

Joshua Bible Studies – Group Member Notes

Introduction

After the Israelites wander for forty years in the wilderness, it looks as though a new era is on the horizon as the descendants of Abraham prepare to enter the land God has promised. Will they trust the promises of God? Will they take the land? Will God be faithful to His promises?

To give your group a quick introduction to the book of Joshua, it is worth watching the Bible Project's video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JqOqJlFF_eU

Although the book of Joshua is a book of history of God's people, Israel, there is plenty in it for us to learn today. Take for example:

"For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day." (Hebrews 4:8).

What does this verse mean? Well you need to wait and see as we go through the studies.

Context

After creation and the Fall, God makes promises to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. These promises include:

- God will make Abraham into a great nation
- God will give Abraham's descendants a land (see Appendix A for who Abraham's descendants are)
- God will make Abraham into a great nation
- God will bless those who bless Israel and curse those who curse Israel
- God will make Abraham's name great
- All the peoples of the earth will be blessed through Abraham

In Genesis 15:

- Abraham was justified by faith because he believed God's promises (15:6)
- God made a covenant with Abraham and by that covenant He promised him a glorious inheritance (15:13-14, 18-21)

See Appendix B for an outline of the whole Bible and where Joshua fits in it.

Joshua

There are a number of incidents that involve Joshua in the lead up to the book of Joshua:

- Exodus 17:9 is the first mention of Joshua in the Bible. There is no background given but the text assumes you already know who he is.
 - Here, he is the military commander who defeats the Amalekites (Ex 17:8-13)
- He has been Moses' aid since his youth (Ex 33:11; Num 11:28)
- He accompanied Moses up to Mount Sinai (Ex 24:13)

Joshua Bible Studies – Group Member Notes

- Joshua witnessed the Golden Calf incident (Ex 32). Here he learnt about the terribleness of sin.
- Joshua would not leave the tent of meeting where God appeared (Ex 33:9-11). He learned about the reality of God in His glory.
- Moses would not tolerate Joshua glorifying him (Num 11:24-29)
- He is one of the 12 spies sent into the land, and one of only two who believe Israel can take the land (Num 13-14). He learnt that when the majority were against him, he was willing to stand with God.
 - Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years until everyone over the age of 20 died, except for Joshua and Caleb (see Appendix C for a map of the ‘wanderings’)
- Moses gives Joshua his name which means “Yahweh saves”. It was Hoshea which means “salvation” (Num 13:16).
- Joshua was designated as Moses’ successor by the Lord (Num 27:15-23; Deut 31:1-8)
 - He was a man in whom God’s Spirit resided (Num 27:18)
- Joshua was the one to lead Israel into the Promised Land (Deut 1:38; 3:28; 31:23)
 - Joshua learns how war must be conducted (Deut 7; 20)
- Joshua was the one to divide the land among the tribes (Num 34:17)
 - Joshua learns how the land should be distributed (Num 32; 34; 35)
 - And he learns that Gad and Reuben will not inherit their assigned land east of the Jordan River unless they enter Canaan with the rest of the tribes and play their part in its armed conquest (Num 32:28)
- Joshua learns how God’s love (Deut 4:37-38), not Israel’s power (Deut 8:17) or righteousness (Deut 9:6), secures the inheritance
- Moses charged Joshua to be “strong and courageous” (Deut 31:7)
- God will be with him and told him to be “strong and courageous” (Deut 31:23)

The book of Joshua covers about a thirty year period of Israel’s history under the leadership of Joshua, as Moses successor. He would have been eighty years old when he led the conquest of Canaan after the forty year wilderness journey (Ex 16:35). He was eighty five years old at the end of the conquest (Josh 14:10), and he died at the age of one hundred and ten (Josh 24:29), thirty years after entering the Promised Land and seventy years after the Exodus.

Prophets

It should also be noted that Joshua is the first book of the ‘Prophets’. The Prophets begin with God calling Joshua to be careful to do all that “Moses my servant” commanded (Josh 1:7-8). And they end with Yahweh’s call in Malachi to “remember the law of my servant Moses” (Mal 4:4). The Prophets (Josh 1:8) and the Writings (Psalm 1:2) both open with commands to “meditate day and night” on God’s Law.

The Land

The foundation for the book of Joshua is really the book of Deuteronomy. Joshua is going to obey the Law given by God to Moses. And concerning the land, Deuteronomy makes a number of important claims:

Joshua Bible Studies – Group Member Notes

- The land will be a place of obedience where God’s people can serve God – Deut 4:1
- The land is God’s gift, an inheritance – Deut 6:10-11
- The land is a place of blessing and of rest – Deut 7:13-15
- The land is a good land, a land flowing with milk and honey – Deut 8:7-10
- The land is the promised land, God is faithful to His promises – Deut 9:4-5
- The land is God’s land – Deut 11:10-12

Structure

A simple structure for the book of Joshua can be seen looking at key words. Here’s one way of breaking up the book:

- Chapters 1-5: Cross over into the Promised Land ¹
- Chapters 6-8: Taking the Land ²
- Chapters 9-12: They took the land ³
- Chapters 13-21: The division of the land amongst the tribes ⁴
- Chapters 22-24: The purpose of the land is as a place where God’s people serve the Lord ⁵

A more complex structure can be found in Appendix D.

Recommended Commentaries

Three very good commentaries on Joshua are:

- *Joshua: No Falling Words* by Dale Ralph Davis
- *Joshua: People of God’s Purpose* by David Jackman
- *Joshua: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* by David Howard

Summary

At the beginning of Joshua, God’s people are finally going to enter the land promised to Abraham. But given Israel’s track record of disobedience, what will happen as they enter the land?

