

Joshua

*This is part of an ongoing series of short articles designed to help us understand what scripture is and what is **in** each book of scripture. Previous articles can be found at www.openarms-communityofchrist.org.*

Joshua is the first of what today are described as “the historical books” in the Bible. However, in the original grouping, it was part of a group described as the “former prophets.” These books are not history in the way we consider history; instead they contain different and overlapping versions of Israel’s past. Each version is shaped by the conviction that God was intimately involved with the people—and while they may be based on ancient oral and written traditions, they also include legends, folktales, poetry, historical stories, and other techniques that created drama supporting the view that God’s interaction with the people was important and relevant.

Joshua picks up where Deuteronomy left off. Moses has died, and Joshua is preparing to lead the people into Canaan. The first fifteen chapters cover the military campaigns that led to the settlements; however, this is a simplified version. It is more an idealized version of a long and complex (and harsh) process.

Chapters 13-21 are a listing of the land distribution among the victorious tribes. Again, these lists probably come from a later period of time—perhaps from the Israelite monarchy. However, they do serve the purpose of showing the extent of the Israelite occupation. They include the listing of cities of refuge, cities that were for **all** residents of Canaan (Israelites or aliens) so that someone who killed another accidentally could live in safety until there was a trial.

The final three chapters are three stories that focus on the loyalty the Israelites owe God, since God has given them this land. At the end of these chapters, Joshua has called the people together before his death. He reviews their past and then challenges the people to put aside other gods and serve only the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

To quickly summarize, the book of Joshua is the story of how an obedient Israel under God’s chosen leader can bring into existence a society based on justice and freedom.