



ROSE GUIDE TO **JOSHUA, JUDGES AND RUTH**

Charts, Maps, and Time Lines



ROSE GUIDE TO
**JOSHUA,
JUDGES,
AND RUTH**

Rose Guide to Joshua, Judges, and Ruth
Copyright © 2025 Rose Publishing
Published by Rose Publishing
An imprint of Tyndale House Ministries
Carol Stream, Illinois
rose-publishing.com

ISBN 979-8-4005-0372-6

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Printed in China

31 30 29 28 27 26 25

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

Joshua, Judges, and Ruth: An Overview 5

CHAPTER 2

Joshua and the Conquest of Canaan 21

CHAPTER 3

Judges of Israel. 45

CHAPTER 4

Life of Samson 61

CHAPTER 5

The Story of Ruth 75

CHAPTER 6

The World of Ancient Israel 93

CHAPTER 7

Who's Who in Joshua, Judges, and Ruth 117

CHAPTER 8

Twelve Tribes of Israel. 135

CHAPTER 1

Joshua, Judges, and Ruth: An Overview



“ will never leave you nor forsake you” (Josh. 1:5). This was God’s promise to Joshua as he and the people of Israel waited at the edge of the promised land.

Almost forty years earlier, Joshua had been one of twelve spies whom Moses sent to scout the land of Canaan. Joshua and Caleb returned from Canaan with a favorable report for Moses, but the other ten spies persuaded the Israelites to stay out, for the people who lived in the land were big and powerful, like giants in their eyes. Joshua, however, challenged the Israelites to have courage: “The LORD is with us. Do not be afraid” (Num. 14:9). But the people listened to their fears more than God’s promises. As a result, God let them wander in the wilderness for decades until that generation passed away.

The book of Joshua opens with a second chance for God’s people. And this time, they found the courage that the earlier generation lacked; this time, they headed into Canaan to take on the giants in the land.

The books of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth cover more than three hundred years of biblical history (c. 1406–1051), from the end of the wilderness wanderings following the exodus to just before the era of Israel’s first kings.

THE STORY OF JOSHUA, JUDGES, AND RUTH

Joshua

The entry into Canaan began with a miraculous sign of God’s presence. God stopped the waters of the Jordan River so that the people could cross on dry land. This was reminiscent of the Red Sea parting when Moses and the Israelites left Egypt.

Joshua’s conquest of Canaan cities also began with a miracle: God brought down the massive walls of Jericho. Rahab, a Canaanite woman in Jericho, wisely understood what was happening: “I know that the LORD has given you this land.... For the LORD your God is God in heaven above and earth below” (Josh. 2:9, 11). When Jericho fell, she and her family were spared because of her faith and assistance to Israel.

After Jericho, Joshua and his army moved through central Canaan. Near Shechem, between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, Joshua and all the people assembled to worship the Lord. Shechem was the location where Abraham and his family had settled centuries earlier when God called him to migrate to Canaan (Gen. 12:6). Joshua built an altar on Mount Ebal, the priests presented offerings to the Lord, and Joshua read the law of Moses to all the people, exhorting them to obey their covenant with God.

Next, Joshua conquered cities in the southern region of Canaan, followed by victories in the north. In all these battles, God was their behind-the-scenes military commander, present and empowering (Josh. 5:13–15). Feared by the people of the land, the Israelites quickly settled throughout Canaan and Joshua allotted specific territories to the tribes of Israel. The book of Joshua closes with Joshua's farewell address in which he reminds the people to remain faithful to God as God had been faithful to them. Joshua memorably declared,

Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.

JOSHUA 24:15

Joshua died at one hundred and ten years old and was buried in the promised land.



Joshua (Hippolyte Flandrin, 1856–1863)

Judges

Joshua's death left the tribes of Israel without a central leader. The Lord was supposed to be their king, but, as we read at the beginning of the book of Judges, "another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel" (Judg. 2:10). Moses had told the people, "Remember the LORD your God," but this new generation soon forgot (Deut. 8:18). The awesome victories of the past became distant tales.