¹ This is highlighted by words related to ‘cross’ as in cross over the Jordan (which is used 15 times out of 20 in Joshua, in these chapters)

² This is highlighted by words related to ‘take’ as in take the land (which is used 10 times out of 19)

³ This is highlighted by words related to ‘took’ as in they took the land (which is used 14 times out of 30)

⁴ This is highlighted by words related to ‘divide’ (which is used 9 times out of 13)

⁵ This is highlighted by words related to ‘serve’ (which is used 19 times out of 45)

Joshua Bible Studies – Group Member Notes

Study 1 – Joshua 1 to 2

1. What thoughts, questions or comments do you have about the book of Joshua?
2. Have you ever lost someone that was a big inspiration for your life? How did that affect you?

Read Joshua 1

Moses has died (1:1)⁶. What do you do when the servant of the Lord dies and a raging river lies between you and the land that you are to inherit? Your greatest leader is dead, so now rise and cross over into the land. What???

The first chapter divides nicely into three sections. This chapter is like the contents page of the book of Joshua:

Table of Contents Item:	Corresponds to:
get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites (1:2-5)	Israel conquers Canaan (chs 1-12)
you will lead these people to inherit the land (1:6)	Israel's inheritance distributed (chs 13-21)
Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law (1:7-9)	Covenant renewals (chs 22-24)

3. What three things does God commit Himself to in verses 3 to 6?
4. Are these three promises of Land, Victory, and Presence, also to Christians today?
5. But what is stated in verse 4 is much more land than Israel ever is. Why the difference?
6. How does this relate to us now?
7. Three times God tells Joshua to be “strong and courageous” (1:6, 7, 9). What does this mean? Read Deuteronomy 31:1-13 for some context.
8. Why is being strong and courageous so important? For Israel? For us?

Moses encouraged Israel by reminding them that God would never leave them or forsake them (Deut 31:6). God promised Joshua that He would never leave him or forsake him (Joshua 1:5). And He promises the same thing for us as Christians (Hebrews 13:5).

9. How does Joshua respond?
10. What do we learn from verses 12 to 15?

⁶ It is worth noting that Moses is called “the servant of the Lord” seven times by the Lord, whereas Joshua is called “Moses’ aide”. It is not until Joshua 24:29 that Joshua is also called “the servant of the Lord”.

Joshua Bible Studies – Group Member Notes

Read Joshua 2

The promised salvation of God is on offer to all, sometimes even to the most unlikely of people, who fear the Lord and repent.

11. What has God already done?

At the end of verse 7, we are left with the tension of 'will the spies escape'? This is not resolved until verse 15, and this highlights the importance of what is in between – Rahab's confession of faith (vv8-14).

12. Why does Rahab have faith in God?
13. What is she commended for?
14. Why are faith and works so important for us?
15. What does Rahab following the Lord anticipate?
16. What does Rahab's example teach you about the similarity of hers and your experience?

Summary

Chapter 1 gives us an introduction to what Joshua is about. God wants to give Israel a land, the Promised Land. Will they obey God?

But to obey God they will need to be strong and courageous because they will face many struggles. Israel starts off obeying God, but then surprisingly, a Canaanite shows great faith in wanting to follow God as well. Rahab teaches us why we should love God: because of who He is and what He does.

So what will happen as Israel enters the Promised Land?

Joshua Bible Studies – Group Member Notes

Study 2 – Joshua 3:1 to 5:12

Last week we saw that Israel is on the edge of the Promised Land. Joshua and his people will need to be strong and courageous to receive the land God gives them. Joshua sends spies to check out Jericho. Miraculously, Rahab the Canaanite declares her faith in God and hides the spies.

This study focuses on Joshua 3:1 to 5:12. Chapters 3 and 4 look at the crossing of the Jordan. And the first part of chapter 5 looks at the preparation required for God's people to be in the land. It should be noted that the verb 'to cross' is used twenty two times in chapters 3 and 4. This is a very important event. Finally, after centuries of waiting, the Israelites were now about to cross into the land promised to Abraham their ancestor.

1. Prior to the book of Joshua, what amazing things has God done for His people?

Read Joshua 3

2. What is the focal point of 3:1-4 and why?
3. Why did God choose this method to give His people the land?
4. How do the Israelites show their faith in God (3:4-6)?
5. What miracle does God do? And what does this remind you of?
6. What is God teaching about Himself here?

Read Joshua 4:1-5:12

7. Why in 4:4 do twelve men get the stones?
8. What is the significance of the pile of stones?
9. Why the repetition of 'your God' in 4:23-24? Why did God do what He has done in these chapters?
10. From chapter 5, what preparations need to be done before Israel attacks Jericho? Why?
11. What does circumcision look like for Christian's today?
12. Interestingly, the day after the Passover the manna from heaven stopped (5:11-12). Why do you think this is the case?
13. Do you have confidence that God's promises are for you? How is this seen in your life now?

Summary

It's happening. God's people miraculously cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land. God is going to fulfil His promise in this generation. This is so important, God gets the united Israelites to create a memorial so that future generations will be able to learn about what God did by giving His people the land. Now that they are in the land, they need to be God's holy people. This starts with the men being circumcised to show they are God's people. They can now enjoy their first Passover over meal in the land, which again is a reminder of God's great act of redemption in saving Israel from slavery in Egypt.

As Christians, we too need to regularly remind ourselves of what God has done for us, in Jesus dying on the cross to pay the price that our sins deserve. And this means that we can live with God in His ultimate land, heaven.

Joshua Bible Studies – Group Member Notes

Study 3 – Joshua 5:13-6:27

The whole book of Joshua is focused on the possessing of the Promised Land. The opening chapters show Joshua as the leader through whom God will give the land to His people – he is the one God is with and to whom He will grant success (1:2-6). Entry into the land is then by God's hand and is explicitly linked with the Exodus as part of God's gracious redemption (salvation).

Once in the land the act of circumcision and celebration of the Passover function as clear identity markers: the Israelites are to live in the land as God's people, faithful to His covenant and remembering His redemption (5:2-12).

Jericho is then the first act of 'possessing' the land. Jericho is paradigmatic of possessing the land – what happens here is then repeated in later chapters to other cities. If Jericho falls then the land is theirs.

There is a broader context specifically related to the battle for Jericho and that is the commands for battles given in Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy 20 distinguishes between the instructions:

- For battles which are against cities 'that are at a distance from you' (verses 1-15) ie those outside the land;
- and the battles against the cities in the land that God had promised them (verses 16-20).

