

# Dr. David Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 1

## Introduction Part 1

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This is Dr. David Howard in his teaching on Joshua through Ruth. This is session number one, Introduction to Joshua, part one, Joshua, Date, and Authorship.

Greetings, I am Professor David Howard. I just completed my 36th year of teaching Old Testament at the seminary level, mostly at Bethel Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. I just actually retired a couple of months ago and will be continuing to teach overseas and as an adjunct here and there in the U.S. But it's been a great privilege to study the Old Testament for a lifetime, essentially, of academic work. I'll say a word about how and why I got into the Old Testament.

I hope that can be good for you. I'd grown up in the church. My parents were missionaries. I grew up in Latin America for the first 15 years of my life. I was taught by godly teachers, pastors, and parents. When I came to be an adult, I realized that I knew a lot about the New Testament and not a whole lot about the Old, even though I'd read it several times.

So, when the Lord called me into graduate school to study the Bible, I decided that maybe the Old Testament was the place to go, just to learn a little bit about it on my own, for myself. I did not enter grad school with the intention of pursuing a career in this. I'd actually done a biology pre-med major in college, but I didn't get into med school, and that was kind of a crisis of identity.

But I'm thrilled that the Lord called me in this direction. So, I chose the Old Testament for personal reasons, and one thing led to another. I really felt called to teach, and my professors said, well if you do that, you need to get a doctorate.

So, I did a doctorate at the University of Michigan in Near Eastern Studies, studying the Old Testament in context and the languages and history, and began teaching at Bethel Seminary in the early 80s. I taught for a few years at Trinity Divinity School in the Chicago area, and also the New Orleans Baptist Seminary, and the last 18 years here at Bethel again. I've been privileged to study the book of Joshua in several different contexts.

In three different classes in my master's and doctorate work, we read the book of Joshua in Hebrew, so I had plenty of experience translating it. I began writing articles about the book and eventually was asked to write a commentary on the book, and it was a great privilege to be able to delve deeply into the book and learn many things. So, this series will be going through the book of Joshua.

It's a wonderful book, and I've been really blessed to teach it, to study it, I want to hope it will be a good experience for you as we come through and introduce the book. So, if I were to ask about first impressions of the book, I do this in my classes, and many times people will say, well, it's about battles. I have the song, Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho, and that's the impression we have, and the conquest, and then the land.

And all that's true, of course. There's a huge concentration in the book and a focus on battles and conflicts with the Canaanites, but I think sometimes we, through our own eyes, think of battles as human endeavors, and I want to emphasize, that we'll see this going through the course here, that it's really, the battles are seen through God's eyes, and God is the primary actor and mover behind the battles, and Israel, in a sense, is kind of a bystander. God is always giving the victory.

If you think about it, there's never any real battle in the book of Joshua where Israel wins the battle on the basis of superior military force or their own endeavors. It's God who does a miracle, God directs the battles, or whatever it might be. And then, of course, really, the battles only consume about five out of the 24 chapters, six out of the 24 chapters in the book, chapters 6 to 12.

I guess that's seven chapters. The rest of the book is preparations for those battles in chapters 1 to 5, and then the distribution of the land and fulfillment of promises from God. So, the land, the book is far more focused on the land of Canaan as a gift from God, as a place of rest, and a place of inheritance, and a place where Israel then, going forward, will be able to live its life for centuries to come.

The book ends with Joshua the man reflecting back on what God has done in several speeches, and again, it gives a kind of a spiritual overlay to, again, these battles. Another thing that often people think about in terms of the battles is the annihilation, the destruction of the Canaanites by the Israelites. And that seems rather harsh, and it takes on a special urgency today in light of modern-day news about Islamic jihad and many of the radical Islamic groups wanting to annihilate all infidels and so on.

