

Info for group leaders on
JOSHUA 1-12

Background

Moses had led the Israelites out of Egypt and through the desert en route to the Promised Land of Canaan. Because of his failure to honour God in the incident of calling water from the rock, God forbade him from entering Canaan (see Numbers 20:2-12). His successor, *Joshua*, would instead lead the people into the inheritance that God had first promised to their forefather Abraham (Genesis 12:2-3).

The book of Joshua, named after its principal character, describes how this happened. It took place around 1406 BC. The book covers a period of about 25 years, from the death of Moses to the death of Joshua.

Author

Though there is no explicit statement to this effect, most of the book was clearly written by Joshua himself. Minor additions, like the record of Joshua's death, were made by Eleazar the high priest and his son Phinehas.

Joshua's personal background

Joshua's youth was spent under the Egyptian slave-regime. Then he took part in the Exodus, quickly assuming a prominent role under Moses, who entrusted him with the battle against Amalek (see Exodus 17:9 – the first occurrence of his name).

He later became Moses' personal assistant, accompanying him at least part of the way to the summit of Sinai for the receiving of the Tablets of the Law (Exodus 24:13-18). He also ministered with him in the temporary tabernacle which preceded the inauguration of the priesthood and the tabernacle proper (Exodus 33:7-11).

Later, Joshua was one of the twelve spies sent to reconnoitre the land of Canaan (see Numbers 13:8, where his name appears in its older form, Hoshea – cf v16). Only he and Caleb brought back a good report, and only these two men, of all those aged twenty and over at the time of the Exodus, entered the promised land. He was thus ideally qualified to take over the leadership of Israel from Moses.

The meaning of the name Joshua

Joshua is a Hebrew name meaning 'the LORD saves' or 'the LORD is the saviour'. It is an apt name, because Joshua saved God's people by conquering Canaan and distributing it to the Israelites as their homeland.

The Greek equivalent to Joshua is the name Jesus, and this is no coincidence, because it is Jesus who saves us and enables us to possess our spiritual possessions (see Hebrews 4:6-11). He is also the one who, like Joshua, intercedes for his people after they have sinned and suffered defeat.

Outline of the book

We shall be looking only at chapters 1-12, but the outline of the book as a whole is as follows:

A.	Chapters 1-5	Entering the land
		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Practical preparation for the invasion 2. Crossing the Jordan 3. Spiritual preparation for the invasion

B.	Chapters 6-12	Conquering the land 1. The central campaign: Jericho and Ai 2. The southern campaign 3. The northern campaign
C.	Chapters 13-24	Settling in the land

Breakdown of chapters 1-12

This series of *Diggers* studies covers the twelve chapters in nine sessions, as follows:

1.	Chapter 1	God prepares Joshua to cross the Jordan
2.	Chapter 2	Rahab and the two spies
3.	Chapters 3-4	Crossing the River Jordan
4.	Chapters 5-6	The fall of Jericho
5.	Chapter 7	The sin of Achan and defeat at Ai
6.	Chapter 8	Ai destroyed and the covenant renewed
7.	Chapter 9	Israel deceived by the Gibeonites
8.	Chapter 10	Cleaning up in the south
9.	Chapters 11-12	Cleaning up in the north

