers. ///

The second half (Ch 13-21) went through several editions. At some time between the 10th and 7th century the Deuteronomic editor (who wrote and/or edited the Pentateuch) shaped the material into a narrative of the land division. He also used numerous bits of information from Judges, which are repeated or paralleled there. ///

The fall of Jericho, as important as it is in the book of Joshua, and as famous as it is to people who know nothing else in the Bible, is mentioned in only two other places, 2 Macabees 12:15-16, Hebrews 11:30

- 2) 2:1 – Abel-shittim, ten miles straight east of the Jordan, north of Mt. Nebo (Pisgah), their last encampment described in Numbers 33:49. ///

The entire story of Rahab (chap 2) is an effort by the deuteronomists to portray Rahab in two ways: 1) impoverishment in social terms -- she was a prostitute because she had no other means of support. 2) She represented the Canaanites in national terms. The first was meant to appeal to **Josiah's** subjects, the second to the landed elite who opposed Josiah's reforms but might be enticed to submit to those reforms. Scholars believe she was reduced to prostitution because her family lived in poverty, and poverty then as now was the main cause of prostitution. There is no basis for the later tradition that she was a madam or inn keeper. **But**, the consonants that make up the word for prostitute and innkeeper are the same: znh.

- 3) 2:24 – “Inhabitants” is better translated “landowners and rulers.”

- 4) 3:1-17 – The march through the Jordan is alluded to in several important passages in the OT and is very significant in the Gospels. See particularly Micah 6:1-5 where Joshua is not

- even mentioned. His name was probably added by the deuteronomists no earlier than Hezekiah's time. /// The crossing is a recapitulation of Moses' parting the waters of the Red Sea, and is later recapitulated in the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. (In turn, Jesus' baptism repeats the experience of Elisha (2 Kings 2). By showing this in his gospel, Mark lays the basis for including Gentiles in Jesus' Kingdom. /// Adam – near the junction of the Jabok and the Jordan, about 18 miles north of Jericho.
- 5) – 4:1 – In Micah 6:4-5 it is Moses, Aaron and Miriam who lead the Israelites out of slavery, and having them “pass over” from Shittim to Gilgal with no mention of Joshua. He was probably added to the story by the deuteronomists in Josiah's reign (639-609). /// The portrayal of crossing the Jordan on dry land is probably a re-enactment of the Red Sea crossing at Passover, which itself was probably introduced into the Exodus story based on 2 Kings 2:8, where Elijah parts the Jordan (in 9th century BCE) just before being taken up. One can read the song in Exodus 15:1-18 as if it were the Jordan, not the Red Sea.
- 6) 4:13 – Fits with Numb 26:7,18, 34, which counts 136,900 males in those three tribes.
- 7) 4:19 – Gilgal means "circle" and may refer to a circle of stones of cultish significance found there. A second meaning is from the root "to roll,"– see 5:9. Exact location of Gilgal is not known, but presumably just a few miles from Jericho. It was named for a memorial cairn, signifying the renewal of “the shame of Egypt.” In one sense a war memorial -- the war that was (slavery) and the war to come (Canaan). /// Gilgal has enormous significance in the OT. It is where Samuel anointed Saul as king of Israel (1 Samuel 11:14) and later determined to depose him because he had violated a battle command of Yahweh at Gilgal (Joshua 7:1-8), where Samuel anointed David king (1 Samuel 13:8-14), where occurs the turning point between Saul and David (1 Samuel 10:18) where Elsha joins a famine-stricken populace, and much later (8th century) as a shrine for Hosea and Amos and indeed for all of Israel for centuries.
- 8) 5:2 – Bronze but not iron tools and weapons were in use. So use of flint knives was to remember Abraham's circumcision before there were bronze and iron. /// This was a ritual circumcision. The Israelites were not circumcised twice! A better translation: “Start again to circumcise the Israelites,” renewing a ritual that had been abandoned for 40 years. Or, the first circumcision may have been merely a “dorsal slit” as the Egyptians did it, and therefore there would have still been a prepuce (foreskin). /// The circumcision passages were inserted by a priestly writer much later.
- 9) 6:19 – Reference to the “treasury of the Lord” is an anachronism because there was not yet a temple or a treasury. This passage was added much later, probably at the time of Josiah, and referred to David's shrine in Jerusalem. /// The “dedication to Yahweh” meant that every living thing had to be killed. This was a prevalent occurrence in the ancient Near East. /// The reference to iron is also an anachronism because it did not reach Palestine until the 10th century BCE.
- 10) 6:20 – Jericho -- six acres in size!!! Archaeological excavations have shown that the wall **did** fall flat, but there are few if any archaeological discoveries that corroborate the Biblical story. /// Robert Coote: “There is probably nothing in the Bible more offensive to modern sensibilities than God's sanction of genocide against the Canaanites.” There are three excuses, all inadequate: the Canaanites were wicked and deserved God's judgment, or the practice was common and thus the Israelites were no worse than their neighbors, or the practice negated an ethic of plunder and exploitation.
- 11) 6:26 – Archaeology shows that Jericho was not rebuilt until 800 BC. Also see 1 Kings 16:34