And so, the comparison has been made that the Bible was essentially condoning the same thing, the same type of thing. I think that there are important differences, and we will talk about those in a later segment in the sequence, but that's another concern that people have as they come into the book. But I hope that we can see beyond that, and see some of the great movements of God in this book, and learn about who God really is through the way he dealt with his own people, and also, actually, the Canaanites, foreign people.

It's not only a book of punishment and conflict of the wicked Canaanites, but there are some inspiring stories of Canaanites who were spared as well. So that's kind of an introduction to the overview of the book. So, let's talk about the book itself.

If you have a Bible, it'll be helpful to follow along through these segments. And so, I'll ask you to turn to the book of Joshua, and we'll dig right in. We're going to look at some specifics about the man and the context, the date, and then we'll look at the historical context, referring to the map behind me here.

We will also refer to what I would call the literary context, how it fits into the canon of the Bible, the canon of the Old Testament at this specific point. So those will be some things we'll look. And then we'll look at what I would see as the overall theme of the book, and then some subsidiary themes before we launch into the first chapter.

So, if you see on page one, or chapter one of your Bible, you see typically at the title page, it'll say Joshua or Book of Joshua. And of course, the book receives its title from the main character, the leader of Israel at the time, the man named Joshua. He was the successor to Moses, and now the new leader of Israel.

His name in Hebrew is Yehoshua, and it means the Lord saves, or the Lord delivers, or Yahweh, the personal divine name of God saves or delivers. Interestingly, in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, that name is rendered as Jesus, which is the same as the name Jesus in the New Testament. And Joshua's original name, we find that in Numbers chapter 13, his original name was Hoshea, which is very similar, means salvation or deliverance.

But we read in Numbers 13, verse 16, that Moses was the one that changed Joshua's name to being the Lord delivers, the Lord saves. It's interesting that often we read the Pentateuch through the lens of seeing the great movements of God, and the people, and Moses, the great leader. But when you come back and look at it through the lens of Joshua, the man, he occurs many times in the Pentateuch.

He is found, first of all, in Exodus chapter 17, where he is an aid and a close confidant of Moses. He had been Moses' aid since his youth, according to Exodus chapter 33. He accompanied Moses up to Mount Sinai in Exodus 24.

He was one of the 12 spies sent into the Promised Land, and he was one of the two who came back with a positive report. And so, he and Caleb were the ones allowed to enter the Promised Land. There's a significant ceremony where he is actually designated as a successor to Moses, and that's in the book of Numbers, chapter 27.

And it's a rather extended passage where the focus is on his commission. He's a man in whom God's Spirit resided, Numbers 27, verse 8. The commissioning service was a

very solemn affair with the entire congregation participating. Eliezer, the high priest, was presiding, and during the ceremony, he was given Moses' authority by laying on Moses' hands.

And later he is commissioned with Eliezer to be the one that distributes the land. So, in the book of Joshua itself, we see several significant places where the distribution of the land is being given, and it is Joshua, the leader, and Eliezer, the priest, doing this. So, it's a solemn affair that's with God's sanction of his two, the spiritual leader and, in a sense, the secular leader, when they get to the land.

When Moses reached the end of his life in Deuteronomy 31, we read that he reminded everyone that Joshua was the designated successor. He charged Joshua to be strong and courageous, and that's the same words used in chapter 1 of Joshua when God speaks to him in similar terms. And when Moses is about to die, Joshua goes with him into the tent of meeting, which I would argue is a separate tent from the Tabernacle.

But he's there with him, and God is with both of them there. And then, finally, in Deuteronomy 34, the chapter tells about Moses' death, and it kind of evaluates Moses as a leader par excellence, like whom there was never a prophet since in Israel, like Moses, in the last three verses of Deuteronomy 34, it mentions Joshua in verse 9. Joshua, the son of Nun, was full of the spirit of wisdom. For Moses had laid his hands on him, and so the people of Israel obeyed him and did as the Lord had commanded Moses.