General guidelines

To your Diggers sessions in general

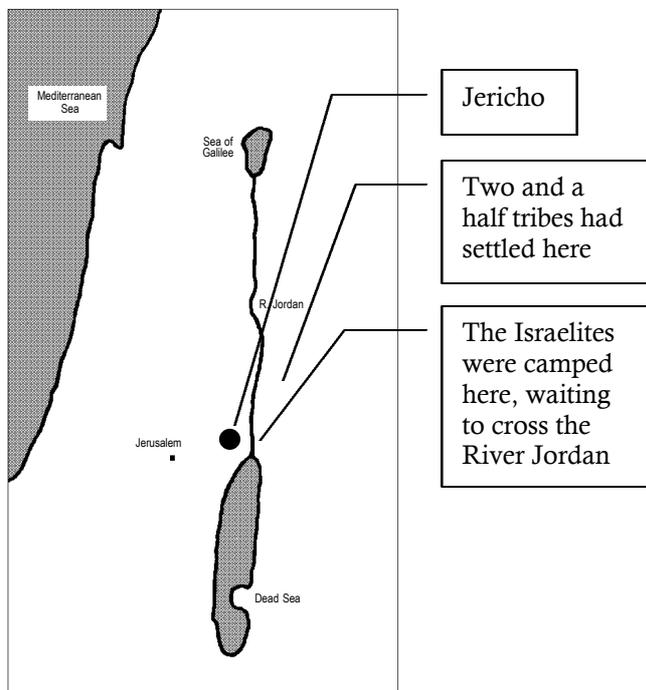
- While the *NIV* is the Bible version used as the basis for the study, encourage your group also to read the book in other versions they might own. This will give different insights.
 - Some people might want to comment on what this passage is saying to *me* a *subjective* approach. While there can be value in this, it is far more important to concentrate on what a particular passage means *objectively*.
 - *Don't dominate* the discussion by talking too much yourself. By all means contribute, but your main role is to steer the discussion forward in a helpful and purposeful way.
 - *Draw out the quieter members* of the group. If necessary mention them by name: John, I wonder if you have any thoughts on this verse?
 - *Tactfully restrain the over-talkative members*: You've had quite a bit to say up to now, Sally, so for a while let's hear what some of the others have to contribute.
 - Occasionally someone might become *argumentative and contentious*. Point out that these sessions are not about winning arguments or scoring points, but about learning together what God's Word has to teach us.
 - *Don't pretend to have all the answers* when you haven't. If somebody raises a question that you can't answer, say, I don't know the answer to that one, but I'll try to find out for next time. Then refer to a Bible commentary, or pass on the question to one of the elders.
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep it <i>practical</i>. Ideas, theories and doctrines are all fine <i>as long as they affect the way we live</i>. Keep steering things back to <i>life-application</i>. Always finish on a practical note. |
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- End each session with *prayer*, asking the Lord to help you all put the session's lessons into practice.

To these chapters in Joshua in particular

- Keep reminding the people that this story echoes our own battle to occupy the *spiritual* promised land – a life in which, though there are enemies and battles, we can trust the Lord's promises and so enjoy victory. As far as possible, keep pulling the discussion back to this aspect of the study.
- Challenge the group (and yourself) regularly at a practical level: Are you, in fact, winning your battles – against personal weaknesses, besetting sins, and temptations – and enjoying victory? Always finish the sessions on this note.
- On the last page there is a map of Canaan at the time of the conquest under Joshua. You will find it helpful to refer to this from time to time.

Notes on the text

Session 1 (Chapter 1) — God prepares Joshua to cross the Jordan



The map shows the geographical setting at the beginning of the book of Joshua. The people were camped on the east bank of the Jordan, opposite Jericho. Their promised inheritance was on the west bank, but 2½ tribes (Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh) had opted for territory on the east side.

Be sure to spend sufficient time on Question 1 before moving on. Satisfy yourself that the group are clear about the spiritual significance of crossing Jordan and beginning the conquest of Canaan.

To help in this, go back to the Exodus and remind everybody of the preceding events: the *Passover* (salvation by faith in the shed blood) and the *Red Sea crossing* (baptism). God never intended the Israelites to stay so long in the *desert* (a life of barrenness and defeat), nor does he intend us to do so.

1:3	<i>set your foot</i>	A common biblical image for take possession of or take dominion over. See 1 Kings 5:3; Psalm 8:4-6; 47:3; Matthew 22:44; Romans 16:20; Ephesians 1:22.
1:13	<i>Rest land</i>	Rest in the Promised Land, that is, from their struggles in the desert. See how the NT develops this idea in connection with the rest of the Sabbath: Hebrews 3:11 4:11.
1:16	<i>Strong and courageous</i>	A phrase that echoes the similar one in v6, 7 and 9. It seems to have become a watchword among the Israelites at the time.

Session 2 (Chapter 2) — Rahab and the two spies

Joshua sends out two spies to reconnoitre the walled city of Jericho, which guarded access to the passes from the Jordan valley up into the central highlands. They lodge with Rahab, who strikes a deal with them that, in return for her sheltering them from local officials, they will spare her and her family at the attack on the city.

