



Purpose, Practice, and Problem

Topic

Introduction to Joshua

Theme

God demonstrated His faithfulness to Israel throughout the book of Joshua.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will consider what confidence in God's faithfulness would look like in His life.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 3

Scripture Focus

Overview of Joshua

Summary

This lesson helps the learner fit Joshua into the storyline of the Bible. It also gives him a framework for applying the book to his life. And finally, it answers any questions he might have concerning God's command to Israel to annihilate the Canaanites.

Outline

I. Purposes

- A. Historical
- B. Theological
 - 1. Backdrop of God's self-revelation
 - 2. Story of God's continued self-revelation

II. Practical Application

III. Perceived Problem

- A. Defining the problem
- B. Resolving the problem
 - 1. Promise to Israel
 - 2. Punishment of the Canaanites
 - 3. Prevention of idolatry

Memory Verse

"And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war" (Revelation 19:11).

GETTING STARTED

God Condones Violence?

Write *God condones violence* on the whiteboard. Ask your learners to respond to the statement. Have them consider what happened in the book of Joshua.

ASK: Has the violence in Joshua ever caused you to cringe as a believer? (Q1)

ASK: Have you wondered how you might settle such uneasiness? (Q2)

This final section of this lesson will deal with the objection that God condoned violence in the book of Joshua. Before we get to that, we will spend some time understanding the purposes and applications of the book.

I Object!

Talk to a learner ahead of time and have him raise the objection at the beginning of class that you shouldn't even be studying Joshua because it is a violent book and God would never condone such violence. Allow the rest of the class to respond to his objection.

ASK: Have you heard such an objection concerning the book of Joshua?

ASK: How would you respond?

This final section of this lesson will help you answer objections concerning the violence of the book of Joshua so you can both answer critics and grow in your confidence in God and His Word. Before we get to that, we will spend some time understanding the purposes and applications of the book of Joshua.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. Purposes

A. Historical

The book of Joshua provides the historical account of Israel's conquest of the Promised Land as well as their division of and settling in the land. Joshua, Israel's leader during the conquest, was born a slave in Egypt at about the same time Moses fled to Midian to escape Pharaoh. So Joshua grew up during the period of Egypt's harshest treatment of the children of Israel. *Normal* was to be under the ever-present threat of Egyptian persecution.

READ: Exodus 2:12. **ASK:** What are some ways the harsh slavery in Egypt could have affected Joshua? (Q3) *The relentless conditions could have made him hopeless, angry, and bitter or humble, watchful, and dependent on God.*

We don't know details about how Joshua responded to the conditions in Egypt. Based on later descriptions of him, it seems he would have been hopeful

and humble as he waited on God to act (Num. 14:6–9).

Joshua's original name was *Hoshea* (Num. 13:8), meaning *salvation*. Moses changed it to *Joshua* (13:16), meaning *Jehovah is salvation*. Most likely the change coincided with Joshua's first military victory over the Amalekites (Exod. 17:8–16). It also communicated that God would ultimately be responsible for giving the Israelites the Promised Land and that He would do so through Joshua's leadership.

God eventually appointed Joshua to replace Moses (Num. 27:12–23). God intended for Joshua to lead the people both as a general would lead an army and as a shepherd would lead his sheep. He was responsible to fight and conquer as well as to care and defend. But Joshua was not to act on his own. God gave the Holy Spirit to Joshua empower him (27:18). Furthermore, God instructed him to stand before Eleazar the priest to inquire of the Lord to determine His directives (27:21). Joshua proved to be a godly leader who was sensitive to God's will.

