

Chapter 11: Joshua

Key Terms

- Deuteronomistic school: (Hypothetical) Hebrew scribal guild of the seventh century BC responsible for shaping the historical literature of the Old Testament (Deuteronomy–Kings)
- ban: in war, to consecrate a city and its inhabitants to destruction; carry out this destruction; totally annihilate a population in war
- Canaan: area of land in Palestine conquered by the Israelites
- historicity: historical accuracy and truthfulness
- Hyksos: Semitic people grouped that ruled Egypt ca. 1800 BC until ca. 1650 BC
- Israelite Conquest/conquest: term used to describe Israel's invasion of Canaan and defeat of peoples living there
- etiological legend: fictional story contrived to explain an observed phenomenon or situation

Key Ideas

- The faithfulness of God in fulfilling the covenant promises.
- The conquest and apportionment of the land.
- The importance of obedience.

Chapter Summary

The majority of scholars attribute this book to the Deuteronomistic school, though others suggest an earlier date. There are several important factors that point to an early date, such as the mention of Canaanites living in Gezer in Josh 16:10 (cf. 1 Kings 9:16). Further, Joshua 8:32 indicates that scribal activity was occurring during Joshua's lifetime.

While some contest the historicity of the book, arguing that it is composed of etiological legends, others press for the essential coherence and reliability of the conquest accounts. Ultimately, it is highly unlikely that Joshua is etiological, for the purpose of the biblical narrative is not etiological, but theological. The lack of forthcoming archeological support further complicates the work of scholars. Scholars frequently reject the most likely biblical date for the conquest—1400 BC—because the archaeological record does not support this date. John Bimson's theory that the end of the Middle Bronze Age II should be re-dated to 1420 BC provides a workable solution to the problem posed by the archaeological record.

Though we cannot be sure of exact dates, the events of Joshua probably took place after the Hyksos were expelled from Egypt and before the Sea Peoples invaded Palestine. Historical reconstruction presents Egypt as the dominant but distant power in Palestine during the time of Joshua, primarily concerned with protecting military outposts and trade routes. Palestine and Syria contained several independent or loosely confederated city-states at this time, as the biblical account depicts. This power structure created an ideal opportunity for the invasion and conquest of Canaan.

Joshua's purpose is to reveal the role of God in keeping his covenant promises to Abraham by giving the land to Israel. The book describes the Israelites' entrance into the land, the commissioning of Joshua, and the conquest narratives, then details the territorial boundaries of the tribes and narrates the renewal of the covenant.

Major theological themes of Joshua include covenant and land, the ban, the divine warrior, sovereign involvement, and corporate solidarity. The land demonstrates the veracity of the covenant and is evidence of God's special favor upon Israel. The ban refers to God's command to completely annihilate the inhabitants of Canaan. Yahweh is frequently pictured as a divine warrior in Joshua who leads his people in battle. This is closely related to God's sovereign involvement in history. This concept cannot be removed from the book without serious damage being done to its theological purpose. Finally, Joshua 7—the narrative of Achan's sin—highlights the importance of corporate solidarity in Joshua.