2:1	<i>Prostitute</i>	NIV margin: Or possibly <i>an innkeeper</i> . We should not be too quick to
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		jump to the conclusion that the men went to avail themselves of her sexual services. In view of all that followed, it is clear that God in his grace planned to save this woman from the judgment soon to fall on the city. Probably, therefore, it was divine providence that brought the men to these particular lodgings.
2:4-7	Lying	While lying is clearly wrong, in a fallen world it is sometimes the lesser of two evils. The alternative here would have been the death of the two spies.
2:12	<i>Kindness</i>	The word is the Hebrew <i>hesed</i> , covenant love, i.e. love of a deeply committed nature. She was asking for a serious pact to be made between her and them. Verses 17-21 give the details (the small print) of the agreement.
2:17, 21	<i>Scarlet cord</i>	Probably just some handy item that would show up against the city wall as a signal to the Israelites marching round. But it is hard to avoid comparing it, especially in view of its colour, with the blood painted round the doors at the time of the Passover in Egypt.

Session 3 (Chapters 3-4) — Crossing the River Jordan

Led by priests carrying the ark of the covenant, the Israelites cross the River Jordan on dry land, even though at that time of year the river is normally in flood.

At God's instructions they carry twelve large stones from the river-bed and use them to create a memorial to the event at Gilgal, on the far bank. They are now in the Promised Land.



3:3	<i>Ark of the covenant</i>	[See picture] This piece of holy furniture is where God chose to dwell in a localised sense among his people. The ark was normally kept in the Tabernacle, behind the curtain, but had poles so that the priests could carry it on their shoulders when the people were on the move.
3:4	<i>Never been this way before</i>	Entering the land was a new experience. Question 4 deals with this. Group members may be facing, for example, marriage; parenthood; serious illness; starting college or work; redundancy; a new job; children leaving home; retirement; old age; death.
3:5	<i>Consecrate yourselves</i>	i.e. set yourselves apart for God; check that you are in sound spiritual condition; deal with any unresolved issues; clean yourselves up.
3:16	<i>Piled up in a heap</i>	This may have been a direct miracle from the LORD. Or it may have been caused by a huge landslide upstream as the banks, undercut by the water, collapsed into the river to form a dam. This has certainly happened in recent times, sometimes aggravated by earth tremors. If the latter was the case, it is no less a miracle in terms of its timing!
4:12	<i>Reuben, Gad etc.</i>	These were the fighting men from the 2½ tribes allocated territory on the east bank of Jordan. Having left their families there while they helped in the conquest of the west bank, they were unencumbered and thus crossed over first.

Session 4 (Chapters 5-6) — The fall of Jericho

The people prepare themselves spiritually for the conflict ahead by circumcising the males and celebrating the Passover. They then follow God's instructions for the conquest of Jericho, the first Canaanite city in their way. They spare Rahab and her family in keeping with the agreement between her and the spies.

5:2-9	Circumcision	This was the sign of Israel's covenant with the LORD (Genesis 17:1-14). It was yet another aspect of the half-heartedness of the desert generation that they had not bothered to circumcise their sons. At
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		God's command Joshua now puts the situation right. NIV footnotes in v3 and v9 explain the place-names involved.
5:10	Passover	God's timing is perfect: by being circumcised they were qualified to celebrate the Passover (Exodus 12:43-44, 48), and the official date for the Passover (Exodus 12:2, 6) coincided with this. Persons under 20 at the time of the exodus were allowed to enter Canaan, and many would remember the events of the original Passover in Egypt.
5:11	<i>Produce of the land</i>	It was harvest time in Canaan (3:15), and the people ate from the crops in the fields outside the walled city of Jericho – the first normal produce eaten since leaving Egypt 40 years earlier.
5:13-15	<i>A man standing</i>	Joshua fell in worship (5:14) and, in response to the man's command, removed his shoes as he was on holy ground (5:15). Clearly this was more than a mere man. It was, in fact, a <i>Christophany</i> – an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ, who fights for his people.
6:1	<i>Jericho</i>	The strategy for conquering Canaan was first to take the key cities of Jericho and Ai, thus establishing a position in the centre of the country and dividing it. From there, they could conquer, first, the southern cities, then those of the more remote north.
6:4-5	<i>Trumpets</i>	These were, literally, jubilee trumpets, used at Israel's festivals to proclaim the presence of God (see Numbers 10:10). By blowing them, the people were declaring that God himself was encircling Jericho.
6:11	<i>Around the city</i>	Jericho at that time covered some 8 or 9 acres, so it would have taken only about half an hour to march once right round it.
6:17	<i>Devoted</i>	A special use of this term, meaning set apart to be completely destroyed. See the NIV footnote. Jericho was to be totally destroyed – the sin of the Amorites had now reached its full measure (Genesis 15:16), suggesting that they had refused what light they had had and had spurned God's revelation in creation (Romans 1:18-20). They were thus ripe for judgment.

