

10-2018

A Biographical Study of Joshua

Harold Willmington

Liberty University, hwillmington@liberty.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/ot_biographies



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Willmington, Harold, "A Biographical Study of Joshua" (2018). *Old Testament Biographies*. 43.
https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/ot_biographies/43

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the A Biographical Study of Individuals of the Bible at Scholars Crossing. It has been accepted for inclusion in Old Testament Biographies by an authorized administrator of Scholars Crossing. For more information, please contact scholarlycommunications@liberty.edu.

Joshua

CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY

I. Joshua, the trip to Canaan

A. From Egypt to Sinai

1. Functioning as a soldier (Exod. 17:8-16)—“Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: to morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill . . . And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword” (Exod. 17:8-10, 13).
2. Functioning as a servant
 - a. During the entire Exodus march, Joshua served as a faithful servant to Moses (Exod. 24:13; Num. 11:28).
 - b. In fact, his original name, Oshea, meaning “salvation,” was changed by Moses to that of Joshua, meaning “Jehovah is salvation” (Num. 13:16).
 - c. He was a man filled with God’s Spirit (Num. 27:18; Deut. 34:9).

B. At Sinai—He accompanied Moses partway up Mt. Sinai, where the great lawgiver received the Ten Commandments (Exod. 24:13; 32:17).

C. From Sinai to Kadesh-barnea—He had his request denied by Moses that two prophets named Eldad and Medad be forbidden to prophesy in the camp (Num. 11:26-29).

D. At Kadesh-barnea

1. His trip to the promised land—Joshua, representing the tribe of Ephraim, was one of the 12 men sent by Moses to search out the land of Canaan (Num. 13:1-3; 8, 16).
2. His testimony concerning the promised land—Upon the return of the 12 men, only two—Joshua and Caleb—gave a positive report about Canaan (Num. 14:6-9).
 - a. They said God had indeed provided a land flowing with milk and honey.
 - b. They said God indeed would protect them in that land. “Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not” (Num. 14:9).

E. From Kadesh-barnea to the eastern bank of the Jordan River (Num. 27:15-23)

1. The concern of the lawgiver—“And Moses spake unto the LORD, saying, Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, Which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the LORD be not as sheep which have no shepherd” (Num. 27:15-17).
2. The command of the Lord—“And the LORD said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him; And set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight. And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient” (Num. 27:18-20).

F. On the eastern bank of the Jordan River

1. Joseph and Moses (Deut. 31:7-8, 23)—“And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the LORD hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it. And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed” (Deut. 31:7-8).
2. Joshua and God—
 - a. God assured Joshua of victory before the death of Moses. “And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thy days approach that thou must die: call Joshua, and present yourselves in the tabernacle of the congregation, that I may give him a charge. And Moses and Joshua went, and presented themselves in the tabernacle of the congregation. And the LORD appeared in the tabernacle in a pillar of a cloud: and the pillar of the cloud stood over the door of the tabernacle” (Deut. 31:14-15).
 - b. God reassured Joshua following the death of Moses (Josh. 1:1-9).
 - (1) What Joshua should do—“Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swore unto their fathers to give them. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Josh. 1:2, 6, 8).
 - (2) What God would do—“Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses . . . There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee . . . The Lord said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee” (Josh. 1:3, 5; 3:7).
3. Joshua and the people—“Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, Pass through the host, and command the people, saying, Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the LORD your God giveth you to possess it . . . Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves: for to morrow the Lord will do wonders among you” (Josh. 1:10-11, 3:5).
4. Joshua and the priests—“And Joshua spake unto the priests, saying, Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass over before the people. And they took up the ark of the covenant, and went before the people. And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the LORD, the LORD of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon an heap” (Josh. 3:6, 13).

5. Joshua and the two and a half tribes (Josh. 1:12-18)—The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh met with Joshua concerning a previous agreement they had had with Moses.
 - a. The request involved—That these two and a half tribes be allowed to settle on the eastern side of the Jordan River.
 - b. The requirement involved—This request would only be granted if they agreed to cross over the Jordan and help the remaining nine and a half tribes defeat the Canaanites.
6. Joshua and the two spies (Josh. 2:1-23)
 - a. Their trip—“Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went, and came into an harlot’s house, named Rahab, and lodged there” (Josh. 2:1).
 - b. Their testimony—“The two men returned, and descended from the mountain, and passed over, and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and told him all things that befell them: And they said unto Joshua, Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do not faint because of us” (Josh. 2:23-24).