So what happens in the Promised Land is unique, not a model for future warfare outside the land. This introduces the theological important concept of the things 'dedicated' or 'devoted' to the Lord.

1. What are some of your concerns or questions about passages like the one we are looking at today on the fall of Jericho?

Read Joshua 5:13-15

2. What do you learn from this passage?
3. Who do you think "the commander of the Lord's army" is?
4. Why does he answer Joshua's question with 'neither' (5:14)?

Read Joshua 6:1-27

Joshua 6:1 raises the question, how are the Israelites going to get into Jericho? No one can come in or go out!

5. So how does the Lord propose the Israelites will get into Jericho (6:2-5)?
6. What is the purpose of the ark in marching around Jericho?

How do we reconcile the conquest of Canaan with God's love for the world?

Patrick Schreiner defines God's Kingdom as "the King's power over the King's people in the King's place". Clearly, at this point in the Bible, the King's people are the people of Israel (which includes foreigners eg Rahab). The King's power is through His word, shown in the Law and His direct speech. So where is the King's place? Where does He dwell? Throughout the Bible, there are a number of places where He clearly dwells:

Joshua Bible Studies – Group Member Notes

- Eden
- The Tabernacle (and the Temple)
- The Promised Land
- Jesus in the flesh on earth
- In the hearts of Christians through the Holy Spirit
- Heaven

In Eden, God dwelt with His people, Adam and Eve. All was good until Adam and Eve sinned. After this they had to leave Eden. The place where God lives must be pure and holy, without sin. The High Priest can only enter the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle/Temple once a year to make sacrifices for sins, only after they have been purified. A Holy God cannot tolerate sin. Holiness – that is the issue.

The Canaanites are sinners (Lev 18:1-30; Deut 9:4-5) and they are in God's Land. But God desires mercy and so gives them four generations to repent (Gen 15:16). God is patient. They have knowledge of God, through general revelation and specifically what they know about God's action during the Exodus and the Jordan miracles. The Canaanites chose to resist God. But neither does Israel receive the lands because they are godly (Deut 9:5).

The land is a picture of the resting place and inheritance of God's people where they will live in peace in relationship with God. This means that the entry into the land and the act of possessing the land are pictures for us of God's kingdom coming. The battles involved in possessing the land show us what has to happen within a rebellious world for that place to become the kingdom of God.

So we come to verse 21:

“They devoted the city to the Lord and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it—men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys.”

Joshua Bible Studies – Group Member Notes

7. What does devoted to the Lord mean?
8. What do we learn about the coming of God's kingdom?
9. How does God establish His ultimate Kingdom?
10. Where in this passage do we see God's mercy?
11. What are the alternatives to God's plan here?

The table below shows how Matthew relates Jesus' ministry to what happened to Israel. Jesus is the true, faithful Israelite, perfectly obeying God like Israel should have.

Incident	Exodus & Joshua	Matthew
Passover Meal	Exodus 12	14:13-21
Miraculous Sea Crossing	Exodus 14	14:22-33
The Law	Exodus 20	15:1-20
Canaanites come to faith	Joshua 2 & 6	15:21-28

God is showing here how the New Joshua (Jesus) would have His New Israel (God's People) relate to Canaanites. The woman's faith is shown by her persistence and submission to Jesus. The crumbs she asks for (Mt 15:27) are actually available in abundance (Mt 15:37). And the Canaanites in this passage are us, non-Jews. God wants to save people in abundance (and shows His abundant mercy).

12. There is a soberness to this passage. Only a few were saved from Jericho. Is God only going to save a few at the final judgement?

When God's kingdom comes:

- He does it Himself
 - He is the one who conquers the Promised Land
 - He is the one who pays the price for sins on the cross
- He judges evil and brings His rule
- He saves those who trust Him

Summary

This conquest shows God to be both just and merciful:

- The people of Jericho are judged for their many sins
- But by faith Rahab the prostitute from Jericho did not perish – Heb 11:31
 - When all seemed doomed for Jericho, God shows His grace

Today God typically defers judgement, giving people time to repent. He withholds final judgement until the last day, but He has the right to judge at any time. And we must not mistake His patience for indifference.

13. What does this mean for us today?

Joshua Bible Studies – Group Member Notes

Study 4 – Joshua 7 to 12

The Israelites have entered the Promised Land. God has miraculously taken Jericho for them. But have all Israelites obeyed God?

Sin has a destructive effect on our relationship with God. But it is not enough to frustrate God's good promises.

1. Can you think of an occasion in your life when sin has not stopped God's plan?

Read Joshua 7

2. 'But' is an ominous note to start a chapter. After obedience in chapter 6 we see disobedience here. What did Achan do?
3. So why are the whole of Israel implicated (7:1)?
4. What are the consequences (7:4-9)?
5. From verses 11-12, how does God explain what is happening?
6. What words are used to describe what Achan did (7:21)?
7. So for us, what steps can we take to avoid this type of sin?

Covetousness is the root of the problem.

8. What was the punishment on Achan (7:25b-26)? Why so severe?
9. What are the parallels and contrasts between Achan and Rahab?