Session 5 (Chapter 7) — The sin of Achan and defeat at Ai

Confident after the victory at Jericho, Israel attacks the smaller town of Ai only to suffer serious defeat. God reveals that this is due to one man's sin in taking some plunder for himself. Achan emerges as the culprit. At God's command, Israel stones him and his family to death.

7:1	<i>Devoted things</i>	This and related phrases are common in this chapter, so be sure to check early on that everybody knows what it means. See the note on 6:17 above.
7:3	<i>Only a few men</i>	The spies were mistaken in their confidence, underestimating the enemy's strength. 8:25 indicates that there were some 6000 men in Ai.
7:6	<i>Tore dust</i>	Traditional signs of sorrow and mourning: tearing one's clothes and putting dust on one's head.
7:11	<i>Israel has sinned</i>	One man's sin is viewed as the sin of the nation. The covenant, which linked the Israelites to God, also linked them to one another; none could act independently.
7:13	<i>Consecrate</i>	The seriousness of what was to happen required personal spiritual preparation. Note the same command in 3:5.
7:14-18	Finding the culprit	This was by the drawing of lots. The use of this drawn-out method would impress on everyone the seriousness of the matter. And it would provide the guilty person an opportunity to own up voluntarily and repent – in which case God may well have forgiven him.

7:20	<i>Achan replied</i>	He expressed no clear regret about disobeying God, causing Israel's army to be defeated and being responsible for the death of 36 soldiers.
7:24-25	The execution	Since the children were executed with Achan we should assume that they were accomplices in his sin, since children were not to be killed for the father's sins (Deuteronomy 24:16). Note that there is no mention of his wife, who presumably had no part in his action.

Session 6 (Chapter 8) — Ai destroyed and the covenant renewed

With Achan's sin judged, and listening this time to God's directions, Joshua and the Israelites succeed in conquering Ai. Then, before any further conquests, they go to Mount Ebal, which offers a panorama of the land, and there renew their covenant with the LORD.

8:1	<i>The whole army</i>	The defeat at Ai had been caused primarily by Achan's sin. But they had also underestimated the enemy's strength (see 7:3-4).
8:3-4	<i>30,000 men</i>	An area of large rocks west of Ai would have made it fairly easy for this number of soldiers to remain out of sight.
8:12	<i>5,000 men</i>	These were placed to prevent soldiers from the town of Bethel coming to provide reinforcements to the men of Ai.
8:18	<i>Hold out the javelin</i>	Like the raising of a standard, this was the pre-arranged signal for attack (see also v26).
8:29	<i>Take his body from the tree</i>	In not leaving the King of Ai's body on the tree overnight Joshua was obeying the Lord's instructions in Deuteronomy 21:22-23 a scripture quoted in connection with Christ's crucifixion in Galatians 3:13.
8:30-35	Rehearsal of the law	Militarily this was a dangerous time to obey God's command through Moses. Instead of securing the other central Canaanite cities, Joshua took a risk by leading his troops north for this religious exercise.

Session 7 (Chapter 9) — Israel deceived by the Gibeonites

Unlike the other peoples in the land, the Gibeonites resort to deception to escape extermination, and Joshua and the Israelite leaders fall for their ruse. The deception causes frustration when it comes to light. But because their oath prevents them from killing them, the Israelites force the Gibeonites to become their slaves.