II. Joshua, the taking of Canaan

A. The crossing involved

1. The path in the river (Josh. 3:15-17; 4:17-18)
 - a. The priests advanced to the river, carrying the Ark of the Covenant.
 - b. When their feet touched the waters, the Jordan was rolled back.
 - c. After all Israel had crossed over on dry ground, the priests stepped out, causing the waters to return.
2. The pyramid of stones—On the west bank (before the waters returned) Joshua chose 12 men, one from each tribe, for a special task (Josh. 4:1-9, 20-24).
 - a. What they were to do—Each man was to carry a rock from the middle of the Jordan to be used in constructing a pile of boulders on the west bank.
 - b. Why they were to do this—These rocks would serve as a memorial for the following generations, reminding them of God’s faithfulness in parting the river.
 - c. Joshua himself built a pile of stones in the middle of the Jordan itself for a similar purpose.
3. The panic of the heathen—“And it came to pass, when all the kings of the Amorites, which were on the side of Jordan westward, and all the kings of the Canaanites, which were by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel, until we were passed over, that their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them any more, because of the children of Israel” (Josh. 5:1).

4. The purification of the people (Josh. 5:2-9)—“The Lord said unto Joshua, Make thee sharp knives, and circumcise again the children of Israel the second time” (Josh. 5:2).
 - a. The need involved—No male in that entire generation, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, had been circumcised as proscribed by Abraham.
 - b. The name involved—The location where the ceremony took place was called Gilgal, meaning “to roll away,” in this case, the reproach of Egypt.
 5. The Passover of the lamb—“The children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho” (Josh. 5:10).
 6. The provision of the land—“And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes, and parched corn in the selfsame day. And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year” (Josh. 5:11-12).
 7. The presence of the Lord
 - a. The warfare by Christ—“And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?” (Josh. 5:13).
 - b. The worship of Christ—“And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my Lord unto his servant? And the captain of the LORD's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so” (Josh. 5:14-15).
- B. The campaigns involved
1. The central campaign—Here the main action took place in two cities and upon two mountains.
 - a. The two cities
 - (1) Jericho—Joshua received instructions from God concerning the battle against Jericho (Josh. 6:1-25).
 - (a) What Israel should do
 - i. The army was to march around the city once daily for six straight days.
 - ii. On the seventh day, the army was to march seven times around Jericho.
 - iii. During the seventh trip, the priests were to follow, blowing their trumpets.
 - iv. The people were then to give a loud shout.
 - v. No soldier was to take any of the spoils of the war for himself.

- vi. Only Rahab the harlot, her immediate family, and anyone found in her house were to be spared.
- (b) What God would do
 - i. He promised to cause the walls of Jericho to fall flat.
 - ii. God kept his word and Jericho was taken.
 - (c) What Joshua then did—He pronounced a prophetic oath over the devastated city. “Cursed be the man before the Lord, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it” (Josh. 6:26). *Note:* See 1 Kings 16:34 for the amazing fulfillment of this prophecy.
- (2) Ai—Joshua sent 3,000 soldiers to defeat the enemy at Ai, only to have his troops themselves utterly defeated (Josh. 7:1-26).
- (a) The concern over this defeat
 - i. Joshua tore his clothes, sprinkled dust on his head, and fell on his face before the Ark of God.
 - ii. He then complained to the Lord for allowing this defeat, suggesting it would have been better had Israel remained on the eastern bank of the Jordan.
 - (b) The causes leading to the defeat
 - i. God’s rebuke—He told Joshua to stop complaining and stand on his feet.
 - ii. God revelation—Joshua was told Israel had lost the battle because of sin. Someone had disobeyed by stealing and lying.
 - (c) The course of action in light of this defeat—God told Joshua that on the following morning he would single out the particular tribe involved, then the clan within the tribe, and finally the family within the clan.
 - (d) The culprit punished for this defeat—The divine finger pointed to the tribe of Judah, the clan of the Zarahites, and the family of Zabdi, the immediate family of Achan.
 - i. What he did—Achan confessed to stealing a beautiful Babylonian robe, 200 shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold.
 - ii. How he died—Achan and his family (who had doubtless had played a part in his crime) were stoned to death and their bodies were burned.
 - (e) The conquest following this defeat—Joshua was now reassured that Israel would be able to defeat Ai, and quickly devised a battle plan (Josh. 8:1-28).
 - i. He chose 30,000 of his best fighting men, who were ordered to lie in ambush behind the city of Ai.