Joshua Bible Studies – Group Member Notes

10. What about parallels between Adam/Eve, Achan, and Ananias/Sapphira?

Steps	Genesis 1-3: Adam and Eve in the Garden	Joshua 7: Achan after Jericho's Fall	Acts 5:1-11: Ananias and Sapphira
New Beginning	Creation of the world	Entry into the Promised Land	Giving of the Holy Spirit
Forbidden Object	Taking fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil	Taking of plunder from Jericho	Holding back profits from a land sale
Sinful Act	Saw, desired, took (3:6)	Saw, coveted, took (7:21)	Lied to Spirit, kept money (5:3)
Hiding/Deception	Hid themselves from the Lord (3:8)	Hid the plunder (7:21)	Lied in their hearts (5:4, 9)
Revealed the secret	Yahweh questions them (3:9-13)	Joshua questions Achan (7:19)	Peter questions them separately (5:3, 8)
Pronouncement of Judgement	Curses announced (3:14-19)	Joshua proclaims God's 'trouble' (7:22-25)	Peter rebukes them (5:4, 9)
Judgement of Death	Removal of access to God (3:23) – so death will follow	Literal death (7:25)	Literal death (5:5, 10)
Corporate Impact	Brought death for all (Rom 5:12)	Entire people 'devoted to destruction' (7:12)	Great fear seized the church (5:11)

Read Joshua 8:1-2

11. What is the irony for Achan about Ai?

Main Points of Chapters 8-11

We don't have time to go through the rest of chapters 8 to 11 in detail. However, the following is a summary of each chapter:

- **Chapter 8 – God is central**
- **Chapter 9 – The Lord needs to be consulted**
- **Chapter 10 – When God is with you, what you are doing for Him is guaranteed**
- **Chapter 11 – Rest from war**
- **Chapter 12 – God is faithful to His promises**

12. What does the Promised Land parallel for us?

Summary

We learn from these passages the contrast between obedience to God and disobedience. When Israel obeys God He blesses them but when they disobey God He curses them. Joshua needs to consult God before making critical decisions. God is the one in charge.

Joshua Bible Studies – Group Member Notes

Study 5 – Joshua 13 to 19

The first half of the book (Ch 1 -12) is about the conquest of the land, and the second half of the book will be about its allocation to the twelve tribes. The central point of the second half of the book is Joshua 18:1-10. God has fulfilled His promises in giving the land to Israel. Now the land needs to be divided up for each tribe.

The land was divided in three steps: the first part took place under Moses on the eastern side of the Jordan, the second and third under Joshua on the western side, first at Gilgal, then at Shiloh.

Program of allocation:

Order	Tribe	Passage	Order	Tribe	Passage
1	Reuben	13:15-23	8	Simeon	19:1-9
2	Gad	13:24-28	9	Zebulun	19:10-16
3	Eastern Manasseh (1/4)	13:29-31	10	Issachar	19:17-23
4	Judah	14:6-15:63	11	Asher	19:24-31
5	Ephraim (1/2)	16:5-10	12	Naphtali	19:32-39
6	Western Manasseh (1/4)	17:1-13	13	Dan	19:40-48
7	Benjamin	18:11-28	14	Levi	21:1-42

NB: the first three tribes have land allocations 'outside' the Promised Land

See *Appendix E* for a map of the tribal division of the Promised Land.

1. Have you ever received an inheritance?
2. What do you do to earn it?

Read Joshua 13

Joshua's old age (v1) is presented as the trigger for the command to him to divide the land for an inheritance (v7). So although "there remains yet very much land to possess" (v1), the allocation and distribution of it among the tribes must be carried out by Joshua, under God, while he is still alive and active.

As the book had begun with God addressing Joshua, encouraging him and giving him instructions (1:2-9), so now too God speaks to Joshua with instructions for carrying out his next tasks, allocating the land (13:1-7).

3. What does God reaffirm in v6?
4. Is this conditional?
5. The land each tribe gets will be decided by casting lots (14:2). What does this mean and what does it say?

Levites the religious leaders

In 13:14 we see that the inheritance for the Levites will be ‘the sacrifices of the Lord’, that is, the tithes the rest of Israel gives for the Lord’s work (Num 18:20-24; Deut 18:1-5). Originally, the tribe of Levi had been sentenced to a landless existence for its violent behaviour in the incident with the Shechemites (Gen 49:5-7; 34:25-31), but later, the Levites redeemed themselves during the golden calf incident where they supported Moses (Ex 32:25-28) and were promised a blessing for it (Deut 33:8-11).

The Levites key roles are to:

- Complete the sacrifices
- Maintain the Tabernacle
- Teach God’s word

Caleb – faithfulness rewarded

Chapter 14 talks about Caleb receiving his inheritance (see Numbers 13-14) because he has wholeheartedly followed the Lord (vv8, 9, 14). At age 85, he attacks the Canaanites (v11). Caleb sets the example of how Israel’s tribes ought to be extending the original conquest by cleaning out and nailing down their various tribal portions.

Rest in the land

And the land had rest from war (v15b). For a brief and shining moment, there was a glimpse of God’s everlasting Sabbath: rest, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

It took seven years to get to this point since they crossed the Jordan.

6. In Chapter 15, Judah receives its inheritance. Why does Judah receive its land allotment first?
7. What is ominous about verse 63 (and 13:13; 16:10; 17:12-13)?

In chapter 16, the next tribes given land are the two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh. Again Genesis 49:22-26 highlights why they are favoured. But then they complain (Joshua 17:14-18).

Read Joshua 17:14-18

The root of their complaint is that they don’t trust God for His provision. They are not being “strong and courageous”.

8. What is Joshua’s answer to their request? Why is it so wise?

Ironically, the three tribes (Judah, Ephraim and Manasseh) that get their allocation first did not drive the Canaanites from the land (15:63; 16:10; 17:13).

Joshua Bible Studies – Group Member Notes

Read Joshua 18:1-10

The establishment of the tabernacle at Shiloh is now the focus (this is at the centre of this section dedicated to the distribution of the land).

This is shown by:

- The tent of meeting being set up there (18:1)
- God's presence is dwelling there

Joshua moves his centre of operations from Gilgal to Shiloh, situated in the centre of the country. This signifies a shift from being on a war footing, with the main camp at Gilgal, to being at rest, at Shiloh. God's rest is finalised and then the tent of meeting is set up.

God is faithful to His promise of the land as an inheritance.

In Genesis 1:28 God commissions Adam and Eve to "fill the earth and subdue it". In Joshua 18:1, the sons of Israel assemble in Shiloh and "the land was subdued". They have obeyed God and the land is now under their control.

18:1 sums up the first half of the book and 18:3 sums up the remainder of the book.

God gives the people the land (18:10), but they must grasp the inheritance in a Caleb-like manner. Here is the land, now take it!