9:1-2	<i>Kings west of the Jordan</i>	Joshua had cut through the centre of Canaan, preventing the kings north and south of the divide from joining forces against Israel. But previously-warring factions formed alliances in both the north and the south to resist Israel's advance.
9:6, 9	<i>A distant country</i>	Somehow the Gibeonites had learned that the law of Moses allowed Israel to make peace with distant cities, whereas they were to destroy those comprising the seven Canaanite nations nearby. See Deuteronomy 20:10-18. The Gibeonites actually lived a mere 25 miles away.
9:27	<i>The altar of the LORD</i>	By insisting that the Gibeonites should work near the Tabernacle, Joshua was ensuring that they would be exposed to the worship of the Lord which he doubtless hoped would stop them defiling Israel with their own pagan religion.
9:27	<i>The place the LORD would choose</i>	Once the land was fully conquered and settled, the LORD would show Israel where he wanted the Tabernacle permanently established. But at this stage he had not yet revealed it.

Session 8 (Chapter 10) — Cleaning up in the south

Angered by the perceived surrender of the Gibeonites to Israel, five local rulers form an alliance to attack Gibeon. The Gibeonites ask Joshua for military help and he rallies to their defence. God supernaturally extends the daylight to enable him to complete the defeat of the five kings, after which Israel goes on to subdue the remaining cities in the south of the country.

10:1	<i>Jerusalem</i>	At this stage it was still a pagan Canaanite city, though an important one. It would not become Israel's capital until much later.
10:7-8	Military strategy	Joshua could have let the five kings attack and defeat the Gibeonites and so rid himself of an embarrassing problem. His support for them was inspired by military strategy. So far, he had attacked one city at a time, but now here were the combined forces of five cities whose defeat would be a major step forward for the Israelites.
10:13	<i>Delayed going down</i>	The remaining hours of daylight would not be enough for Israel to hunt down all their enemies and see God's promise in v8 fulfilled. It was noon, with the sun overhead and the moon on the western horizon. Both sun and moon were Canaanite gods. It seems that, in answer to Joshua's request, God caused the rotation of the earth to slow down so that it made one full rotation in 48 hours rather than in 24, allowing Joshua to complete his work and, at the same time, showing the Canaanites that the LORD was the supreme God.
10:13	<i>The Book of Jashar</i>	A collection of songs in poetic style to honour the achievements of Israel's leaders. It is also mentioned in 2 Samuel 1:8 and possibly 1 Kings 8:12-13, but it is not part of Scripture.
10:27	<i>Down from the trees</i>	See the note on 8:29 above.
10:41	<i>Goshen</i>	Not, of course, the Goshen where the Israelites had lived when they were still in Egypt.

Session 9 (Chapters 11-12) — Cleaning up in the north

With the centre and south of Canaan subdued, Joshua now turns his attention to the north of the country. He acts in obedience to the LORD, both directly and through the commands given earlier by Moses, and routinely enjoys victory over all the Canaanites. The conquest of Canaan is more or less complete.

11:10-11	<i>Hazor</i>	This was by far the largest city (in area) in that region of the Middle East and stood at a junction of several trade routes. Its destruction would be a signal to the whole region that nothing could stand against God's people.
11:20	<i>The LORD hardened their hearts</i>	He confirmed them in the attitude they had already adopted as he had earlier done with Pharaoh in Egypt (Exodus 4:21; 8:15). They had rejected God's revelation to them in nature (Romans 1:18-20) and in their conscience (Romans 2:14-16). They had also refused to acknowledge his greatness as the one who had worked miracles for Israel at the Red Sea, the River Jordan and Jericho.
11:21-22	<i>Anakites</i>	These were the giants who had terrified the spies sent into Canaan by Moses 45 years earlier. The defeat of these seemingly invincible warriors is dealt with here in just a couple of sentences!
Ch 12	Kings	31 kings are listed here, all in territory about 150 miles long and 50 miles wide. But these were little more than tribal kings who ruled over city-states. They were often at war with one another, and their multiplicity and lack of unity made Joshua's task much easier.

A map of Israel at the time of the conquest under Joshua

(from *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Victor Books, 1985)

(BKC [OT] p. 333)