- for one example of effectiveness of the curse.
- 12) 7:1--8:29. The fall of Ai. Digs have shown that Ai was destroyed in 2200 BC, 900 years before Joshua, and was not rebuilt before the Israelite conquest. The probable explanation: when Ai was destroyed the inhabitants moved 1 1/2 miles east and built Bethel (which digs do show was built then). Bethel, whose population was that of Ai, was destroyed by Israel in c 1250, as the digs show. This is probably the same story that is told in Judg 1:22-26.
 - 13) 7:2 – “Ai” means ruin. The present-day name for Ai is el-Tell. “Tel” in Hebrew means ruin, and the artificial developed mounds scattered all over the Near East are called tels. This story explains how Ai became a ruin, as Bethel did in Josiah’s time. To the deuteronomists Ai stood symbolically for Bethel and its loathed cult. /// Two parallels to the story of Ai: 1) The battle at Gibeah between the Israelites and Benjaminites in Judges 20, a plot identical to the one at Ai, 2) The other is in Deuteronomy 1:9-45 which summarizes Numbers 13-14.
 - 14) 7:16ff – The main point of the stories of Rahab, Achan, and (in Chap 9) the Gibeonites, is that the Canaanites and Israelites are irreconcilable enemies. The counterpoint is that there can be exceptions. These may seem inconsistent, but were consistent with **Josiah’s** attempt to reconquer all of Israel again, and this is what the deuteronomists wanted to emphasize.
 - 15) 7:24-26 – These names are not listed in the LXX and are probably a gloss. Achor is five miles south of Jericho.
 - 16) 8:14 – The Arabah – a major region in Israel: Mt. Herman to the north, Red Sea to the south, including Sea of Galilee, Jordan River valley, Dead Sea, and the plains of Moab.
 - 17) 8:30-35 – Joshua follows the instructions of Moses as recorded in Deuteronomy 28:1-14. However, this passage is probably misplaced because the altar is built near Shechem which lies in the north of the highlands. Perhaps related to Deuteronomy 28:1-69 and Joshua 24 and may belong there. Or, it may belong after 9:1-2 because it is found there in the LXX. Or, following the circumcision rites in 5:2-8 as found in 4QJosh.
 - 18) 9:1ff – The accounts to follow of the conquest of the lowland northern kings and the highland southern kings are “literary compositions rather than historical reports” (Coote, NIB). “Yahweh’s act of provocation shifts the onus for the conquest onto the dispossessed rather than the usurper.” /// Late Bronze Age Canaan (Joshua’s time) suggests that Canaan society was splintered by conflicts between myriad tiny city states, whereas the Amarna letters written by numerous rival rulers to the Egyptian court in 14th century BCE seem to suggest that there were only a few rulers who had control of extensive areas. These differing conclusions were made by the deuteronomists during Josiah’s reform in order to give a specific setting. In the context of Josiah’s reform, the two “nations” represent antitheses. The Israelites were given “tribal” identities in theory but were actually severely curtailed by the royal court. /// Gibeon was not inhabited in Joshua’s time, but in David’s. The deuteronomists introduced this story to explain why the Gibeonites were patronized by David and to explain why they served as corvee to the temple in Jerusalem. /// This story, and most of the rest of Joshua, contradicts the point of view of much of the OT as well as the gospels and Paul’s letters, that the outsiders (Gentiles) were always intended by God to be allowed into the new covenant. /// See 2 Samuel 21:2 for Saul’s abrogation of the treaty mentioned in Joshua 9:15.
 - 19) 10:15 – This is a copyist’s error -- Joshua could not possibly have returned to Gilgal. It is

identical with vs 43 and belongs there. There are other puzzles and inconsistencies between this account of Joshua's conquest and other accounts, especially in Judges: 1) In 2 Sam 5:6-9, Jerusalem is conquered for the first time by David; 2) In Judg 1:4-13, Jerusalem, Hebron, and Debir are captured after Joshua dies; 3) In Joshua, the Judahites live in Jerusalem, in Judges it is the Benjamites; 4) In Judges, Caleb is not mentioned in the capture of Hebron, as in Joshua 15:13; 5) In Joshua the conquest is rapid and very nearly complete, whereas in Judges it was gradual and incomplete, with opponents continuing to cause trouble everywhere. The account in Judges is not likely to be more historically true than in Joshua. Both books reflect the monarchial policies of the 8th and 7th century BCE. The deuteronomists were not concerned with any of the inconsistencies; 6) other more minor items -- see NIB, p. 646.

