



OT Historical Book 1

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JOSHUA

INTRODUCTION

Overview of Joshua

Titles: Joshua means “Jehovah is salvation.”
The Book is often referred to as the Book of Conquest.

Author: Written by Joshua (18.9, 24.25,26).

Setting: Covers the period of time from the death of Moses to the death of Joshua, which is about 30 years.

Outline of the Book:

1. Entering the land (Ch’s 1-5)
2. Conquering the land (Ch’s 6-12)
3. Dividing the land (Ch’s 13-22)
4. Farewell and burial in the land (Ch’s 23-24).

Relationship to the promised land in Pentateuch:

| | |
|-------------|---------------------------------------|
| Genesis | - promise of a new land. |
| Exodus | - leaving for the land. |
| Leviticus | - laws for living in the land. |
| Numbers | - wandering outside the land. |
| Deuteronomy | - preparations for entering the land. |
| Joshua | - possessing the land. |

Joshua the man

1. His name

Joshua was first named “Hoshea” or “Oshea” (Nu.13.8,16), which means “salvation, deliverance, or conquest.” But later his name was changed to “Joshua” meaning, “Jehovah is salvation.” Obviously the latter name means the same thing, “salvation,” except that the big difference is “Jehovah” included in the meaning of his new name. As Joshua was born in Egypt and in captivity, his name must have been a sign of hope and expectation. In fact, salvation was commonly referred to in military exercises. But later, when Joshua was credited with his new name, focus was placed on God as the one who really saves. Somewhere along

the line, somebody had a revelation that only Jehovah can really save to the uttermost! It is little wonder that Joshua would look to God so much, and declare that it is God who delivers us from our enemies. Significantly, the Greek form of Joshua is “Jesus”! Hence, one soon gets the distinct impression that this Book is going to be about God saving His people.

2. His heritage

Joshua came from the tribe of Ephraim (Nu.13.8, 1Cr.7.20-27). His father’s name was Nun (meaning “fish”), and his grandfather was Elishama who marched at the head of the tribe of Ephraim in the wilderness (Nu.1.10, 2.18, 10.22). It seems that Joshua came from a line of faithful and capable leaders. Perhaps he was influenced very strongly by their example. Joshua could have easily rested on the laurels of his heritage, as many still do, but rejected the temptation to rest on his family’s previous successes. In short, he wanted to maximize what God wanted him to be. Ultimately, it is our response to God that determines what we become, and not so much our heritage whether impressive, mediocre, or downright insignificant. You don’t need to have a rich family heritage to do wonders in the church.

3. His birthplace

Joshua was born into slavery in Egypt. He well knew the oppression, the hopelessness, the despair, the pain, the tears and the torment. Yet his lifestyle shows us no overreaction to a slave mindset, for he was liberated in the promises of God. Unfortunately, many never get free from a slave mindset. They never free themselves of the past, they magnetize themselves to offenses and criticism, they wallow in self-pity like a ship with a broken rudder in the ocean, and look behind and never ahead. The crux is how we respond to what has happened to us in the past, knowing the promises of God. We are no longer meant to be children of the slave woman (as from Hagar), but children of the free woman (as from Sarah) - Gal.4.30-31. We can notice one thing about Joshua -- he was willing! He looked ahead. He was free of the bondages of the past, unlike most of Israel who always seemed to cast their thoughts back to Egypt. No wonder Joshua would exhort: “Do not go back and serve the gods of Egypt” (Jos.24.14).

4. His First Victory

The first time Joshua is mentioned he is leading the troops to victory (Ex.17.8-16). This was Israel’s first battle, when the Amalekites came against them. This is the ministry Joshua would have later on, for it would be 40 years before he would fight in the great conquests of Jericho and other Canaanite cities. He was a man in preparation. He did not despise the day of small beginnings. For most of us, there may be some gap between the time when God called and the actual fulfillment of that call. Even David had to wait for years (though anointed by Samuel to be King) before becoming king of Israel. Paul of the N.T. had to wait too, as have most other Bible characters. In essence, God may impart a call, a vision and an anointing, but it may take some time to eventuate while the Lord works on substance, character, maturity and

prepares the scene. Also notice that nobody came and slapped hands on Joshua before crossing the Jordan, announcing some ministry he was not already familiar with, trained in, or prepared for. His conquests in Canaan were merely an extension of what his lifestyle and calling already was. We must never be greedy to embark on some ministry service never really given to us. Most Christian leaders and pastors see no “big deal” in what they are doing because, to them, it is quite natural and is something they have already been doing anyway. Awards and positions really only formalize or acknowledge what a person is already doing.

5. His desire for God

Though only Moses was initially told to climb Mt.Sinai (Ex.24.2), we find Joshua going with him to get the Tablets of the Law (Ex.24.13). It seems that God saw the desire of this young man to want to be in His presence, and allowed it. God will not turn away anybody who wants to draw near to Him. As we saw in Pentateuch, He wants relationship more than anything else! We further read of how Joshua used to linger in the Tabernacle of Moses (Ex.33.11). When everybody had gone home, even Moses, Joshua hung around the Tabernacle because of his desire for the presence of God. Passion and desire are qualities every believer should possess. Do you have a heart for God?

