

The Covenant of Fidelity

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The “Golden Age” of Joshua is the only period of Israelite history during which the people were wholly faithful to YHWH (Jsh24:31, Jr2:2b-3a). **The Covenant of Fidelity is the epitome of Joshua’s life** (Jsh23:14). It is the climax of the Book of Joshua – we need to **survey Joshua’s life to appreciate the Covenant of Fidelity**.

Joshua’s Commission: Joshua was specifically **commissioned to lead the people into the Promised Land** (Nm27:18-20, Dt31:7-8). Joshua had been Moses’ assistant from the beginning (Ex17:4, 24:13, Nm11:28), and he was one of the original twelve spies (Nm13:8,16,14:30).

No Apostasy in the Book of Joshua: The Book of Joshua is the only “historic” or “prophetic” book of the Old Testament which does **NOT deal with any Israelite apostasy** – it is a very positive book, a book of accomplishment, **a book of successful service to God**. There is only one criticism of Joshua – the Gibeonite deception (Jsh9:14-15). After the death of Joshua there was some criticism for failure to drive out all the inhabitants of the land, but that was part of the plan (Ex23:30, Dt7:22). The problem was intermixing with the Inhabitants of the land (Jdg2:2).

War with the Inhabitants of the Land: Joshua’s first business was war with the inhabitants of the land (Jsh1:3,5-6, 3:10b, 5:1). The war took five to ten years – it is very briefly recounted in Joshua chapters six through eleven. After early victories the Israelites were able establish themselves in the central highlands near Shechem where they performed **the covenant ratification ceremony prescribed by Moses** (Dt27:1-26, Jsh8:30-35). Mount Ebal has been archeologically excavated and Joshua’s alter has been found.

The Division of the Land: Next Joshua spent five to ten years allocating and dividing the land – described in Joshua chapters thirteen through twenty-two. **Not all the land was conquered** “there remains much land to posses ...” (Jsh13:1b-7) so **many Israelites “lived among the Canaanites”** (Jdg1:32).

The Golden Age: Although Israel did NOT control all the territory, **the remaining inhabitants of the land posed no threat to Israel**, “the land lay subdued before them” (Jsh18:1), and Joshua settled into “retirement” (Jsh19:49-50). **These last years of Joshua’s life and the years of the “elders who outlived” him, about forty years, were the “Golden Age”**.

Joshua’s Final Speech: When Joshua is approaching death, he makes a final exhortation to the people as did his mentor, Moses. **Joshua recognizes that the work is NOT complete** – there remain inhabitants of the land to be driven out (Jsh23:2-5). Joshua is explicit about the consequences of intermixing with them (Jsh23:6-11). **Turning back is NOT an option** (Jsh23:12-13, Lk9:62). Joshua summarises the beneficence of YHWH and the consequences of apostasy (Jsh23:14-16)

The Covenant of Fidelity: Israel was committed to **the Sinai Covenant**; Christians are committed to **the Covenant of Baptism**. When Moses committed the people to the Covenant of Life, all Israel was right there in the camp: it was possible to cut the covenant on an individual level – this was no longer possible for Joshua, so **the covenant participants are representative** (Jsh24:1). But, the **implications of the covenant are very much at an individual level**.

Historical Prologue: Joshua expresses **a somewhat unique description of Israelite history**: he reports direct speech of YHWH, affirming that the Abrahamic line did not always serve YHWH (Jsh24:2-4). The psychological distance of the Israelites from the Exodus is clear by the inclusion of the Exodus Generation as “fathers” (Jsh24:5-7). Even the events in the Plains of Moab were a distant memory (Jsh24:8-10). **The Conquest was NOT remembered by the whole current generation** born in the Promised Land (Jsh24:11-13).

Covenant Stipulation: Serve YHWH: There is one simple stipulation to the covenant: **“fidelity”, serve YHWH “in sincerity and in faithfulness”**, expressed by avoidance of all idolatry. Joshua rhetorically offers the assembled people the option of choosing other “gods”, but categorically affirms his fidelity to YHWH (Jsh24:14-15). Joshua makes the covenant very personal **“as for me and my house, we will serve YHWH”**. The assembled people emphatically deny any desire to serve other “gods”, and unequivocally affirm fidelity to YHWH (Jsh24:16-18). Next Joshua reminds them of **the inevitability of sin and the need for repentance**. Again, the assembled people unequivocally affirm fidelity to YHWH (Jsh24:19-21).

Covenant Witnesses: Joshua states that the people have witnessed against themselves (Jsh24:22-24). On this agreement to the terms of the covenant, **the covenant is recorded as cut**. **A “stone” is set up as a formal witness** and Joshua records the covenant in the **“documentation of the torah of God”** (Jsh24:25-27)

The Covenant of Fidelity was specifically with the Nation of Israel to remind them of the importance of their commitment to the Sinai Covenant: **the essence of the covenant is “fidelity”, absolute commitment to serve God** – this is the essence of the “covenant” of baptism. A Christian agrees to **grow in grace and knowledge – the torah of God**: to accomplish that growth **absolute commitment to live by the Way of God is required**. Because we are human, we are all susceptible to sin, which requires ongoing repentance. Through this process **we learn what it means to “serve the LORD for he is our God”**.