The book of Judges portrays repeated cycles of sin and deliverance during this era.

Sin: Though Israel had conquered many key cities in Canaan, they settled alongside the remaining Canaanites in the land (Judg. 2:20–23). In ancient Near East religions, people believed that a multitude of deities ruled over all aspects of life. The Israelites often turned to these false gods instead of trusting in the one true God to provide for their needs.

Oppression: In response to Israel's sins, God allowed other nations to oppress Israel. This oppression was not a mere inconvenience; in the ancient world, it was brutal and violent. Many Israelites probably felt like the farmer Gideon when he said, "Where are all [God's] wonders that our ancestors told us about?... The LORD has abandoned us" (Judg. 6:13).

Repentance: In desperation, the Israelites eventually cried out to God: "We have sinned against you, forsaking our God and serving the Baals" (Judg. 10:10).

Deliverance: In his mercy, God would then raise up a leader (a judge) to deliver Israel from their oppressors. Notable among the twelve judges in the book of Judges are Deborah, Gideon, and Samson. Deborah was a prophet who led Israel to defeat King Jabin who "cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years" (Judg. 4:3). Gideon, an ordinary farmer and "least" among his family, was called by God to lead extraordinary military victories (Judg. 6:15). Samson was a foolish and revengeful man whom God, nevertheless, empowered with

amazing physical strength to accomplish God’s purpose of breaking Philistine dominance over Israel.

Peace: With the success of each judge, Israel would then experience a time of peace. But eventually the Israelites would fall back into worshipping other gods, and the cycle would start again.

Interestingly, the last five chapters in the book of Judges do not include any judges. This section consists of stories about Israelite violence, idolatry, and civil war between the tribes of Israel. In addition to outside oppressors, the people of God were oppressing each other too. Why was everything so chaotic? These chapters explain, “In those days, Israel had no king and everyone did as they saw fit” (Judg. 17:6; 18:1; 21:25).

Ruth

The story of Ruth is set during a latter part of the era of the judges, a time when Israel’s spiritual and social life was a mess (Ruth 1:1). Ruth’s story is quite different than the stories in the book of Judges. The book of Ruth does not include amazing feats of strength like in Samson’s story or shocking military victories like in Gideon’s; but to the two widowed women in this story, what God did in their lives must have seemed just as miraculous.

The book begins with a famine that caused Naomi and her family to move from Bethlehem to Moab. (Moab had been an enemy of Israel; Judg. 3:12.) Naomi’s husband and her two sons died in Moab, leaving her destitute. She returned to Bethlehem, but she was not alone. Naomi’s daughter-in-law,



Ruth in the Fields (Hugues Merle, 1876)

Ruth, a Moabite and also a widow, chose to go with her. Ruth pledged loyalty to Naomi: “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16). Life in Bethlehem would not be easy for Ruth. She was a widow, childless, and a foreigner.

In Bethlehem, Ruth worked among the poor, gleaning leftovers in grain fields. But God was at work behind the scenes of her life. The field she gleaned in belonged to an Israelite named Boaz. He had heard of Ruth’s unwavering dedication to Naomi, and he was moved to compassion toward Ruth. By the end of the story, Boaz, an Israelite and “a man of worth” (Ruth 2:1), is married to Ruth, a Moabite and “a woman of noble character” (Ruth 3:11). Being from the same clan as Naomi’s family, Boaz acted as a “guardian-redeemer” (Ruth 2:20) and bought back Naomi’s family land for her. The Lord blessed Ruth and Boaz with a son—a grandson for Naomi who renewed her life with joy. It is through this child’s lineage that King David and, most importantly, Jesus the Messiah came (Matt. 1:5–6).

God’s love shines through this story in the lives of ordinary people who showed extraordinary kindness and loyalty during a time when those qualities were difficult to find.

THE HISTORICAL BOOKS

Joshua, Judges, and Ruth are the first three books in a large section of the Old Testament called the Historical Books. This section comes immediately after the Pentateuch. (The Pentateuch is Genesis through Deuteronomy.)

