



# JOSHUA

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No Falling Words



Dale Ralph Davis

CHRISTIAN  
**FOCUS**





Dale Ralph Davis is pastor of Woodlands Presbyterian Church, Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Previously he taught Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi. He has previously written commentaries on:

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## Abbreviations

ASV	American Standard Version
<i>IBD</i>	<i>Illustrated Bible Dictionary</i>
<i>ISBE</i>	<i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
<i>IDB</i>	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
<i>IDB/S</i>	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible/Supplementary Volume</i>
JB	Jerusalem Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
TEV	Today's English Version
<i>TWOT</i>	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i>
<i>ZPEB</i>	<i>Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible</i>





## Preface

I remember learning one rule in Speech 101 in college: Never begin a speech with an apology. Since this is not a speech but is a book, I will break the rule – at least with some disclaimers.

This commentary is obviously not a critical, linguistic, grammatical, archaeological thesaurus on Joshua. There is a reason for that: I neither can nor want to write that sort of commentary. Certainly, you will find grammatical details or critical discussions – at least bits and pieces of them – in this study. But the focus is necessarily elsewhere. I do not know multiple Near Eastern languages (such as Ugaritic or Akkadian) and so cannot stress linguistics; I am not a trained archaeologist or historian and so do not emphasize backgrounds; and I am skeptical of the usefulness of cerebral critical positions, which frequently seem intent on considering everything but the text as it stands, and so will not enter barren disputes. My purpose has been to provide a model of what a pastor can do in biblical study if he will sweat over the Hebrew text and assume that the text as we have it was meant to be bread from God for his people. My conviction is that if one is willing to keep his Hebrew Bible before his eyes, a congregation of God's people next to his heart, and the struggle of hermeneutics (i.e. what does this writer intend to proclaim to God's people in his time, and how do I faithfully hold on to that intention and helpfully apply that text to God's contemporary flock?) in his mind, he will have manna to set before God's hungry people.

Clearly, I think commentaries should be written from this conviction and after this pattern. I do not think I can expect



my seminary students to *warm* to the Old Testament unless they sense it *nurturing* them as they hear it taught. (Why should not the Spirit be at work in our classrooms?) But if once they feel the *fire* of the Old Testament text – well, then, the Old Testament becomes a new book to them! Certainly, all the technical matters (linguistic, archaeological, critical) are in order; but we must bring the fragments together in an expository treatment that is not ashamed to stoop to the level of application.

In recent years, evangelicals have made much of the inspiration, infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture. Rightly so. But three 'i's' are not enough. We must push the 'instructability' of Scripture. The apostle was surely completely sober when he wrote that the Old Testament is 'profitable' (2 Tim. 3:16). We must demonstrate that. If the church is to recover the Old Testament, our expositions of it must show that, without torturing or twisting, it speaks for the comfort and correction of the saints.

I trust *No Falling Words* approximates such standards. The title comes from Joshua 21:43-45, the sheet anchor of the book (precisely, from verse 45; see also 23:14). There were no falling words among the ancient Genesis promises; no *falling* words means no *failing* words. I trust readers will find the same – that God's promise contains no falling words, only *standing* ones, upon which we, too, can stand.

A couple of mundane matters should be noted. I assume that the reader will have Bible in hand as he or she uses this book. I have drawn on a number of English translations, but, frequently, the translations are my own.

I owe multiple thanks to students, colleagues, and former parishioners for their stimulation and encouragement. I originally finished this volume on Reformation Day, 1987. It was a 'manse' production, written amid the delights and distresses of pastoral ministry. I don't think that is in any way a deficiency! And I am most grateful to Christian Focus for sending it forth in a new format. The book remains dedicated to Yahweh's gift (Prov. 19:14), Barbara, for two reasons: no other human being so richly deserves it, and she wanted me to dedicate it to her!





## Introduction

There is no effort here to provide a full introduction to the Book of Joshua. A proposal about the date and setting of the book will be made later (see introductory comments on Joshua 22, including the footnotes). Critical conclusions should be drawn only after careful exposure to the text itself. However, I believe it is important to answer the question, is Joshua among the prophets?

Don't we usually stick Joshua among the historical books, which is the term we use to designate the books of Joshua through 2 Chronicles in our English Bibles? Jewish tradition was probably closer to the truth when it dubbed Joshua through 2 Kings as former prophets.<sup>1</sup>

But why torture ourselves over terms? What difference does it make whether we look on Joshua as a historical or as a prophetic book? It has to do with the way some people think of history. I used to have theological students (who had just begun to get excited about the Old Testament) tell me, 'I never read or studied the Old Testament very much, because it seemed like it was all *history*.' What did they mean by that? They meant that they had viewed the Old Testament as a mere record of historical facts – and a dry one at that. Some of them never liked history in school, and when the Bible was cast in the same form ... alas!

What happens when one looks at Joshua as primarily prophecy rather than history? What is this difference between

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<sup>1</sup> In distinction from the latter prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of the Twelve (the minor prophets) – 1–2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings were viewed as one book each, so that the former prophets comprised four books: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings.





former prophets and historical books? To oversimplify, it is like the difference between preaching and a world history book. The 'prophecy of Joshua' means to convict, not merely to inform; to comfort, not simply to enlighten. The Book of Joshua is preaching material beamed to Israel in the form of historical narrative. We need to see clearly that 'history in the O[ld] T[estament] is a declaration from God about God'.<sup>2</sup> But until we begin to think of history that way, we will do well to keep thinking of Joshua as one of the former *prophets*.

As you read and study Joshua, try to keep asking yourself the question: What is the writer *preaching about* when he tells me this story? He is not telling you the story only to inform you (although that is part of it); he has a message to proclaim, a God to press upon you.<sup>3</sup>

Keeping this in mind, let us begin.



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<sup>2</sup> J. A. Motyer, 'Old Testament History', in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 1:154.

<sup>3</sup> I agree with Sidney Greidanus when he asserts that historical texts 'do not merely relate past facts but proclaim these facts in a relevant manner to the church at various stages of redemptive history'. He holds that the 'nature of the historical text can best be described ... as proclamation' (*Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts* [Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1970], 212). None of the preceding remarks should be viewed as impugning the importance or reliability of biblical history; they are only an attempt to clarify the true nature of that history.