- ii. Joshua then attacked Ai with another army and pretended to retreat, that the enemy might be drawn out from the city to counterattack.
 - iii. When this happened, the 30,000 men entered Ai and destroyed it.
 - b. The two mountains (Josh. 8:30-35)
 - (1) Joshua built an altar on Mt. Ebal as Moses had previously commanded.
 - (2) He made it of uncut stones on which no iron tool had been used.
 - (3) As the people watched, he carved upon the stones the Ten Commandments.
 - (4) He then sacrificed burnt and peace offerings upon the altar.
 - (5) Finally, he ordered the priests to read out loud the entire Law of Moses to the people.
 - (a) The blessings for obeying the Law were read from the top of Mt. Gerizim.
 - (b) The curses for disobeying the Law were read from the top of Mt. Ebal.
- 2. The southern campaign
 - a. The deception of Joshua—Joshua was deceived by a pagan group in Canaan known as the Gibeonites (Josh. 9:1-27).
 - (1) The content of this deception
 - (a) How they deceived Joshua—A delegation met with Joshua, pretending they had come from a far country. They carried worn-out sacks and old wine skins. They wore patched sandals and ragged clothes. Their food supply was dry and moldy (Josh. 9:3-13).
 - (b) Why they deceived Joshua—They feared the military power of Israel and realized Joshua would not sign a peace treaty with the local Canaanites, which they were. But he might do so with a delegation from a far-off country.
 - (2) The cause of the deception—Why did Israel and Joshua fall for this trick? The reason is given in nine short words. We are told that Israel “asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord” (Josh. 9:14).
 - (3) The consequences following this deception.
 - (a) Only after signing the treaty did Joshua learn the truth. Israel had given its word. The enemy could not be harmed.
 - (b) Joshua did, however, make them wood cutters and water carriers (Josh. 9:27).
 - b. The destruction by Joshua—Joshua waged war against Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem, and his allies (Josh. 10:1-27).
 - (1) The reason for the battle
 - (a) Adoni-zedek attacked the Gibeonites for signing a peace treaty with Joshua.
 - (b) The city of Gibeon appealed to Joshua for help.

- (2) The reassurance before the battle—“The Lord said unto Joshua, Fear them not: for I have delivered them into thine hand; there shall not a man of them stand before thee” (Josh. 10:8).
 - (3) The results of the battle
 - (a) God hurled down large hailstones from the sky upon the enemy.
 - (b) Joshua then worked one of the great miracles found in the Old Testament. “He said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the Valley of Aijalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. . . So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it . . . for the LORD fought for Israel” (Josh. 10:12-14).
 - (4) The reprisal following the battle
 - (a) Following his great victory, Joshua captured and executed the five enemy kings who had declared war on him (Josh. 10:26).
 - (b) He then conquered the eight key southern Canaanite cities (Josh. 10:28-43).
3. The northern campaign—Joshua defeated the allied northern Canaanite forces near the waters of Merom, just north of the Galilean Sea (Josh. 11:1-22).
- a. He burned Hazor, the key city of the confederacy.
 - b. He hamstringed the enemy’s horses and burned their chariots. “So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war” (Josh. 11:23).

III. Joshua, the time in Canaan

A. The casting of lots—He divided the land among the 12 tribes.

1. The parties involved—He was aided in this by Eleazar the high priest and the leaders of Israel (Josh. 19:51).
2. The place involved—This was done in Shiloh, the location of the tabernacle (Josh. 18:1, 10).
3. The procedure involved—The land allotment was determined by the casting of lots (Josh. 18:10; 19:51).
4. The partitions involved
 - a. Land east of the Jordan, as assigned to the two and a half tribes (Josh. 13:15-32)
 - b. Land west of the Jordan, as assigned to the nine and a half tribes (Josh. 15–19)

B. The champion of God—Caleb (Josh. 14:6-14)

1. His review of the past—“Forty years old was I when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land; and I brought him word again as it was in mine heart. Nevertheless my brethren that went up with me made the heart of the people melt: but I wholly followed the LORD my God. And Moses swore on that day, saying, Surely the land whereon thy feet have trodden shall be thine inheritance, and thy children's for ever, because thou hast wholly followed the LORD my God.