So, obviously, Moses is the great leader, and he's a towering figure in the rest of the Old Testament history. Joshua is his designated successor. We will see how, in a sense, Joshua grew into the job of leader.

He is not ever compared to Moses in quite the towering way, but in the book of Joshua, in the Pentateuch, he is clearly the one that is to succeed Moses and to, in a sense, fill his shoes, even though perhaps he wasn't the leader in the sense of giving the law and those kinds of things. The book is clear that God was with him several times. It says, almost a dozen times, it says God was with Joshua as he was with Moses.

The entire nation vowed to obey him and serve him. At the beginning of his ministry, in chapter 1, when they said everything that we were commanded we will do, just as we obeyed Moses, we will obey you. At the end of the book, they obeyed his challenge to vow to follow him, in chapter 24.

We see Joshua acting authoritatively in the last speeches, in chapters 22 to 24. He speaks with great authority. Then he is referenced, when the book ends, as the servant of the Lord.

There is an interesting, I would say, growing into the job theme in the book. Maybe this would be a place to talk about it. Please turn to Joshua 1, if you are turned elsewhere.

We will see in verse 1, it says, after the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, and Moses is called the servant of the Lord somewhere around 16, 18 times in the book of Joshua. He is called more times that in Joshua than he is in the entire Pentateuch. So, Moses is the servant of the Lord.

The Lord said to Joshua, the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, or Moses' aid. It's interesting, that Joshua is the successor to Moses, designated successor, God's blessed him, and so on. But the author of the book, here, is not calling him yet the servant of the Lord.

Moses is the servant of the Lord, but Joshua is only the aid to Moses. In a sense, he is not quite given the full authority, or at least by the author of the book. Moses is called the servant of the Lord 16 to 18 times through the book of Joshua, but Joshua is never called that until the end.

You get to the end of the book when we have what we call the death notice of Joshua when he is dead and buried. It says, chapter 24, verse 29, after these things, Joshua, the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died. Being 110 years old, and so it goes.

So, in a sense, Joshua had to die before he was designated as the servant of the Lord, but the book ultimately gives him that honor, just as we had with Moses. So, that's enough about Joshua the man. Let's talk about the book itself, the authorship, and the date of composition of the book.

Basically, the book is anonymous. There is no claim in the book who actually wrote the whole book. There is no claim elsewhere in Scripture about who wrote the book, so we just really don't know.

The rabbis attributed the book to Joshua the man as the writer. Some rabbis saw parts of the book as written by a later hand, especially the part about Joshua's death. Some rabbis attributed the writing of the book of Joshua to Samuel.

There are several references in the book to something happening or something being there until this day, and so that would lead some to say it's not Joshua, it's somebody later, maybe Samuel, and so on. Now, there's clearly Joshua wrote parts of the book because, for example, chapter 24, verse 26 says that Joshua recorded these things in the book of the law of God, referring to the covenant that people had made at Shechem. So, I have no doubt that he recorded some of the book.

Who wrote the whole thing, we just don't really know. My view is that evangelicals, we rightly so, have a vested interest in understanding the Bible to be true and reflective of the historical realities and being accurate in what it says. Sometimes we spin our wheels, I think, when we try to guess at things that the Bible is not affirming.

Many of us would affirm, for example, the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch because the Bible affirms many places that Moses was the author of most or all of the Pentateuch. We would defend the Pauline authorship of Paul's epistles and so on. But when books are anonymous, it seems to me it's an interesting exercise perhaps to try to guess at what the authors might be but it's really an exercise at guessing and it's not essential to the book.

If it were essential, my view would be that the Holy Spirit would have inspired the writers to indicate who were the authors or who was the author. In terms of the date of composition, again, we don't really know but those references to until this day sound like they are past the lifetime of Joshua. As a matter of fact, that's really the case at the end of the book.

It says, verse 31, chapter 24, Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua and all of the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had known all the work that the Lord did for Israel. So, it was clearly written after the final form of the book was clearly written after Joshua's time but again, we don't really know. Several of the references to until this day would indicate maybe the time of Samuel.