Nearly all of the Israelites entering the land were under the age of sixty. God had judged their parents and grandparents for not entering the land forty years earlier. As a result, all those twenty years old and older died during forty years of wandering in the wilderness. That meant a significant number of the Israelites alive at the time of the conquest were born during the wilderness wanderings and had no experiential knowledge of slavery in Egypt. The new generations were anxious to have a place to settle and call their own. They were ready for rest, which is exactly what God promised them (Josh. 1:13; 21:44, 45). They stepped across the Jordan and entered the land without a hint of turning back, a theme that plagued their parents and grandparents (Exod. 14:11, 12; 16:1–3; Num. 11:5, 6). Their problem wasn't a lack of faith to obey God to start the task; it was a lack of faith and fortitude to finish the task (Josh. 13:1; 16:10; 17:13, 17; Judg. 1:27–36). Before his death, Joshua challenged Israel to complete their conquest of the land and to obey God's law (23:5, 6).

B. Theological

God's relationship with Israel during the conquest reveals His character and attributes. So Joshua is also a theological book. Its revelation of God builds on what God revealed about Himself in the Pentateuch.

1. Backdrop of God's self-revelation

The book of Joshua needs to be viewed against the backdrop of God's introduction of Himself to Israel in Exodus through Deuteronomy. God laid a lot of groundwork for His relationship with Israel as He led and instructed them along their way to the Promised Land. Reviewing that groundwork will prepare us to gain a better understanding of God as He reveals Himself in the book of Joshua.

PREZI: Use the Prezi called *Review of Exodus through Deuteronomy* to review how God introduced Himself to the children of Israel prior to the book of Joshua. See the commentary below as you work through the Prezi. (Note: The mountain in the Prezi is representative of God as Israel's rock. As Israel journeyed toward the Promised Land, they essentially explored God and learned about Him. They could look back at their journey and realize He had been a faithful, solid rock to them even though they had often wavered and disobeyed Him.)

God began His introduction of Himself to Moses and Israel as the **sovereign**

The Truth for Living course on Exodus—Deuteronomy is called *Who I AM: God's Self-revelation*. Consider getting that course and reading it as a good background to this course on Joshua. The course is available at RegularBaptistPress.org. The commentary under this point summarizes the course.

See the CD for instructions for using Prezi. You do not need to download any Prezi software in order to run the Prezis for this course.

The Abrahamic Covenant states that Israel would possess *all* of the land God promised to them. As such, the Covenant has yet to be fulfilled since Israel has never possessed *all* of the Promised Land on a permanent basis. This means there must be a future time when Israel returns to the land to fully possess it in order to fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant. The future millennial Kingdom of Christ provides a setting for the return of Israel to the land to fully possess it in a literal sense.

over all (Exod. 1:1–2:22). He guided and directed Moses' life and grew Israel into a large nation despite Pharaoh's plans to diminish Israel's strength and number. God then met directly with Moses at the burning bush and introduced Himself as the **transcendent helper** Who is far above Moses and Israel and yet near them to help them (2:23–4:17). He used the name *I AM*, meaning He is the eternal, self-existent One. God then addressed the children of Israel in Egypt, coming to them as Yahweh, the **promise keeper** (4:18–7:13). After sending nine plagues on Egypt, God revealed Himself to Israel as their **redeemer** by providing lambs to protect them from the angel of death in the tenth plague (7:14–12:42). He acted as their **leader** by wisely taking them to and powerfully taking them through the Red Sea (13:17–15:21). On the east side of the Red Sea God showed Israel that He is their **provider** by giving them water to drink and meat to eat as they made their way to Mount Sinai (15:22–17:16). At Sinai, God was Israel's **instructor**, giving them the beginning of the law and stipulations for enjoying the benefits of the Mosaic Covenant (19:1–20:21). Also at Sinai, God revealed that He is **glorious God** when He showed justice, mercy, and grace to idolatrous Israel (24:1–34:28). His Sinai directions for the sacrifices and priesthood showed He is the **atoner** (Exod. 35–40; Lev. 1–27). Between Sinai and the Promised Land God demonstrated that He is the **gracious giver** (Num. 1–14). He blessed underserving, ungrateful, and untrusting Israel. After Israel refused to enter the Promised Land, God revealed Himself as the **powerful proclaimer**, Whose words cannot be thwarted (14:39–24:25).

