

JOSHUA

interpretive strategies

ye-ho-shua = “Yahweh saves = Joshua יהושע

yo'-shi-ya-hu = “Yahweh supports” = Josiah יאשיהו

Lecture Outline

I. Reading the Book of Joshua on Its Own Terms

II. Content Overview

III. Does God Hate the Canaanites?

IV. KHEREM = “The BAN”

V. Seven Reading Strategies for *kherem* in Joshua

I. Reading Joshua on Its Own Terms

A. Literary-Historical Context

Robert Hubbard, “The Story Behind the Book of Joshua” in *Covenant Companion* (Oct 2008).

- around 630 BC, Jerusalem; a unique literary project—a major History of Israel.
- from the conquest of Canaan under Joshua to the current king, Josiah. Their history makes up the books of Joshua through 2 Kings 23 in our Bibles.
- access to all the scrolls and resources of two large archives, one at the Temple and the other at the Palace

“The Deuteronomists”

- Several of these scholars are named in Scripture: Shaphan (2K22), Elishama (Jer 36:12) and Baruch.
- Their purpose was to show that the book of Deuteronomy was correct: faithfulness to God brings reward; unfaithfulness brings disaster. Disaster is what had happened to their cousins in the northern ten tribes when Assyria destroyed them in 722.
- The writers, now known as the “Deuteronomists” saw the idolatry of the North infect the south, promoted by their own king, Manasseh, Josiah’s grandfather, who built shrines to Assyrian gods in the Temple grounds.
- But Josiah’s reforms had encouraged the Scribes. He removed the false gods, had the Torah read publicly, and led the long-neglected celebration of Passover—remembering the LORD’s deliverance from Egypt’s slavery.

The message of Joshua for that generation was the call for Judah to serve only the LORD.

- The book ends with high praise for Joshua and his leadership team (24:31).
- This praise for Joshua, who had courage and said, “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD,” became a call the listeners in Josiah’s day to do the same!
- Unflinching loyalty to God is the only way that 7th century Judah could escape the disaster that destroyed the North.
- Joshua became the prototype for King Josiah and the people through his faithfulness, courage, and resolve to get their houses in order with the LORD.

B. Canonical Community Context

- When the 2nd Temple Community received the book of Joshua, the “Conquest” had already been left behind as the main message of the book.
- For Josiah, at the end of the 1st Temple 700 years after Joshua’s entrance to the land, **Joshua’s courage and faithfulness and the LORD’s guidance** were already distilled as the key messages.
- Even then, the book of Joshua-Kings, did not have the status of Scripture. *That* came in the 2nd Temple period, **AFTER** the Babylonian conquest of Israel.
- After their own defeat, Israel understood that Joshua was **NOT** about Conquest, but **about the LORD’s requirement for holy living IN or OUT of the Land**. They returned to the Land in peace, through the Persian edicts.

The 2nd Temple community gave Joshua the status of Scripture.

- They read Joshua as a book about faithfulness, courage, and the LORD's guidance, **in the 2nd Temple (5th century).**
- The small 2nd Temple surviving community, having already seen their own walls destroyed, needed to hear the word: **“Be strong, Be bold.** It is possible for you to RE-build in the land.”
- When they did go back to the land it was not behind an army. It was through Cyrus's edict and **through a peaceful return.**
- They were a dispossessed people under God's judgment like the Canaanites had been. In exile, they knew, “We were just like the Canaanites: God took down our walls and our cities for exactly the same reason: for our wickedness. But we can rebuild. We can be faithful.”

II. Book of Joshua Content

Overview

I. Chapters 1-II:

The LORD Fights for Israel

II. Chapters 12-21:

Tribal Territory Allotments

III. Chapters 22-24:

Concluding Narrative at Shechem

lecture outline

A. Chapters 1-11

B. Excurses on Canaanite Cities

C. Chapters 12-24

D. Three Models of Land
Possession

A. Chapters I-II

In chapter 1, the LORD says, KHAZAQ: “Be strong and courageous.” That is the original 2nd Temple rebuilding context which can still preach in similar community rebuilding-under-pressure contexts.

In chapter 2 Rahab saves the spies and ends up in the genealogy of Jesus with Ruth and Tamar.

In chapter 3, the people cross the Jordan River, like a second crossing of the Sea, powerful as a metaphor for death and new life.

In chapter 4 of Joshua, they set up the memorial stones to say, “This is where the LORD led us when we were homeless.”

Chapter 5 is the worship service at Gilgal. They celebrated the Passover and all the adult men are circumcised.

In chapter six we have the first military campaign: the attack of Jericho.

