

Joshua

1. Theme – Joshua traces the fulfillment of God’s promise of the land to Israel by describing their entry into Canaan and their progressive defeat of the peoples of Canaan. It presents a unified Israel moving out under the leadership of Joshua, Moses’ successor, and functioning according to the “constitution” laid out in Deuteronomy.
2. Author and date – The author of Joshua is not explicitly stated in the book. Traditionally, the book was attributed to Joshua. At the very least, some of the book was written by Joshua or under Joshua’s leadership. (Joshua 24:26 “And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God.”) At least some source material dates to Joshua’s time (Joshua 6:25, 16:10). However, there is disagreement over the extent of Joshua’s contribution to the book. The phrase “to this day” recurs throughout the book (4:9, 5:9, 6:25, 7:26, 8:28-29, 9:27, 10:27, 13:13, 15:63, 16:10) and implies a later perspective. Some sections were clearly written somewhat later. For example, Joshua 24:29-33 describes not only Joshua’s death but the lives of those leaders who succeeded Joshua. A comparison of Joshua 15:63 with 2 Sam. 5:6-10 suggests that the book was completed before David took Jerusalem.
3. Structure of the book (suggested by Joshua 1:2-7 – Hendriksen):
 - a. God causes Israel to cross the Jordan and enter the land. (ch. 1-5)
 - b. God causes Israel to conquer the land. (ch. 6-12)
 - i. central campaign (Jericho, Ai, etc.)
 - ii. southern campaign (the five kings, etc.)
 - iii. northern campaign (Hazor, etc.)
 - c. God causes Israel to inherit the land (divisions among the tribes). (ch. 13-22)
 - d. Joshua, in his farewell address, emphasizes Israel’s resulting obligation to worship and love God. (ch. 23-24)
4. Major themes and importance:
 - a. Parallels and contrasts between Moses and Joshua
 - i. Covenant is renewed at the end of their lives.
 - ii. People are sent to possess their inheritance.
 - iii. Moses parts the Red Sea, and Joshua parts the Jordan River.
 - iv. Both lead Israel to military victories.
 - v. BUT, Moses names a successor; Joshua does not. This leads to the tension that Judges describes.
 - vi. AND, Joshua succeeds Moses and yet is not the “prophet like Moses.” (Deut. 18:14-22 and 34:9-11). God does not speak to Joshua face-to-face. We must wait for another.
 - b. There is a constant tension between the holiness of God and his graciousness toward his people. He sets forth choices on which blessings and curses are made conditional. Yet he also makes unconditional promises of grace toward his people.
 - c. There is a tension in the book between the idea that the people have possessed and conquered the land (Josh. 21:45 “Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed.”) and the reality that the conquest is incomplete (Josh. 17:13 “Now when the people of Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but did not utterly drive them out.”)
 - d. The rest provided by Joshua foreshadows but does not fulfill the rest of the gospel and ultimately of heaven (Heb. 4:10-11). The inheritance of the land foreshadows the imperishable hope in Christ (1 Pet. 1:3-5). The conquest of Canaan foreshadows the moving out and growth of the kingdom through the spread of the gospel.
 - e. Joshua, the people of Israel, and Rahab of Jericho are presented as models of faith, those who were looking for a better country (Heb. 11:30-31).

References:

An Introduction to the Old Testament, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.
Survey of the Bible, 4th revised ed., W. Hendriksen, Baker, 1976.