Forty years then passed as Israel wandered in the wilderness. Once the rebellious generation was dead, God spoke to the new generations. He restated His law and presented Himself as the **loving Lord** (Deut. 1:1–7:11). In Moses' last address to the new generations of Israel, he portrayed God as the **solid rock** because of God's unwavering, faithful character throughout Israel's history (7–34). It is God's faithfulness that Moses wanted Israel to acknowledge. As the book of Joshua opens, God's faithfulness as the solid rock forms the backdrop to the conquest.

READ: Deuteronomy 31:30–32:4. **ASK:** What two words would you use to describe God based on this passage? (Q4) *Perhaps unwavering and perfect.*

2. Story of God's continued self-revelation

The record of Joshua shows that God was faithful and true to His covenants with Israel. God brought them into the land He had promised as part of the *Abrahamic Covenant* (Gen. 15:18–21). He then both blessed them for their obedience and chastened them for their disobedience in accordance with the *Mosaic Covenant* (Exod. 19–Deut. 28). Overall, God's desire was to bless Israel so they might be successful in the Promised Land (Josh. 1:8) and that His glory might be known (Num. 14:21; Ps. 72:19; Hab. 2:14). He proved He would fight for them so that they could fully realize rest in the land. This desire of God to help Israel was never in question in the book of Joshua. By contrast, Israel's obedience to God was often in question. As mentioned above, they acted by faith in taking the land but lacked enough faith to carry out the conquest to completion. Consequently, they never had complete rest in the land, for God eventually used the remaining Canaanites as a thorn in Israel's side (Judg. 2:1–3). The Canaanites proved a painful reminder of Israel's need to serve God faithfully, trust Him fully, and love Him preeminently.

II. Practical Application

As we understand the theology of the book of Joshua and subsequently seek appropriate practical applications, we need to remember that God did *not* extend the Abrahamic Covenant to the church. Therefore our applications should not be focused on determining how we might fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant either literally or spiritually. We should not be looking to somehow apply the concept of fully *possessing a land* of some sort to our spiritual lives today.

Furthermore, the Mosaic Covenant, which included God's blessings on Israel's obedience and curses on their disobedience, was done away with by Christ's death on the cross (Gal. 3:24, 25). It is not our guide for life. So we should not consider the laws of the Mosaic Covenant with their blessings and cursings as a prescription for God's relationship with us. God does bless our obedience, but that blessing is not necessarily in the form of physical rest or an abundant land. In fact, according to the New Testament teachings on the life of a believer, the more obedient we are to God the more likely we are to experience persecution and hardship (Phil. 2:27–30).

READ: 2 Timothy 3:12. **ASK:** What is the plain truth in this verse? (Q5) *All those who desire to live godly lives will suffer persecution.*

When we obey God, we should not think that He is somehow indebted to us and obligated to make us healthy and wealthy. We should serve God because we are grateful He provided us with salvation. We should seek to honor Him with our lives, knowing that any resultant hardships or persecutions work to glorify Him (Phil. 1:12–21). On the other hand, we should realize that serving God and living for His glory is an enjoyable life despite any accompanying persecutions or hardships. God gives peace and joy to those who faithfully serve Him (Rom. 8:6; 15:13).

So the focus of this study will be on trusting our faithful God rather than on claiming a *land* of some sort or expecting God to make our lives healthy and wealthy in exchange for acts of service. We will find the book to be much more enriching and meaningful as we understand it in its proper setting rather than trying to force an application on it. In applying a book like Joshua, it is also helpful to remember that the Old Testament lays a foundation for the New Testament. We should not read the New Testament back into the Old Testament. Doing so does a grave disservice to God's intentions for the Old Testament books.