Joshua 6—11

In chapter 7-8, the Hebrews go up to “drive the people” from the **citadel of Ai**, but are themselves driven back. Aachen (a Judahite) had found some silver and gold in Jericho and dug a whole under his tent and hid it. The Lord withdrew his protection from his people until it was destroyed.

In chapter 9, they negotiate peace with people of the land, according to God’s principles of covenant with the Canaanites from Gibeon.

Chapter 10 describes the second military campaign: the battle of five Canaanite/Amorite kings (of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon) who gather to fight Joshua and to destroy Gibeon for making a treaty with the Hebrews.

Chapter 11, is the third campaign against the capital city of the northern Canaanites, **Hazor**; a city of 40,000 people with a walled

B. Excurses on Canaanite “Cites”

- In the excavation of the citadel mounds at Hazor and other Bronze age Canaanite cities, it has been discovered that the Canaanite rulers lived on fortified hills in citadels.
- **OT scholar Richard Hess** (Denver Seminary) has recently argued that God’s double command: 1) Drive them out: and 2) “kill everything that breathes in them,” referred to the religious/military citadels.
- Part of the discussion centers on the Hebrew word **‘YIR** (עִיר), which is translated “city” or “town” in English Bibles, but technically means “fortified height” or “citadel.”
- The farmers and majority population of the country-side were not the target of the command to “kill everyone.” The 13th century ‘YIR was a central stronghold for the religious and military leaders and their families.



Deuteronomy 20:16-18

In the 'YIRIM ('citadels'; NIV "cities") of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, **do not leave alive anything that breathes.** Completely destroy them--the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites--as the LORD your God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the LORD your God.

C. Chapters 12-24

Josh 11:18-19 “Joshua waged war against all these kings for a long time. Except for the Hivites living in Gibeon, not one city made a treaty of peace with the Israelites, who took them all in battle.”

- **Chapter 12 then gives a summary report of the conquest:** “These are the 31 kings of the land whom the Israelites had defeated.”
- But in the very next chapter (13), says that it was not exactly a *conquest*. “Well, we didn’t destroy the Canaanite cities on the coast lands; and we did not take the Beth Shan or Taanak, Gezer or Dor, or Megiddo.
- **Chapters 15-21** describe the allotment of land to the tribes, but that Jerusalem was not conquered. Joshua reports also that the tribe of Manasseh could not destroy the Philistines of the coastal plain.
- Nonetheless, the report has the overstating general notice that

Nonetheless, the report ends with the overstating general
notice

that “Everything God promised came true.

The dream came true, we came into our land and we took
Joshua 21:43-45 it.”

So the LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn
to give their ancestors, and they took possession of
it and settled there. The LORD gave them rest on
every side, just as he had sworn to their ancestors.

**Not one of their enemies withstood them; the
LORD gave all their enemies into their hands.** Not
one of all the LORD’s good promises to Israel
failed; **all of them were fulfilled.**

Chapter 22 introduces the key 2nd

Temple issue of faithful *worship*.

- Rueben, Gad, and Manasseh, in the region of Gilead and Bashan built a huge “altar of remembrance” in the trans-Jordan (east).
- They appealed, successfully to the High Priest Phineas.
- In Joshua 22:22 they twice repeat the three names/words for “God”, confirming their faith: **“God of gods, the LORD! God of gods the LORD!** He knows; and let Israel itself know! If it was in rebellion or in breach of faith toward **the LORD**, do not spare us today.”

אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהִים יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהִים יְהוָה

D. Three Models of Land

Possession

- Archeological evidence documents the sudden emergence the “Israelite house” which differs in design from Canaanite houses.
- These houses appear in the archeological strata in the thirteenth century B.C. in the *shephelah*, i.e., the rolling hill country of Judah, *between* the central ridge that runs north and south and the plain that runs along the Mediterranean Coast.
- The coastal plain, in the late-Bronze/early Iron age, is dominated by the Philistines with their chariots and populated by Canaanite floor-plan

You are reading about three historical reconstruction theories.