There is a reference in chapter 6 to Rahab living in Jericho until this day and unless she herself lived several centuries long that sounds like it was written fairly quickly after the events of the book of Joshua. However, I'm not completely sure about that because in the book of Hosea, chapter 3, verse 5 it says in Hosea's time, which is in the 8th century BC, 700s, it mentions the house of David or it doesn't mention the house of David, it mentions David himself being alive and that's clearly a reference to the house of David, to the lineage of David. So, the reference in Hosea to David is clearly to the descendants of David and maybe that's the case here as well.

The short answer is we don't really know the date of the writing either. We'll talk about the historical context of the book the date of the events of the book the date of writing may have been later but the date of the events. You see the map here and just to begin the discussion there's a key reference to.

I'm sorry, I'll start again with the date of Joshua and all the events in the book of Joshua are dependent on understanding when the date of the exodus out of Egypt occurred.

There's a big discussion about that you'll find in the literature two major dates given the traditional date has depended on a key reference in 1 Kings 6, verse 1 if you'd like to turn to that I will say a couple of things about that.

So, in 1 Kings 6 the context here is now years later in Solomon's day when Solomon is laying the foundation of the temple. Here's what it says 1 Kings 6, verse 1 "in the 480th year after the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt." It goes on to say in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel in the month of Ziv, which was the second month, he began to build the house of the Lord. So, it is telling us that when Solomon laid the foundations of the temple, this is 480 years after the death of Solomon.

Now we know with pretty precise accuracy when Solomon lived and what the date of this would have been. In his fourth year, it would have been about 966 B.C. 967. And so, you go backward 480 years and you get to the year 1446 B.C. And so, the traditional view has been that Israel emigrated out of Egypt and went up toward the land of Canaan in 1446. And 40 years later when they finally entered under Joshua would have been around 1406. 1400 is a good round number for that.

The problem is that when archaeology began uncovering things in the Middle East about 100 years ago, in the early part of the 20th century. It became clear that there was a huge layer of destruction throughout the eastern Mediterranean, destruction of cities, displacement of peoples and migrations, and so on. And it was kind of almost like a civilizational collapse and it was kind of like the aftermath almost of a nuclear war that life had to start over again. That has usually been dated around 1200 B.C.

Recently maybe a few decades later in the 1100s but we'll say 1200 is a good round number for that, and that's usually seen by archaeologists now as the end of what's called the Late Bronze Age. 1200 BC, is a little bit after beginning of what's called the Iron Age. And so, as cities were beginning to be uncovered some of these destruction layers in that time were attributed to the Israelites coming in to destroy the cities in Canaan.

There's a reference in an Egyptian stele from under the king of Merneptah dates to around 1208 referencing Israel as a people in the land Canaan. So, it clearly shows the Egyptians recognized them as outside of Egypt and that would reinforce the view that maybe they had just come out. There are good evangelicals in the mainstream of critical scholarship who would go with the later date. Evangelicals are about evenly split between either date. So, there's not an issue of your reliability as an orthodox scholar or not which date you go with. My own view is that the earlier date is the more probable for several reasons. One is that this reference in Kings. The scholars who see that as later see this the 480 years as a symbolic number thinking of maybe 12 cycles of 40 years of generations. So, 12 times 40 is 480 and if you see a

generation a real generation, lifespan of people would be maybe closer to 20 or 25 years. You can compress that however in my view the way the verse reads that's a pretty precise date because it goes on to talk about in the 480th year after people came out of Egypt in the 4th year Solomon's reign in the month of Ziv was the second month. So, it looks like it really is trying to be a calendar date and not using a symbolic number but giving us a real number with years, months and even down to that level of precision.