III. Perceived Problem

Before starting the study of the text in Joshua, we need to address a source of serious criticism of the book and ultimately the Bible. Critics have claimed that the Bible must not be true because of the violence in the book of Joshua. They believe a loving God would never command His people to completely destroy nations. However, a Biblical understanding of God's relationship with Israel and His plans for the Promised Land reveals that God was righteous in commanding the conquest. The book of Joshua aligns with the rest of the Bible's teaching on God's righteousness.

A. Defining the problem

Critics point out that God's commands to Israel concerning their battles with the inhabitants of the Promised Land seem to condone violent, unethical behavior.

See the online article entitled *The Problem of Genocide in the Old Testament* for additional information on this topic. The article is available at baptist-bulletin.org/the-baptist-bulletin-magazine/the-problem-of-genocide-in-the-old-testament/.

READ: Deuteronomy 20:16–18. **ASK:** What is God's clear command to Israel concerning the inhabitants of the Promised Land? (Q6) *They were to let nothing that breathes remain alive.*

ASK: What is your response to God's instructions concerning the inhabitants of the Promised Land? (Q7)

Genocide, the systematic elimination of a people group, seems to be the practice God directed Israel to follow as they invaded the Promised Land. Based on that perception, some critics discount the Bible, claiming a loving God wouldn't command such heartless cruelty.

READ: Joshua 10:40. **ASK:** Write a news headline describing Joshua's conquest of southern Canaan. (Q8)

At first look, it does seem like the book of Joshua presents God as the author of horrible atrocities. But a closer look and a fuller understanding of God's command and His relationships with Israel and the pagan nations prove otherwise.

B. Resolving the problem

That God commanded a complete annihilation of the inhabitants is not debatable. His commands to Joshua are quite clear (Deut. 20:16–18). Why God would command such violent acts? The answer to that question is threefold.

1. Promise to Israel

First of all, the Promised Land rightfully belonged to Israel because God promised it to them from their beginning. God's Covenant with Abraham was mainly about giving Abraham the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:1–3; 15:18–21). God passed His covenant with Abraham down to Isaac, Jacob, and finally to Jacob's descendants (35:12). Israel in a sense held the deed to Canaan. As the deed holders, they weren't invading someone else's land; they were entering their own land. The Canaanites occupied land that didn't belong to them. They were free to leave at any time; they chose to stand their ground and fight.

We should note that Israel didn't deserve to live in Canaan; they weren't upright in heart and better than any other nation (Deut. 9:5). But God promised them the land and planned to use them as part of His future plan of redemption. Eventually Jesus Christ was born in the Promised Land as the Savior of the world. And one day He will return to the Promised Land to set up His earthly Kingdom (Rev. 20:4).

2. Punishment of the Canaanites

Secondly, God commanded the annihilation of the Canaanites because they were ripe for God's judgment.

READ: Deuteronomy 9:5. **ASK:** What did God say about the nations living in Canaan at the time of the conquest? (Q9) *They were wicked.*

The Canaanites deserved to be punished for their sins. And God had certainly given them time to repent.

READ: Joshua 2:9. **ASK:** What did Rahab acknowledge to the Israelite spies concerning the land? (Q10) *That the Lord had given Israel the land and that He was going to fight for them.*

READ: Joshua 2:10, 11. **ASK:** What events caused the Canaanites to fear Israel? (Q11) *The parting of the Red Sea and the destruction of the Amorite kings on the east side of the Jordan.*

Forty years or so had passed since the crossing of the Red Sea and the destruction of Pharaoh's army. Apparently the event was still fresh in the minds of Canaan's inhabitants. Yet none but Rahab and her family feared God enough to ask for mercy. God was merciful to Rahab's family. He spared them while He destroyed the rest of the inhabitants of the wicked city of Jericho (Josh. 6:21–23).

This display of God's wrath against sin is righteous. One day Christ will return to the Promised Land to destroy the foreign armies who will occupy it at the end of the Tribulation (Rev. 19:11–16). Christ will put the armies and their sending nations to death by the word of His mouth.