And now, behold, the LORD hath kept me alive, as he said, these forty and five years, even since the LORD spake this word unto Moses, while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness: and now, lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in" (Josh. 14:7-11).

2. His request for the future—"Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the Lord spake in that day" (Josh. 14:12).
- C. The cities of refuge—Joshua designated the six cities of refuge (Josh. 20:1-9).
1. Cities west of the Jordan River
 - a. Kadesh, in the tribe of Naphtali
 - b. Shechem, in the tribe of Ephraim
 - c. Hebron, in the tribe of Judah
 2. Cities east of the Jordan River
 - a. Bezer, in the tribe of Reuben
 - b. Ramoth, in the tribe of Gad
 - c. Golan, in the tribe of Manasseh
 3. Joshua then assigned 48 cities to the Levites (Josh. 21:1-8).
- D. The challenge of faith
1. Given by Joshua to the two and a half tribes (Josh. 22:1-34)
 - a. The contents of the message
 - (1) He commended them for their obedience to God on the west side of the river. "Ye have kept all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I commanded you: Ye have not left your brethren these many days unto this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the LORD your God" (Josh. 22:2-3).
 - (2) He cautioned them to continue their obedience on the east side of the river. "Behold, I have divided unto you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, even unto the great sea westward. And the LORD your God, he shall expel them from before you, and drive them from out of your sight; and ye shall possess their land, as the LORD your God hath promised unto you" (Josh. 23:4-5).
 - b. The confusion following the messages
 - (1) What the two and a half tribes actually did—En route home, they built an altar on the western bank of the Jordan before crossing over to serve as a reminder of their common heritage with the remaining nine and a half tribes.
 - (2) What the nine and a half tribes assumed they did—They at first misinterpreted this, viewing it as an altar of rebellion. The matter was quickly clarified, however, averting a possible civil war.

2. Given by Joshua to the nine and a half tribes (Josh. 23:1-16)—He reviewed what God had done for them in former days. “Ye have seen all that the LORD your God hath done unto all these nations because of you; for the LORD your God is he that hath fought for you. For the LORD hath driven out from before you great nations and strong: but as for you, no man hath been able to stand before you unto this day. And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof” (Josh. 23:3, 9, 14).
3. Given by Joshua to the entire nation (Josh. 24:1-13)
 - a. God’s covenant with Israel was reviewed—Joshua summarized the faithfulness of God in the past (Josh. 24:1-13).
 - (1) He brought Abraham from a pagan land to Canaan.
 - (2) He gave him many descendants through Isaac and Jacob.
 - (3) He called Moses and Aaron to lead Israel out of Egypt.
 - (4) He fought Israel’s battles in the wilderness.
 - (5) He brought their generation into the promised land.
 - b. God’s covenant with Israel was renewed.
 - (1) The consecration of the people—They promised to fear, obey, and serve the Lord.
 - (2) The contract of the prophet—Joshua drew up for them the terms of their agreement, recording it in the book of the Law of God. He then took a large stone and set it under an oak tree near the tabernacle to serve as a reminder of this renewed covenant. Joshua died at the age of 110 and was buried in the hill country of Ephraim (Josh. 24:29-30).

THEOLOGICAL SUMMARY

- I. Joshua is referred to on only two occasions in the New Testament, and both are found in the book of Hebrews. His frailty is mentioned—The author showed that Joshua was inferior to Jesus, for he was unable to provide that perfect rest that only Christ can offer (Heb. 4:8-9).
- II. His faith is mentioned—“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days” (Heb. 11:30).

STATISTICS

Father: Nun (Exod. 33:11)

First mention: Exodus 17:9

Final mention: Hebrews 4:8

Meaning of his name: “Jehovah saves”

Frequency of his name: Referred to 201 times

Biblical books mentioning him: Eight books (Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 Kings, 1 Chronicles, Hebrews)

Occupation: Soldier and national leader

Place of birth: Egypt

Place of death: Hill country of Ephraim (Josh. 24:29-30)

Age at death: 110 (Josh. 24:29)

Important fact about his life: He was Moses' successor who led Israel into the promised land (Josh. 1:1-3).