

# INTRODUCTION TO JOSHUA

by  
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**Note:** Author's introduction in *Notes, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Joshua* (New York: Saxton & Miles, 1844). The text has not been modified, except that punctuation has been modernized and long paragraphs have been divided.

## 1. *Title, Author, and Age*

The title of the several books in the Sacred Canon, as we have already remarked, designate for the most part rather their subject matter than their authors. The book before us is the first that is called by the name of an individual, and that probably for the reason now suggested, that it relates exclusively to the important series of events in the Israelitish history in which Joshua was so conspicuous an actor. It details the various proceedings of this illustrious leader in the execution of the high trust committed to him as the successor of Moses. Yet this leaves undetermined the question respecting its true authorship.

The voice of Jewish tradition very generally ascribes the book to Joshua, and there is nothing to be gathered from internal evidence which militates with the conclusion that the bulk of it may have proceeded from his hand. That certain passages, however, were (upon this supposition) inserted at a later period (as is evidently the case in regard to the Pentateuch) may safely be admitted without detracting from its canonical authority of genuineness. Indeed, should it be maintained, as is done by some critics, that it was wholly composed after his demise from documents penned by him or under his direction, this will still leave its claims to a place, in its present form, in the inspired writings unaffected.

The arguments sustaining this position have already been given in the preceding section<sup>1</sup>. Yet on the whole the evidence appears to preponderate in favor of the opinion which makes Joshua the author, with the exception of the parts above alluded to. We cannot, indeed, place much stress upon the passage, 24:26, in which Joshua is said to have "written these words in the book of the law of God," for it is not clear that anything more is there intended than the words uttered on that occasion, and in which the people express their solemn engagements to be faithful to the covenant. See Note *in loc*. But the following considerations have more weight.

1. The style of the composition is remarkably pure, free from foreign words, forms, or idioms, and so strikingly conformed to that of the Pentateuch as to argue a date nearly co-eval [equally old] with it.

2. The writer speaks of himself as one that participated in the transactions which he records: "And it came to pass, when all the kings of the Amorites which were on the side of Jordan westward, and all the kings of the Canaanites which were by the sea, heard that the Lord had

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<sup>1</sup> See "Introduction to the Historical Books in General" by this same author.

dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel, *until we were passed over*, that their heart melted; neither was there spirit in them any more, because of the children of Israel" (5:1). As it is said, moreover, that "Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father's household, and all that she had; *and she dwells in Israel even unto this day*" (6:25), there is a strong presumption that this was not written later than near the close of Joshua's life; and if so, he would be as likely to have written it as anyone else.

3. It is scarcely conceivable that so many names of persons and places as occur in this book should have been preserved unless in a cotemporary document. And from whom would such a document have been more likely to proceed than from Joshua himself? He might naturally be expected to record such transactions as went to illustrate the truth of the Divine promises made to his people.

4. The division of the land among the different tribes was doubtless recorded at the time it was made, and it was certainly made by Joshua in person immediately after the conquest. The account of this division occupies a very considerable portion of the whole book (chs. 14-21); and as it is difficult, in the absence of all testimony to the contrary, to assign a reason why Joshua should not have written the bulk of the other parts as well as this, the presumption undoubtedly is, especially as tradition affirms it, that he is the principal author. The truth of the tradition may fairly be taken for granted, unless the work itself can be shown to contain internal evidence against it.

5. In 17:13 it is said, "It came to pass, when the children of Israel were waxen strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute; but did not utterly drive them out." This has the air of having been written shortly after the conquest. Had it been penned at a much later period, the writer would scarcely have failed to mention the well known fact that the Israelites were soon seduced into idolatry by these very tributaries. The date of the writing was undoubtedly prior to this apostacy.

The principal objections against assigning the authorship of the book to Daniel [*sic*; Joshua], are the following:--

1. In 10:13 the circumstance of the sun and moon being stayed in their course is said to be written in the book of Jasher. This testimony, it is contended, would not have been quoted by Joshua, or any other contemporary writer, concerning transactions of recent occurrence and unusual notoriety. The inference therefore is, that the book entitled "the Wars of the Lord" must have been written at a much earlier period than that in which it is cited. But there is no difficulty in supposing that as Joshua probably composed his book towards the latter part of his life, he might have introduced an apposite [pertinent] quotation from a history or poem containing a more minute or vivid description of the miracle, and written some years before his own.

2. The use of the phrase "to this day" is supposed to indicate a period very considerably subsequent to the date of the events. Thus of the stones set up in the Jordan--"they were there *unto this day*" (4:9); of the place where the reproach of Egypt was rolled away--"the name of the place is called Gilgal *unto this day*" (5:9); of the valley of Achor--"it is a desolation *unto this day*" (7:26); of the ruins of Ai--"it is a desolation *unto this day*" (8:28); and so in other

instances. In reply to this it can only be said that the phrase does not necessarily imply any considerable length of time. If Washington had written annals of the American Revolution in the last year or two of his life, no one would have been surprised to hear him saying of certain monuments or memorials of battles and victories, that they remained "unto this day." In like manner Joshua might have expressed himself in the same language in similar circumstances.