Benjamin's allocation is next (18:11-28). Then Simeon's (19:1-19). Simeon's allotment is within Judah's again in fulfilment of Genesis 49:7.

9. Why are these lists of lands and cities and boundaries so important?

Lastly, Joshua receives his inheritance in 19:49-50.

Joshua 19:51 is a fitting conclusion to this section of Joshua.

"These are the territories that Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun and the heads of the tribal clans of Israel assigned by lot at Shiloh in the presence of the Lord at the entrance to the tent of meeting. And so they finished dividing the land."

Now all the tribes except for Levi had received their inheritances.

10. Where is the 'rest' for Christians? How is this similar and different to the Promised Land?

Summary

God is faithful to His promises. He determines which tribe will get which part of the land. All Israel needs to do to receive the inheritance is take it. Sometimes they do, but most of the time they fail.

Joshua Bible Studies – Group Member Notes

Study 6 – Joshua 20 to 21

Finally, the task of apportioning the lands east and west of the Jordan to the twelve tribes was complete. What is the first thing God looks at? A system of justice and then the provision for the teaching of God's word. So, these two final items remained to be taken care of:

- The designation of the cities of refuge (ch 20)
 - A system of justice
- The designation of the Levitical cities (ch 21)
 - Provision for the teaching of God's word

The Lord's concern is that the land not only be duly allocated as an inheritance for the tribes (ch 13-19) but that it be a land where justice prevails and true worship is cultivated (designation of six cities of refuge - ch 20; and forty eight Levitical cities 21:1-42).

1. Do you think God is just? Why or why not?

Read Joshua 20

2. What is this passage talking about?
3. What does the legislation for 'Cities of Refuge' teach us about God?
4. What does the death of the High Priest mean in this situation (20:6)? Why?
5. How does Jesus do the same thing?
6. How does verse 9 add to the story?

So Cities of Refuge were:

- Easy to reach from anywhere in the country
 - Open to all
 - The gates were never locked (known from extra-biblical sources)
 - Stocked with provisions
 - But there was no help for the killer if they didn't flee to one of these
7. So how is a City of Refuge similar to Christ?
 8. What do you learn from this passage that impacts you?

Read Joshua 21

Joshua 21:43-45 provides the theological key to all that we have witnessed. It brackets the book with Joshua 1:6. The emphasis here is on the exactness of the distributions and the fact that they were scattered throughout Israel.

Joshua Bible Studies – Group Member Notes

9. Why did the Levites need to be in cities scattered throughout the land?
10. Who is the focus of verses 43 to 45? What did they do?
11. But how can this be said when there are still Canaanites in the land?
12. How does this relate to us and the Gospel?
13. How will you respond to what you have learnt from this passage?

Summary

By allocating cities of refuge and cities for the Levites, God shows His mercy and His care that all people can be taught His word. The same principals apply now:

- God wants to be merciful to us (Eph 2:4-5)
- God wants us to understand His word (1 Th 2:13)

Joshua Bible Studies – Group Member Notes

Study 7 – Joshua 22 to 24

This is the last study in Joshua. God has led the Israelites into the Promised Land. The land is at rest. It has been allocated amongst the tribes. So in light of all this, how will Israel respond to God's mercy and generosity?

1. What does it mean today to commit idolatry?

The final three chapters of the book of Joshua outline three farewells:

- Firstly, in chapter 22, to the two and a half tribes whose homes are east of the Jordan
- Secondly, in chapter 23, to the elders and heads and judges of Israel
- Thirdly, in chapter 24, to the whole nation

The book ends with a strong forward look with the people renewing their commitment to the covenant and to the Lord.

Chapter 22 sees the tribes to settle east of the Jordan leave but before they cross the Jordan, they build an altar to the Lord. This causes angst amongst the remaining Israelites as they see the altar as an alternate place to worship Yahweh, something forbidden (Deut 12:13-14). So they catch up and discuss the matter. It turns out the altar is not an alternate place to worship but rather a reminder that they are part of God's people too. It was a mark of loyalty and unity (note the mention of the location multiple times 22:10, 11 on the Israelite side of the Jordan). And of course, the altar will help the tribes remember all that God has done for them. So these tribes return to their land, carrying the wealth God has provided for them (v8).

So now onto chapter 23.

Read Joshua 23

God has given Israel rest in the land (v1). The big questions of these last two chapters then are 'how will that rest be used?' and 'what will be its fruit?'

2. Joshua draws special attention to 'the nations' (vv3, 4, 7, 9, 12, 13). Who are they and why does he do this?
3. What does Joshua emphasise in verse 14? Why does he do this?
4. How does this relate to our situation as Christians?
5. But Joshua also warns the people (vv15-16). What is the warning and how does he do it?

Joshua tells the leaders of the people to be strong (verse 6) like God told him to be (1:6, 7, 9). Strength shown by obeying God's word. And be very careful to love the Lord (verse 11).

Joshua Bible Studies – Group Member Notes

6. Looking at verse 11, what does be ‘very careful’ mean?
7. Why should we be ‘very careful’ to love the Lord your God as well?

Read Joshua 24

Now Joshua assembles all the people at Shechem. Shechem is where the Lord appeared to Abram and promised to give the land to his offspring (Genesis 12:6-7). God’s promises have been fulfilled.

8. How does God emphasise His faithfulness to His people?
9. What does verse 14 say the people of God are to do?
10. What does ‘fear the Lord’ mean?
11. The four imperatives in Question 9 also apply to us today. How do we live these out?
12. In verses 14 to 24, what sort of commitment does the covenant require?
13. But what does Joshua say in verse 19? Why?