READ: Revelation 19:11. **ASK:** What word describes Christ's warfare? (Q12) *Righteousness.*

Israel's destruction of Canaan's inhabitants actually serves as a precursor to Christ's yet future actions when He descends to the Promised Land to set up His Kingdom.

3. Prevention of idolatry

At the time of the conquest, the Promised Land was filled with idol worshipers. Their temples, shrines, high places, and altars were prevalent throughout the land. These symbols and tools of the pagan religions would tempt the Israelites to adopt the Canaanites' gods. Ridding the Canaanites and their idolatry from the land would limit the influences their false gods could have on the Israelites. As the Biblical record shows, the Canaanites and their gods indeed proved to be a powerful temptation to the Israelites.

What made the Canaanites' gods so attractive? First, the lush land seemed to be evidence that the Canaanites' fertility gods controlled the rain that nourished the land and provided abundant crops. Once the Israelites settled in the land, it would be tempting for them to conclude that the Canaanites' gods must be true since the Canaanites had lived in the land of abundance over an extended period of time. But *God* was the One causing the Promised Land to be abundant (Deut. 8:1–10). He brought the rain and caused the land to bear fruit. God warned Israel not to forget Him and serve other gods in the land (8:11–20). If they did forget Him, He would chasten them and cause them to perish from the land.

Second, the Israelites believed they would be free from the law's restrictions if they worshiped the Canaanites' gods. In their minds, the false gods gave them freedom to live according to their desires rather than God's law. The flesh always wants the freedom to live without restrictions on its lusts. That is why Israel's eventual idolatry was often wedded with gross immorality (1 Kings 14:22–24) and atrocious sins (2 Kings 17:17).

The term *sodomites* (1 Kings 14:24) refers to those practicing religious rituals that involved sodomy and prostitution.

Romans 1:18–32 also makes the connection between idolatry and gross immorality.

READ: 2 Kings 17:7–17 **ASK:** To what extent did the Northern Kingdom of Israel serve the false gods of the nations around them? (Q13) *They went so far as to burn their children to death to try to appease the gods and thereby ensure prosperity in the land.*

Israel and Judah both turned their backs on God’s law in favor of a self-directed, idolatrous life. Obviously God’s concern that the Promised Land be rid of idol worshipers was well-founded.

READ: Judges 2:1–6. **ASK:** Why is a thorn in the side a good description of the Canaanites that Israel left in the land? (Q14) *They repeatedly led the Israelites to commit idolatry, which brought serious and devastating effects on Israel and eventually resulted in their captivity.*

RESOURCE: Display resource 3 to review the answers to the objections of violence in Joshua.



MAKING IT PERSONAL

The Power of the Gospel

Those who seek to dismiss God based on His commands to Israel to make war are simply seeking a way to escape the reality of God. If God is true, then they are answerable to Him. They are afraid of what that might mean for their eternity. So while sharing answers to their objections about the Bible might help them understand God, the real problem we need to address is their lack of hope for eternity. The gospel is the answer to their fears.

ASK: What truth about God does the gospel help to establish (Romans 1:16, 17)? (Q15) *That God is righteous.*

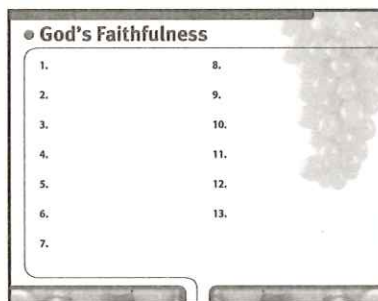
ASK: With whom do you need to unleash the power of the gospel? (Q16)

God’s Faithfulness

God’s faithfulness is a consistent theme in His relationship with Israel and especially in the book of Joshua.

ASK: How confident are you in God’s faithfulness? (Q17)

ASK: What would confidence in God’s faithfulness look like in your life? (Q18)



Summary and Memory Verse

RESOURCE: Display resource 1. Add the following statement about God’s faithfulness: God is always faithful.