3. An argument to the same effect is derived from the narrative of the taking of Leshem by the Danites (19:48,49). This event, it is said, appears from Judges 18:27-29 to have occurred after the death of Joshua, and therefore the present account of it is inconsistent with the asserted authorship of the book. Hence some have attributed its composition to Eleazar, some to Samuel, and some to Isaiah or Ezra. But it is not necessary on this account to attempt to invalidate the claims of Joshua to the authorship of the substance of the book. It is not denied that occasional interpolations have been made by later hands, and this may safely be admitted to be one (although it is to be remarked that Jahn and others express strong doubt whether the two narratives refer to the same expedition, as they vary in several particulars).

4. It is objected that certain places are called in this book by names which they did not acquire till some ages afterwards. But as to "the stray city Tyre" (19:29), Bochart contends that this is not the celebrated city of that name but an inland fortified place. So the Cabul mentioned (19:27) is affirmed by Reland not to have been the country to which that name was applied by Hiram in Solomon's time but a city which in the age of Josephus had degenerated into a village. We may observe, too, in this connection, that the expression "house of God" (9:23) is not exclusively applied to *the temple* but also to *the tabernacle*, as the Bedouins apply the term to a *tent*.

On the whole, therefore, we feel little hesitation in referring the authorship of the book as a whole to Joshua, though we doubt not that certain isolated passages have been inserted by copyists or revisers at a subsequent period. We see no good reason to doubt that the history here given is his work as truly as the Commentaries of Cæsar are his. And in this view we are confirmed by the *a priori* probabilities of the case. Moses, it is certain, kept an accurate register of the various events that took place during his administration in the wilderness. And as Joshua was his constant servant and companion, he could not but be aware of the importance of such historical memoranda, nor can it well be supposed that, having succeeded him in the same office, he should not have continued the same practice.

## 2. Contents, Scope, and Design

The book relates the history of Israel while under the command and government of Joshua, the entrance of the Hebrews into Canaan, their conquest of the greater part of the country, the division of the territory by lot among the several tribes, and the provision made for the settlement and establishment of the Jewish church in that country.

The length of time embraced in this history is variously stated by chronologists at seventeen, twenty-seven, and thirty years. Between twenty-six and twenty-seven years is the usually received and most probable period.

The leading drift of the writer is to demonstrate the faithfulness of God in the perfect accomplishment of all his promises to the patriarchs--Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, and also to Moses--that the children of Israel should obtain possession of the land of Canaan. Viewed in this light it is an invaluable appendage to the preceding five books of Moses, and indeed bears to them very much the same relation as does the Acts of the Apostles to the Gospels of the four Evangelists.

The inspired historian relates, with all the animation of one who was an actual eye-witness and participator of the scenes described, the successive miracles that favored and secured the conquest of the country, the general zeal, activity, and obedience of Israel in prosecuting their wars, with the occasional lapses and transgressions that interrupted the career of their victories. We see the Divine power and faithfulness conspicuously displayed in guiding, cherishing, and defending the chosen people amidst all the trials to which they were exposed. And while the general tenor of the narrative affords a striking emblem of the warfare of the Christian in gaining possession of his heavenly inheritance, it ministers the most abundant encouragement to those who in sincerity and faith throw themselves upon the superintending care of that Being who keeps covenant and mercy forever.

The following will serve as a synopsis of the contents of the several chapters:

#### *Part I -- The Entrance of the Israelites into Canaan*

1. The appointment of Joshua as leader of Israel (ch. 1)
2. The spies sent out to view the land (ch. 2)
3. The miraculous passage of the Jordan (1:10-18; chs. 3, 4)
4. The renewal of the covenant (5:1-13)

#### *Part II -- The Victories of the Israelites under Joshua*

1. The conquest of Jericho (ch. 6)
2. The capture of Ai (chs. 7, 8)
3. Fraud of the Gibeonites; conquest of the five kings; miracle of the sun's standing still (chs. 9, 10)
4. Conquest of Canaan completed (ch. 11)
5. Recapitulation of the conquests of Israel (chs. 12, 13)

#### *Part III -- Division of the Country*

1. Inheritance of the two tribes and a half (ch. 13)
2. General division of Canaan (ch. 14)
3. Inheritance of Caleb (chs. 14, 15)
4. Lot of Judah (ch. 15)
5. Lot of Joseph (chs. 16, 17)
6. The Tabernacle set up (ch. 18)
7. Lot of Benjamin and the remaining tribes (chs. 18, 19)
8. Inheritance of Joshua (ch. 19)
9. Cities of refuge and Levitical cities (chs. 20, 21)

Part IV -- *The last Exhortations and Death of Joshua*

1. The assembling of the people and first address of Joshua (ch. 23)
2. The tribes again assembled and addressed by Joshua (ch. 24)
3. The death and burial of Joshua (ch. 24)
4. The death and burial of Eleazar (ch. 24)