The books in this second section of the Old Testament deal with Israel’s historical experience with the land and their God. The books range from conquering, settling, and experiencing the many joys, temptations, failures, and

HISTORICAL BOOKS

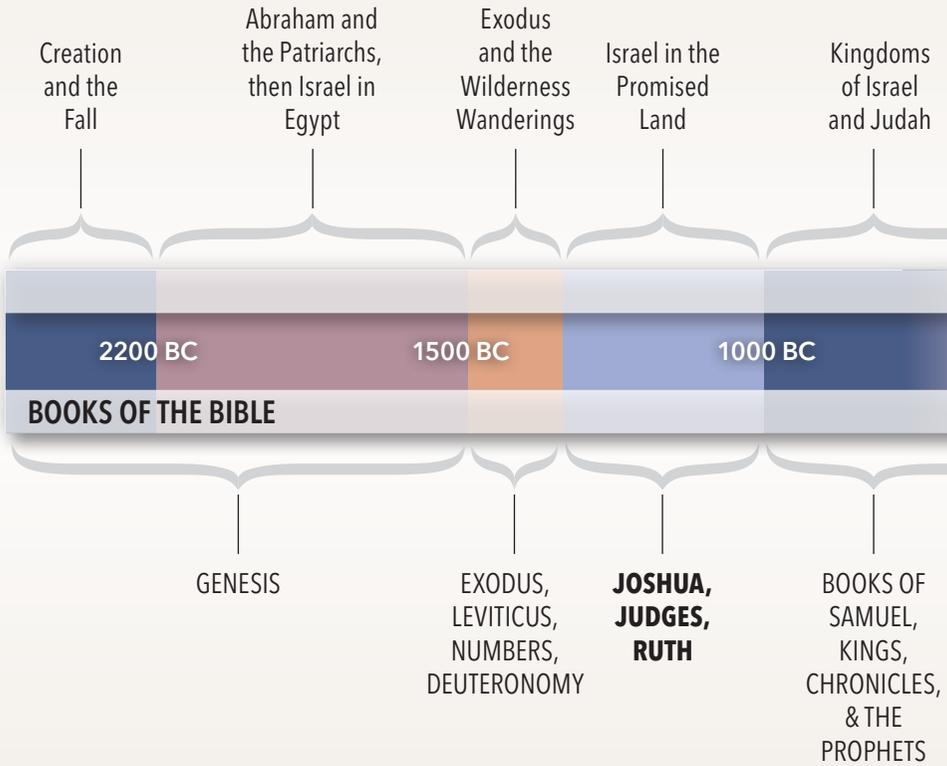
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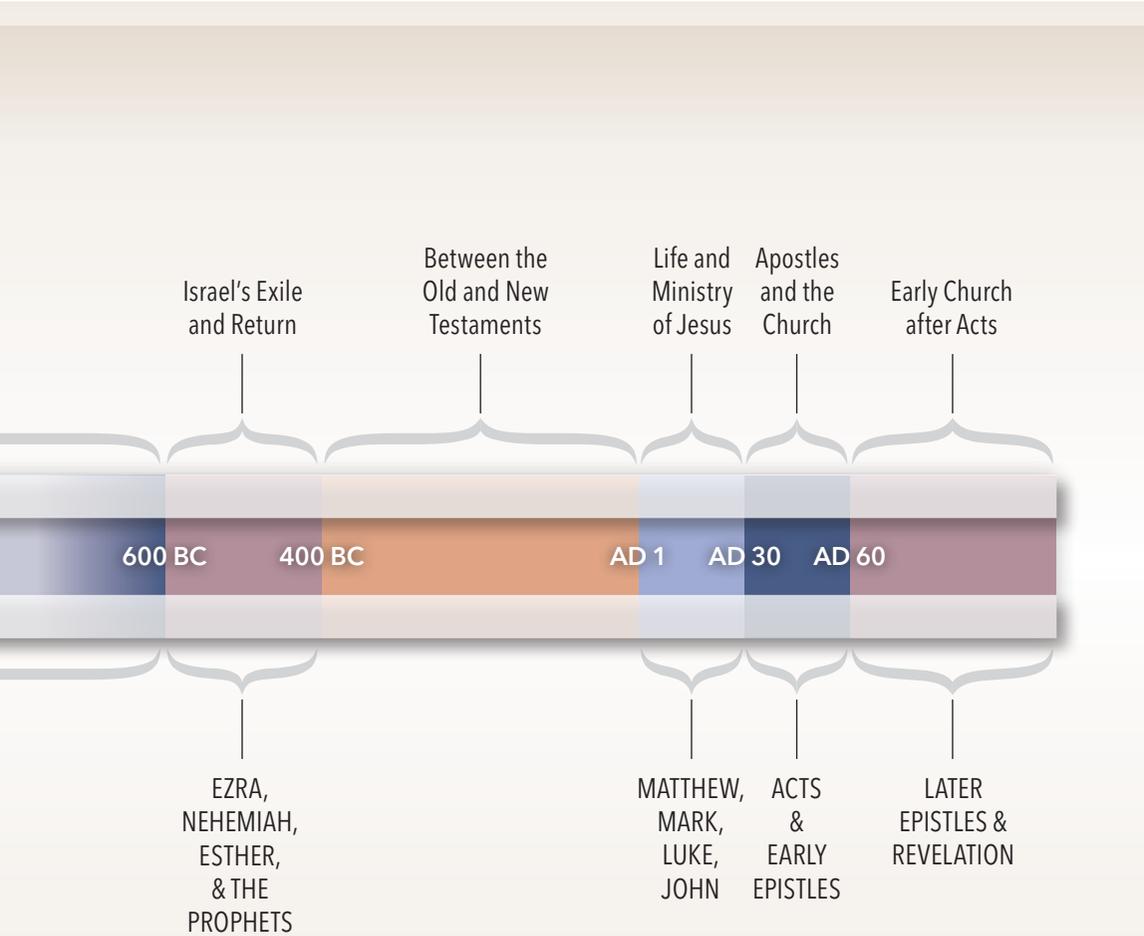
challenges of dwelling in the land as the Israelites learned how to live as God's people. The books cover the history of Israel from the time of Joshua's conquest (1400s BC) to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (400s BC). In between, we find a dramatic history of a people, their leaders, many painful disappointments, and some remarkable accomplishments. Israel changed from a loosely organized group of twelve tribes during the era of Joshua and the judges to a united kingdom under kings Saul, David, and Solomon; and then to a divided kingdom, an exiled people, and finally a returning people under leaders like Ezra and Nehemiah.