- **Migration Model** (Noth, 1960). Only a few battles occurred. Most of the Hebrews settled into agricultural life peacefully alongside the Canaanites. The idea of “Israel’s conquest” grew as they shared and told stories of their infiltration to the land.
- **Conquest Model** (Albright, 1949 and Wright 1962). The basic biblical story of “conquest” is true, but it happened over a longer time; based on 13th century archeological destruction evidence of Hazor in the north and smaller city-states in the south and the less developed houses, pottery, art, and metallurgy of the Hebrews in the hill country.
- **Internal Revolt Model** (Mendenhall, 1962 and Gottwald, 1979). This theory rests in large part on the violent destruction and ruins of 13th century Hazor. Joshua’s group was a catalyst for a

III. Does God Hate the Canaanites?

- A. In the Bible, God is not “against the Canaanites.”
The LORD is against the “wickedness of the Canaanites.”
- In Genesis 21 and 26, Abram and Isaac, in fact, make peaceful covenant treaties with the Amorite/Canaanite king, Abimelech over water rights.
 - In Genesis 37, Joseph, by God’s providence, saves the Canaanites from starvation, as well as his own family, in the seven years of famine. In Genesis 50, Joseph says that God brought him to Egypt “in order to preserve a numerous people.” (Gen 37:13-14; 50:20)
 - For a more detailed look at what we know about the Canaanites from their own sources, archeology, and the biblical perspective on the Israelite practice of Canaanite religion, see my one hour audio lecture posted on Canvas as

C. Molech Worship Practices of the Israelites

- Melek (= “king”), Malik, Molk, Molok, Milcom
- The Hebrew writers usually called him “Molech” using the vowels from “bosheth” = “shame.”
- a “crisis” god as well as a calendar year god
- king of the underworld
- required child sacrifice at the major Ba’al-Asherah temples in exchange for his power in family or local crisis intervention.

Molech Worship: child sacrifice is the primary reason that God destroys people in Canaan.

- It is *condemned* and given as *primary evidence* for the need for annihilating the *Canaanites*: Deut 4:19; 12:31; 17:3; 18:9-14; Lev 18:21; 20:2-5; Ezek 16:20; Ps 106:37-38.
- Israelites also worshiped in this way: Jdgs 11:30-39; 2Sam 21:1-9; 1Kings 11:7, 16:34; 2Kings 16:1-4, 17:17, 21:6, 23:10; Isaiah 31:9; 43:2, 57:9, Jer 32:35; Ezek 20:31; Deut 12:29-32, 18:10; Lev 18:21, 20:2-5.
- Jeremiah and Ezekiel named it as the reason for the Babylonian Exile. The Israelites in Jerusalem made it a religious practice in the Hinnom valley during the reign of Manasseh, at Tophet, “the place of burning”, just outside Jerusalem’s city walls. Jeremiah renamed it the “valley of slaughter”. Jer 2:23; 7:31; 8:2; 19:5-6, 11-14; 31:40; 32:35; Ezek 23:37-39.
- The historical books give it as a primary reason for the exile to Babylon and destruction of the city. 2Kgs 16:2-4; 17:5-20; 21:1-13; 23:5-10; Deut 28:45-68.

Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan p.152

“We are as yet in no position to say that the NW Semites [Canaanites] were more ‘depraved’ from a Yawhist point of view than the Egyptians, Mesopotamians and Hittites, but it is certainly true that human sacrifice lasted much longer among the Canaanites and their congeners [devotees] than in either Egypt or Mesopotamia. The same situation seems to hold for sexual abuses in the service of religion, for both Egypt and—on the whole—Mesopotamia seem to have raised the standards in this area at a much earlier date than

IV. KHEREM = “The BAN”

- The term *kherem* is translated in quite a variety of ways, since it is an unfamiliar concept in English: *the ban*; *annihilation*; *utter destruction*; *dedicated* (used as a noun).
- The central idea here is that a person or an object is returned to its Maker (the LORD) by destroying the person, animal, or object
- Even the people and animals are said to be *dedicated*, meaning “killed” since their breath, which belongs to God, is returned to God. Only God can command such a theologically rooted action.
- The translation *ban* indicates a “ban” on the Hebrews taking any profit from anything that is *dedicated*, since it truly belongs to God.



The text is quite consistent, insisting that only God can do such things; and that the rules cannot be modified. If they are, “it is evil.”

***kherem* became the occasion for the end of Saul’s kingship.**

- Saul took much profit from this campaign and it was “evil in the sight of the LORD” (1Sam 15:9, 19)
- Samuel tore Saul’s robe, and God tore the kingdom away from him (1Sam 15:23-28)
- *kherem* can take **no** profit; but genocide’s expressed purpose **is** to take profit.
- *kherem* can only be commanded by God, and God stopped commanding it more than 3000 years ago; genocide, however, is perpetrated by men who are their

B. 20th Century Guilt and reading Joshua

What do these numbers mean to
you?

- 6 million
- 25 million
- 1 million

Recommended Further Reading

- Wright, Christopher. *The God I Don't Understand*, 2011.
- Cowles, Merrill, Gard, Longman III, *Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide*, Zondervan, 2003.
- Hubbard [see the pdf on Canvas; *unpublished*]
- Coplan [see the pdf on Canvas; *unpublished*]