Throughout the book, God provides the people with a series of ‘stone’ reminders:

Passage	Context	Reason
4:20	Gilgal	A reminder of God’s faithfulness in bringing Israel safely across the Jordan into the Promised Land
7:26	Over Achan	A reminder of Israel’s potential for unfaithfulness and of the dire consequences that result
8:28-29	Over the king of Ai	A monument to Israel’s second chance and restoration
8:30-32	Joshua engraves a copy of the Law	A reminder of Israel’s duty to live in obedience to God’s Law
10:27	Over Amorite kings at Gibeon	A reminder of God’s gracious action in defending Israel’s covenant with a Canaanite city
22:34	Peace in the land of Gilead	A witness to the unity of the Transjordan tribes with Israel west of the Jordan
24:26-27	Covenant renewal at Shechem	A reminder of Israel’s duty to serve the Lord, who fulfilled every promise in bringing them into the land

It is critical to remember God’s faithfulness.

14. God has a long history of leading His people. Is this the same for us? In what ways? And what should we do in light of this? And why?

The story is complete. Joshua’s work is done, they are in the land, and the narrative draws to its conclusion (vv29-33). Joshua is now accorded the ultimate accolade of the same title as Moses – he is “the servant of the Lord (v29 compare 1:1).

And Joshua (v30), Joseph (v32), and Eleazar (v33) are all buried in the land. There is however a hint that things may not be so rosy in the future (v31).

Joshua Bible Studies – Group Member Notes

So we see in Joshua:

- God's faithfulness to His promises (Genesis 12:1-3 of Nation, Land, and Blessing)
- Joshua representing the first generation of Israelites who have to rely on the written Word
- The appropriate response to what God has generously done for His people, is obedience

So at the end of Joshua we have God's People (Israel), in God's Place (the Promised Land), under God's rule (the Law), enjoying God's blessing (the fruit of the Land).

Joshua also leaves us with the question of will the Israelites remember God's faithful mercy or will they not listen to the warnings He has given them and disobey?

But there is an expectation that there is more to the story ...

Read Hebrews 4:1-13

15. We have read a lot about Joshua and Israel as they entered, conquered, and allocated the Promised Land. What are the implications for us today?

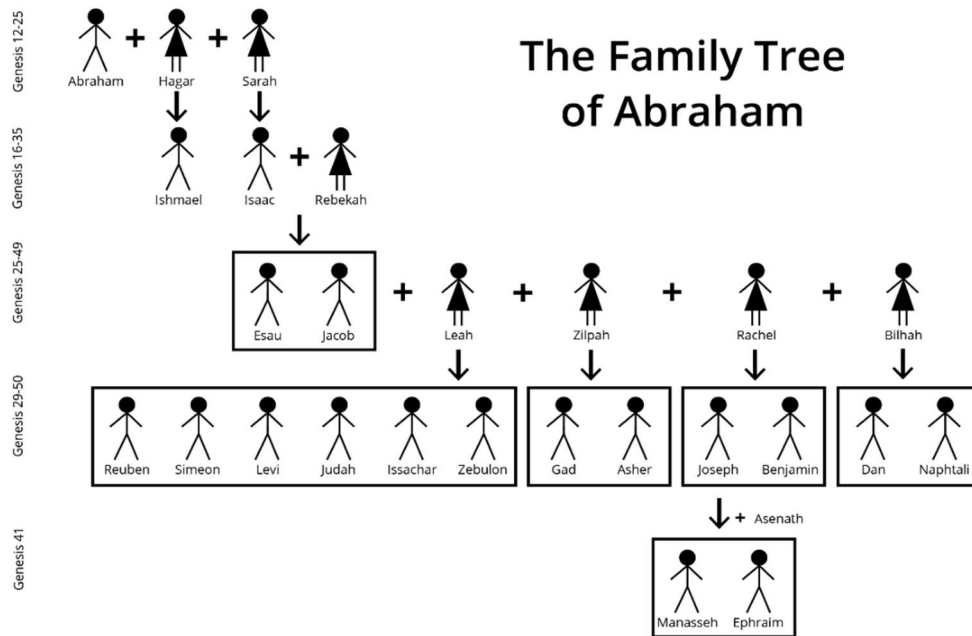
We face the same test now as Israel did: can the church be faithful after the eyewitnesses to Jesus have died? But there is also the same solution:

- God is faithful to His promises
- God has given us His word to learn how to live His way
- God is rich in mercy and desires that all people be saved
- Remember the Lord!