One thing that you might also see in discussions of the date of the exodus is if you add up the years of all the judges in the book of Judges, so and so became a judge and the land had, judged for so many years the land had rest for 40 years or 80 years, you get numbers that are bigger than fit in either category. You have numbers that are greater than the 400 years between Joshua and say King David. And so, in either case you have to compress the reigns of the judges the tenure of the judges. I think the point being if you read carefully in the book of Judges we will see that the judges were, individual judges were not necessarily responsible for the entire land. Sometimes there are regional conflicts under this judge or that judge. And so, they may have been overlapping in what was happening may not have been consecutive chronologically.

Either view of the exodus, whether it's the earlier or later view, has to compress some of those numbers. And so, my view is that it's the earlier date that's the better date. So, I would view again a round number end of the death of Moses around 1406 or 1400.

Joshua's tenure the probably the reference the length of the events in the book of Joshua about 30 years, 5-7 years of the active battles and then another 25 years or so of putting things together settling in the land and so on. So that would be a little bit about the date of the events.

The map I've drawn here is intended to show the geographical and historical context so let me just try to explain this this map represents 3000 years of Old Testament history. So, I have the Hittites were, the Hittite Empire reigned in this part of the area for a couple hundred years 1400 to 1200 BC. The Assyrians and the Babylonians were constantly going back and forth with each other. There was time when the Assyrians were dominant and most things on this map were under the Assyrian Empire. Then their fortunes waned and the Babylonians fortunes waxed. The Persians toward the end of the period, conquered the Babylonians and they held sway until the Alexander the Great conquered the Near East in around 330 BC.

The Egyptians their power was mostly in the 3rd and 2nd millenniums BC the 3000s, 2000s down to about 1000. So everything here is not all existing in equal power at the same time this represents about 3000 years of Old Testament history. The labels



I've given in capital letters in red are the major world empires in these different centuries the blue. The smaller regional powers and nations against the backdrop of which Israel lived its life mostly through its history. So, this is Aram, the capital was Damascus. The modern-day name of these countries is in green so that's Syria and that's the same Damascus that we hear about in the news these days.

The Ammonites lived east of the Jordan River this is a bad map here, the Jordan is much longer than that. Moabites lived east of the Dead Sea, and Edomites lived southeast of the Dead Sea. The Midianites were down here in the northwestern part of the Arabian Desert. This is the Sinai Peninsula the Israelites came out of Egypt into Sinai and up to the land of Canaan.

Eventually Abraham emigrated from Ur, probably in the south of the Mesopotamia some put it farther north, but if he's in the south he migrates here to the city of Haran and it is from here that he receives the call to go down into the land of Canaan.

So, this is the backdrop. So, you remember in Genesis God calls, Abraham is already migrating with his father Terah and his family and they are in Haran. God calls Abraham to go into the promised land and so he takes his family here. Abraham settles here and his son Isaac and Jacob are all living here. Jacob's 12 sons Joseph, you know the stories.

They end up in Egypt because of the famine. Joseph rises in the household of Pharaoh 400 years of slavery in Egypt and then Moses is raised up to bring the people out of Egypt, across the Red Sea. Somewhere down to Mount Sinai, they get the Ten Commandments and the law at Mount Sinai. Eventually they set out to go into the land of Canaan. The land of Canaan would be all this area here.

They send the spies into the land, Numbers 13 and 14. The spies come back with a bad report. The people complain so God sentences them to wander in the wilderness for 40 years.

They end up at the end of that time up here, just east of the Jordan River, east of Jericho and Jerusalem. This is where the book of Deuteronomy unfolds. Deuteronomy has the final speeches of Moses. Moses is not going to cross the Jordan with the people because of the sin that he committed in Numbers chapter 20. So, you have the final speeches of Moses here.

Then in the book of Joshua, it begins right here as well and then the action takes us into Canaan. It unfolds to the south and to the north and the people are settling in the land that God had promised.

So that's kind of the historical, geographical context of the book. We'll come back to refer to this more but this is kind of a general introduction to that

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