

# JOSHUA

## Short Version

### Introduction

With the book of Joshua, we come to a new section of the Bible, sometimes called the “Historical Books” and sometimes known as “Deuteronomist History” (DH). A word about the terms *historical* and *Deuteronomist*.

**History in the Bible.** Designating a book of the Bible as *historical* does not mean it contains history as we understand it. We think of history as a set of verifiable events, as linear reality, one event following another. The six historical books that we are about to study tell the story from a *theological perspective*. This means that the primary focus of the authors of these books is not history but rather the *interpretation* of the events from God’s perspective. As we shall see, the aim of the writer was to show that things went well for Israel when they followed God’s law, as outlined by Moses in the book of Deuteronomy.

**Deuteronomistic History.** Most scholars group Joshua, Judges, 1&2 Samuel, and 1&2 Kings, together and call them Deuteronomistic History (DH) because they believe that all six books came from the same school of writers who were deeply influenced by the book of Deuteronomy. It is believed that these writers lived around the time of Israel’s exile and wrote the books to explain why Israel had lost the land. It was not because of God’s unfaithfulness to his promises, but because of Israel’s unfaithfulness to their covenant with God, especially to their promise not to worship the false gods of the Canaanites. The common thread that moves through Israel’s Deuteronomistic History (Joshua to 2 Kings) is the belief that if Israel is faithful to God, she will prosper, but if she turns her back on God, she will be punished. This precept shared by the above six books of the Bible is sometimes referred to as the *Deuteronomic Principle*: faithfulness will be reward-ed; unfaithfulness will be punished. We are now ready to look at the first of the six books in this section of the Bible.

### Purpose of the Book of Joshua

In the context of the Deuteronomistic History, the specific purpose of the Book of Joshua, with its emphasis on the conquest and division of the land, is to show the fidelity of God to the promises made in the past to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), Isaac (Gen 26:3), and

Jacob (Gen 28:13), and to Moses and the Israelites (Ex 6:7-8). Hopefully, the Israelites now living in exile having lost their land, can begin to trust again in God’s willingness and power to restore them to the land if they would return to following God’s law. So we can say that the Book of Joshua was written to stir a spirit of obedience and commitment to God and the Torah. The Book assumes that Israel’s exile from the land was not due to any military disadvantage, but to their disobedience to the Torah.

**What is the story?** Still camped east of the Jordan River, the Israelites spy on Jericho, then prepare to march across the river. Joshua leads many successful campaigns of conquest in northern, southern, and central Canaan. Finally conquered, the land is allotted to the tribes. Joshua makes a farewell speech during which the covenant is renewed. Joshua dies and is buried.

### Division of Chapters

Joshua can be divided into three main parts:

**PART ONE:** Conquest of Canaan (chs 1-12)

**PART TWO:** Division of the land amongst the tribes (chs 13-29)

**PART THREE:** Joshua’s farewell address (chs 23-24)

*A final introductory note.* If you are not familiar with the Book of Joshua, brace yourself for what may be the most violent book of the Bible, making it all the more challenging because God is seen as the one ordering the Israelites to deal with their enemies in a most violent way.

### Suggested text to read

**Chapter 1:1-11-** Promise of divine assistance

**Chapter 2-** Spies saved by Rahab

**Chapter 3-** Crossing into Jordan – one of the key events in Israel’s history

**Chapter 4-** Memorial stones

**Chapter 5-** Rites at Gilgal

**Chapter 6-** Fall of Jericho 6:26 states: *“They observed the ban putting to the sword all living creatures in the city: men and women, young and old, as well as oxen, sheep and asses.”*

For a commentary on this reprehensible practice see article 18 pages 3-4.

**Chapter 7-** Sin of Ahas has community consequences

**Chapter 10-** God works two nature miracles to help the Israelites

**Chapter 23-24-** Joshua’s final address