Appendix A – The Family Tree of Abraham

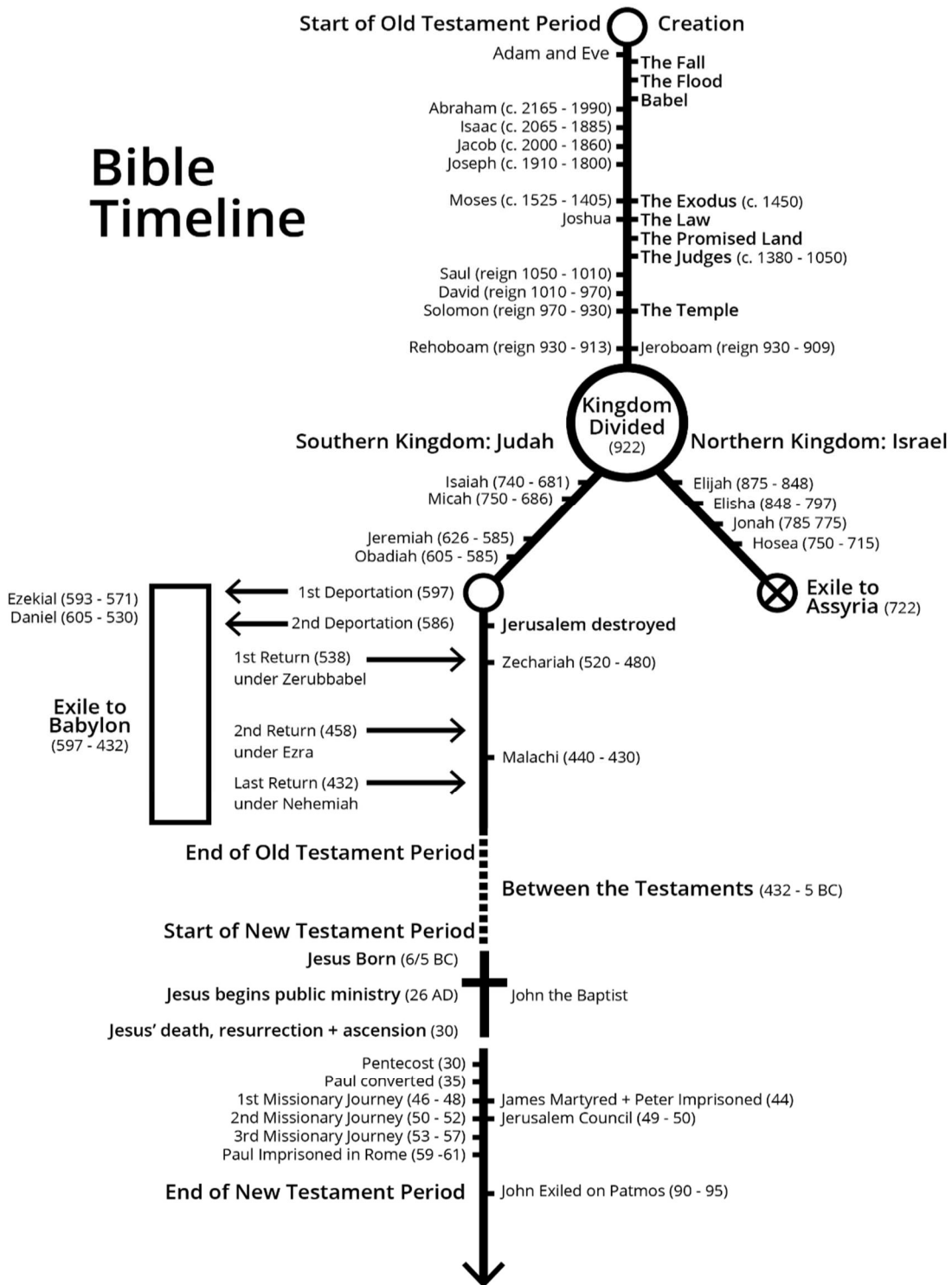
There are twelve tribes of Israel. The twelve are the twelve sons of Jacob (renamed Israel). However, Joseph’s two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, are seen as half tribes rather than Joseph being a tribe.

When Jacob blessed Joseph's sons (Manasseh and Ephraim), while on his deathbed, he honoured them by treating them as his sons rather than as his grandsons (Genesis 48). Because of the symbolism of the number 12 to Judaism (the 12 tribes of Israel, totality, wholeness), the tribes were not considered whole tribes but were instead called half-tribes. Joshua gave them double the territory the other tribes received so that, even though they were technically half-tribes, they would each have the same amount of land as Jacob's other sons.



Visual sourced from *Creation to New Creation* (Moore College Distance Course)

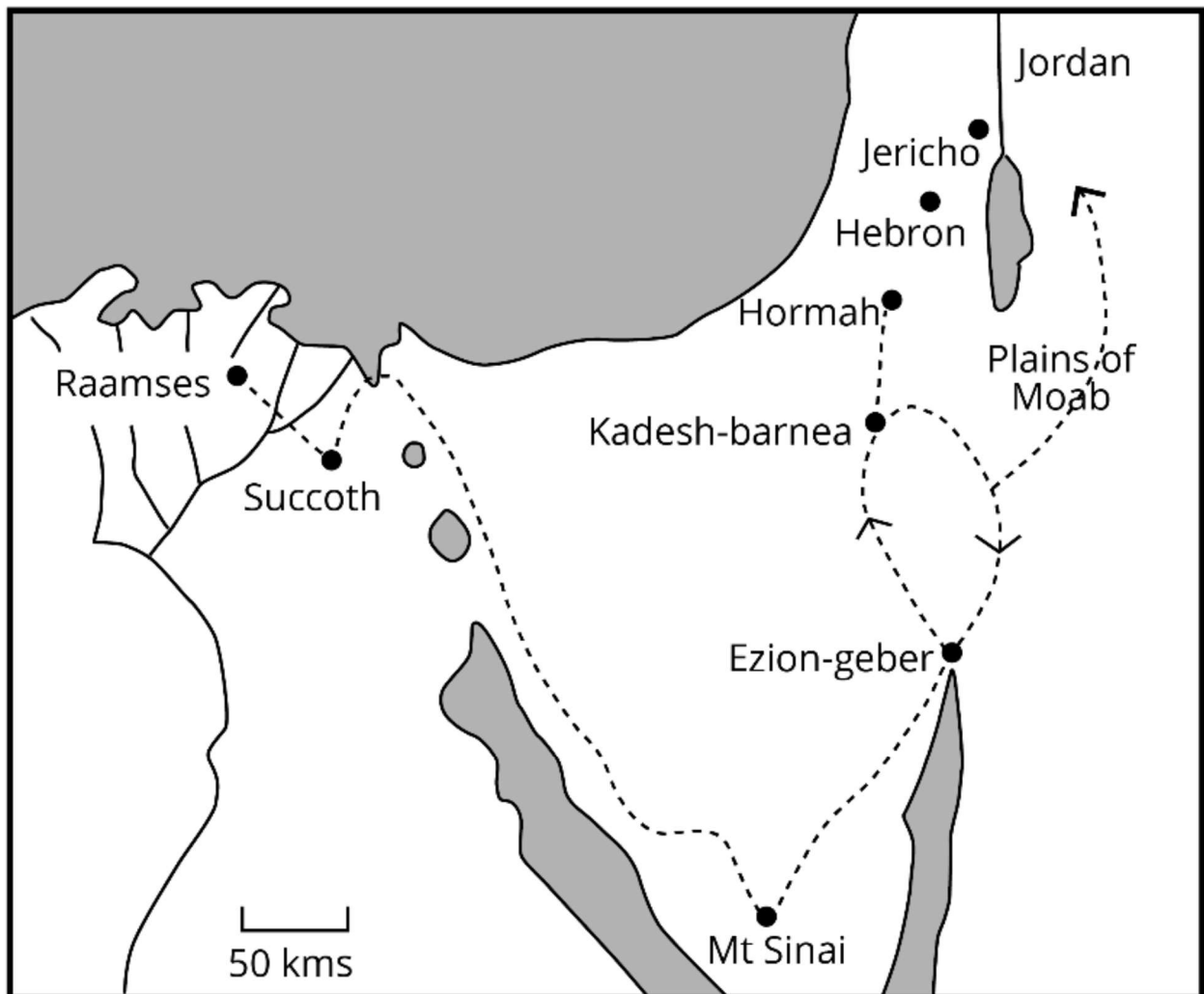
Appendix B – The Bible Timeline



Visual sourced from *Creation to New Creation* (Moore College Distance Course)

Appendix C – From Egypt to the Promised Land

This map shows the journey that God's people took from Egypt to the Promised Land.