The many narratives in these books illustrate for us how God relates in history to his people and the whole world. They show how God works his will in human history.

- ✠ God works in direct ways, as in the stories of Joshua entering the promised land.
- ✠ God works in indirect ways, through Israel's judges and prophets, and also through nations like the Philistines, Assyrians, and Babylonians.
- ✠ God works behind the scenes, as in the stories of Ruth and Esther.

JOSHUA, JUDGES, AND RUTH IN BIBLICAL HISTORY





THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

Purpose

The book of Joshua functions as a bridge between the wilderness experience and the time in the promised land. It shows how God brought his people into the promised land and gave them rest. The book also tells the story of Joshua, whom God chose to be the leader of Israel after Moses's death.

Outline

1. Entrance into Canaan (1:1–5:12)
 - a. Joshua's leadership (1)
 - b. Rahab and the spies (2)
 - c. Crossing the Jordan River (3:1–5:12)
2. Conquest of Canaan (5:13–12:24)
 - a. Fall of Jericho (5:13–6:27)
 - b. Achan's sin and the fall of Ai (7:1–8:29)
 - c. Renewal of the covenant (8:30–35)
 - d. Conquests in the south and north (9:1–12:24)
3. Distribution of the Land (13–21)
 - a. Allotments for the tribes (13–19)
 - b. Cities of refuge (20)
 - c. Levite cities (21)
4. A Future for Israel (22–24)
 - a. Faithfulness of the eastern tribes (22)
 - b. Joshua's farewell address (23)
 - c. Renewal of the covenant (24)

Author

The book does not indicate who wrote it. An ancient tradition suggests Joshua as an author and the prophet Samuel as a main author or editor, though this is highly speculative.