- 20) 11:1ff – Believed by Coote and many scholars that this is the same battle detailed in Judges 4-5, between King Jabin leading a coalition of Canaanites against the Israelites in the Jezreel Valley.
- 21) 11:8 – Improbably far for it is well up into Lebanon, which was never under Israelite control. They were Phoenicians, also Canaanites racially and culturally (and invented the first alphabet).
- 22) 11:21 – A race of giants, perhaps Goliath's ancestors.
- 23) 12:9-24 – In the MT, each king's name is followed by the word "one," an intriguing mystery and is missing from the LXX manuscripts. Scholars believe the entire list was introduced by the deuteronomists in Josiah's time at his request.
- 24) Chapters 13-21 – The story of the distribution of the land is an attempt by the deuteronomists of Josiah's time to explain how the tribes got their land. It is likely that the allotment of land was actually done by negotiation and by lot.
- 25) 13:1-7 – Not controlled until the time of David. Gath was the home of Goliath. The land referred to in v. 3 is Philistine land, though listing the towns is an anachronism: none had been settled in Joshua's time. The land in v. 4 is the Canaanite coast between Philistia and Phoenicia. The land in v. 5, Sidonia, was the contemporary term for Phoenicia.

- 26) 13:8 – The rest of the book of Joshua is an idealized version of the distribution, not finalized till the monarchy was established by David. Neither Gaza nor Jerusalem were taken until David's time. Coote believes that this list of defeated cities reflects the goal of **Josiah** to bring them under his jurisdiction. This story is therefore “a fictionalized account of an existing administrative arrangement.” But the tribal lists probably did exist before his time and the deuteronomist made use of them. “The persistence of twelve tribal names in exactly the same genealogical relationship over several centuries of extreme social change” is implausible.
- 27) 13:13 – The first of five references to the incomplete dispossession of the Promised Land. The others are 14:12, 15:63, 16:10, 17:12-18.
- 28) 14:1-4 – Distribution of land by lot was a common practice for many centuries and was prevalent at the time of Josiah when Joshua was written. But the tribes had already occupied the various parts of Israel by Josiah's time so this story of distribution is fictional. To prevent a scrambling for land, the priests and Joshua divided it by lot, probably in rituals using the Urim and Thummim. The two lists of Judah's allotment (15:1-12, 20-63) cannot pre-date the 7th century since they include towns not settled before then. /// Eleazar was Aaron's son.
- 29) 14:6 – Caleb and Joshua were the only two spies that reported that they wanted Moses to take the army north early in their desert wanderings.
- 30) 18:1 – Shiloh was the home of Hilkiah, the priest of Josiah's reform who found part of Moses' Torah (probably Deuteronomy) in the temple. His name means “the priesthood of Jahweh is my portion” -- so the deuteronomists finished the allotment of land at Shiloh. Here the remaining seven tribes received their land, but the Levites got no land, only the priesthood as their portion. /// The deuteronomists thought of themselves as the heirs to the thin line of priests that ended with Abiathar's banishment to Anathoth (by Solomon) and replacement by Zadok. They felt it was now their turn to have their privileges returned and this lies behind the role of Shiloh in the book of Joshua.
- 31) 20:1-9 – Originally, “asylum” was provided by altars, as prescribed in Exodus 21:33-34 and executed in 1 Kings 1:50: “Adonijah, in fear of Solomon, also left; he went and seized the horns of the altar...and said, ‘Let King Solomon first swear that he will not kill me...’” The idea of urban asylum was originated by the deuteronomists in Josiah's time because altars outside Jerusalem were prohibited. They were major towns in the 7th century but mentioned only once in Joshua 21. There is no evidence in the priestly law that refuge towns existed before Josiah's time.
- 32) 21:1ff -- See Numbers 35:1-8 for justification for the following distribution of tribes and families.
- 33) 21:43-45 – Supreme irony. Contradicted many times in the book of Joshua.
- 34) **Chapter 22** – The point of this story is that to the deuteronomists of Josiah's time, the Jordan is not a **natural** boundary even if it is an administrative boundary.
- 35) 24:1 – Near Nablus, between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, now Tel Balatah. This event was probably not at the end of Joshua's life, rather should precede Ch 11, i.e. before the conquest of the North.
- 36) 24:25 – Closely linked to 8:30-35. The “law” referred to here is the whole law of Moses -- not just the laws of Deuteronomy -- as it Nehemiah 8:18 -- so probably was written in **post-exilic** times.