Visual sourced from *Creation to New Creation* (Moore College Distance Course)

The journey of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land starts in Raamses. The Israelites, as slaves, helped build the city of Raamses (Exodus 1:11). When the Israelites leave Egypt they go via Succoth (Ex 12:37) and then cross the Red Sea. They then walk to Mount Sinai where they receive the Ten Commandments and build the Tabernacle (Exodus 20f). Ezion-geber is likely one of the first places Israel camped after the Exodus from Egypt before reaching Kadesh-barnea the first time (Num 33:35). The Israelites then reach Kadesh-barnea (Num 13-14; 33:36) and this is where the twelve spies go into the Promised Land and come back and report (ten spies say we can't take the land and two, Joshua and Caleb, say they can!).

At Hormah, the Israelites try to take the land without God's permission. This is a dismal failure (Num 14:45). After this, the Israelites wander in the desert for forty years until all adults over the age of 20 have died, except for Joshua and Caleb. They wander in the area between Ezion-geber and Kadesh-barnea.

After wandering in the desert for forty years, we get to the book of Joshua and this time God will let them into the land. But this time, they enter via the Jordan River and cross the Jordan near Jericho.

Joshua Bible Studies – Group Member Notes

Appendix D – Structure of Joshua

The best structure I have seen is from David Dorsey (*Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, 91-94).

Structure of Chapters 1-8

- **A Opening focus on the “Book of the Law of Moses” (1:1-18)**
 - Joshua becomes the leader of Israel
 - Joshua commits himself to the law of Moses
 - God promises to be with Joshua
- **B Encouragement from a believing Canaanite: Rahab hides spies (2:1-24)**
 - Rahab scarlet thread; brought into God’s people
 - Good results from Rahab’s report 2:24; 2:6;
 - **C Jordan stands up (3:1-4:24)**
 - Israel is given marching orders
 - The priests lead the procession
 - The miracle enables Israel to enter the land
 - **D Israel worships Yahweh in the Promised Land (5:1-12)**
 - **C’ Jericho falls down (5:13-6:27)**
 - Israel is given marching orders
 - The priests lead the procession
 - The miracle enables Israel to enter the land
- **B’ Discouragement from a faithless Israelite: Achan hides plunder (7:1-8:29)**
 - Zerah scarlet thread (Gen 38:28); offspring cut off from God’s people
 - Bad results from Achan’s sin 7:7; 7:5; 7:9
- **A’ Closing focus on the “Book of the Law of Moses” (8:30-35)**
 - Joshua leads the people to renew the covenant
 - Joshua copies the stone tablets of Moses
 - God’s presence will dwell with the people in the land because of Joshua

Joshua Bible Studies – Group Member Notes

Chapters 9-12

- **A All the kings of Canaan oppose Joshua as one (9:1-2)**
 - Includes kings west of the Jordan, Lebanon, highlands, Shephelah, etc
 - 'they gathered together as one to fight against Joshua and Israel' v2
 - **B Mercy for a believing remnant Israel makes peace with Gibeon (9:3-27)**
 - Those who seek mercy are spared
 - **C Defeat of Southern Coalition (10:1-15)**
 - Begins: "when King Adoni-zedek heard ... he sent to ... " list of kings
 - Kings "gather together ... to fight Israel"
 - Yahweh reassures Joshua: "do not be afraid of them; I will give them into your hands"
 - Joshua and the entire army surprise attack against enemy
 - Israel struck the enemy, pursued them as far as ... and as far as ...
 - **D Ritual ceremony at Makkedah, conquest of kings of south (10:16-43)**
 - **C' Defeat of Northern Coalition (11:1-15)**
 - Begins: "when King Jabin heard ... he sent to ... " list of kings
 - Kings "gather together ... to fight Israel"
 - Yahweh reassures Joshua: "do not be afraid of them; I will give them into your hands"
 - Joshua and the entire army surprise attack against enemy
 - Israel struck the enemy, pursued them as far as ... and as far as ...
 - **B' No Mercy for hardened Canaanites (11:16-23)**
 - Those who harden their hearts are judged
- **A' All the kings whom Joshua conquered are listed one by one (12:1-24)**
 - Includes kings west of the Jordan, Lebanon, highlands, Shephelah, etc
 - Each king listed, one by one – 31 in total

Chapters 13-24

- **A Introduction (13:1-7)**
 - Joshua's divides land as he grows old
 - Already / Not Yet: This is your land ... whose inhabitants you must drive out
 - **B Transjordan Tribes (13:8-33)**
 - **C Levites (14:1-5)**
 - **D Personal Allotment for Caleb (14:6-15)**
 - **E Two Large Tribes – Judah and Joseph (15:1-17:18)**
 - **F Land Apportioned from Shiloh (18:1-10)**
 - **E' Smaller Tribes – associated with Judah and Joseph (18:11-19:48)**
 - **D' Personal Allotment for Joshua (19:49-52)**
 - **C' Levitical Cities (20:1-21:45)**
 - **B' Transjordan Tribes (22:1-34)**
- **A' Conclusion (23:1-24:33)**
 - Joshua's closing challenge as he is about to die
 - Already / Not Yet: This is your land ... whose inhabitants you must drive out

Appendix E – Map of Promised Land Allocation