Date

The book was likely composed early in Israel's history (1400s–1300s BC). Some linguistic evidence indicates that it was edited later, in the era of the kings (1100s–600s BC) and perhaps even during the time of exile (500s BC).

Setting

When the Israelites came to the borders of the promised land, the political and military powerhouses of the region were Egypt and Mesopotamia, and both were in a time of transition. The Canaanite kingdoms were independent and small, without an internal organization.

Themes

- ✠ God's faithfulness to his promises
- ✠ The covenant between God and Israel
- ✠ God's holiness and judgment
- ✠ The unity of God's people
- ✠ The role of Joshua as the leader of Israel

Key Bible Verses

"Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go" (Josh. 1:9).

"But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD" (Josh. 24:15).

THE BOOK OF JUDGES

Purpose

The book of Judges offers a theological (or prophetic) look at the history of God's people; it contrasts God's faithfulness with humanity's unfaithfulness and fickleness. It also provides a rationale for the kings, who were supposed to care for Israel's safety, lead the people to obedience of the law, and promote the pure worship of the Lord. In the era of the judges, "Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit" (Judg. 21:25).

Outline

1. An Incomplete Conquest and a Failing Faith (1:1–3:6)
2. A Cycle of Sin, Punishment, and Grace (3:7–16:31)
 - a. Judges Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar (3:7–31)
 - b. Judge Deborah (4–5)
 - c. Judge Gideon (6–9)
 - d. Judges Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon (10–12)
 - e. Judge Samson (13–16)
3. Spiritual and Moral Decay (17–21)
 - a. Micah's idols (17–18)
 - b. The Levite, the concubine, and a tribal war (19–21)

Author

The book gives no indication about its author. Ancient Jewish tradition credits the prophet Samuel with having written it, though this is far from certain.

Date

Like its author, the date that the book of Judges was written also remains unknown.

Setting

The events in the book of Judges take place in various parts of Canaan where the tribes of Israel had settled, including key locations like Gaza, Bethlehem, Shechem, Gibeah, Shiloh, and Mount Tabor.

Themes

- ✠ Sin and punishment
- ✠ God's justice and mercy
- ✠ Covenant loyalty and disloyalty
- ✠ God's holiness and judgment
- ✠ The unity of God's people

Key Bible Verses

“After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel” (Judg. 2:10).

“Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders” (Judg. 2:16).



Hills near Bethlehem

THE BOOK OF RUTH

Purpose

The book of Ruth presents a wonderful, concise, yet deep story of emptiness that turns into fullness; of despair into hope; of bitter sadness into joy and celebration. It shows how God turns around his people's fortunes. The book also presents the origins of King David's royal house.

Outline

1. Famine, Migration, and Death in Naomi's Family (1)
2. Boaz Meets Ruth in the Grain Fields (2)
3. Ruth Asks Boaz to be the Guardian-Redeemer (3)
4. Marriage, Birth, and Renewal in Naomi's Family (4)

Author

The author of Ruth is unknown. Jewish tradition attributes the book to the prophet Samuel, though nothing in the text indicates this.

Date

As with the author, the date of writing is also unknown.

Setting

The events took place during the era of the judges (Ruth 1:1), sometime between the death of Joshua (c. 1350 BC) and David's ascension to the throne of Israel (c. 1000 BC). Most scholars place the story in the latter part of the era of judges. The story is set during a severe famine in Israel. Naomi and her family leave Bethlehem and travel to the land of Moab to escape the famine. Moab was one of Israel's fiercest enemies.

Themes

- ✠ God's care and providence
- ✠ Loyalty, trust, and kindness
- ✠ Redemption and renewal

Key Bible Verses

"Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16).

"May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge" (Ruth 2:12).