6. His servanthood

Joshua faithfully served Moses throughout his life. Whether it was as a military leader, assistant, or mere companion, Joshua was ready to help and fit in where needed. He is called “his [Moses’] servant” (Ex.33.11). He was the David to Saul, the Elisha to Elijah, the Timothy to Paul. Certainly, one is getting the distinct impression that God is not just interested in charismatic gifts. In fact, gifts should flow out of character. We may do better not to be so impressed with the great “gifts” and “anointing” some seem to minister in, but to check out their character as well. If their character is questionable, though they raise the dead, watch out! You will know them by their “fruits” (Matt.7.16).

7. His willingness to be corrected

Now, this really is a mark of a good leader! Notice Nu.Ch.11. This scene was the one in which God poured out some of the spirit that was on Moses onto 70 elders (v’s 16-17). The seventy prophesied, although the spirit rested only on Eldad and Medad who continued to prophesy. Joshua said, “My lord Moses, forbid them!” (v.28), to which Moses replied that he wished there were more who were prophets (v.29). In fact, Joshua was rather sharply rebuked: “Are you jealous for my sake?” (v.29). Unfortunately, many of us get exclusive in our area of ministry function. We want to be the one who is picked, who gets selected for some position, who is on some in-house “who’s who” list, who gets to be the leader in some area, who gets recognized, who is the “cool” guy around church, who gets favour, who gets the glory for some job well done, and so on. Our attitude can be “who can we eliminate” in the competitive

rush rather than “who else can get a blessing.” Competition, striving, playing political games, cutting out others and ambition can reign supreme. So, certain attitudes were being dealt with in Joshua. Even Jesus once said to the “sons of thunder” (James and John): “You do not know what spirit you are of.” We can’t always be the exclusive hub in a wheel. We can’t be the recipient of all the praise, all of the time, to all of the people. We can’t hog a revival all to ourselves. Exclusivity was being dealt with in Joshua, and he was willing to be corrected -- for we never hear any more of the matter nor his questioning of Moses in such a way ever again.

8. He is a man of faith

This was proven when he and Caleb, along with 10 other spies, went out to search the land of Canaan (Deut.1.22f). Yes, there seemed no possible way of ever getting the land. It was far too big for them. But what was bigger than the circumstances was God’s word! Joshua believed in that word, and that is what separated him and Caleb from the doubtful ten. They were indeed unable – in the natural -- but God was able. It was humanly impossible, but spiritually possible. There were many obstacles, but many opportunities in God. Man’s word was doubtful, but God’s word was promising. Joshua chose to believe the Lord despite the circumstances and all that he could see. He was a faith man. There is not much one can do with anybody who is a “doubting Thomas.” Joshua was that faith man, and the Lord would use him years later in leading the people across the Jordan.

9. He was willing to forgive

Joshua had plenty to be bitter about! Despite his faithful response after spying out the land, he had to wander for nearly 40 years in the wilderness just like everybody else. He could have blamed them all for not yet getting his portion of land, for not yet getting his leadership position over Israel in leading them over the Jordan, for not yet getting the “milk and honey” and other blessings Canaan had to offer, for being penalized for other’s mistakes, for suffering hardship through no fault of his own, for having to wait so long for something he was so keen to obtain, for putting up with dry sand and unpleasantness year after year, for seeing his vision apparently die in the wilderness, for seeing human misery and funerals day after day, and for seeing 40 years apparently taken away from his youth. Let’s face it, Joshua had a lot to be bitter about. Can a man or woman ever rise from such bitterness of the past? Can we forgive others or even release our own wounded spirits to function and achieve again? Do we have “the stuff” to get up and go again? Joshua did. We can! Unforgiveness binds up a person in chains, and causes one to shrivel up and starve spiritually. But forgiveness is the floodgate of the dam, that when released, allows rivers of living water to gush out again. Another thing -- sometimes we get to lead “failures” into successes though having identified with them in their failures. Even Jesus identified with us, though keeping himself separate and pure. If ever we feel like lashing out against others who have failed (especially when their failure affects us), it is good to remind ourselves that Jesus reached out to you and me when we failed.

10. His appointment and commission

Joshua was appointed to take over the leadership of Israel in Nu.27.15-23. He stood before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation of Israel, and then Moses laid his hands on Joshua and he was “commissioned.” He still waited some time, however, until Moses’ ministry was at an end. Joshua appears again in Deut.31.14 on the eve of the death of Moses. Clearly Joshua did not push his way to the top, but waited until it was God’s time. Joshua had waited years to assume the leadership of Israel, and now he hears that the people will go astray, break the covenant, and play the harlot once in the new land (Nu.31.16). Moses, too, knows that the people will rebel: “You have been rebellious against the Lord; how much more, then, after my death?” (32.27). No wonder Joshua is told to “be strong and be courageous” (v.23)! How would we be, like a Joshua or a Jeremiah, to know that after all our work and effort the people we lead are going to desert the faith and rebel against God? The challenge to Joshua was to keep this rebellion from coming to pass in his lifetime. He remained faithful to his call, and Israel prospered throughout all the days of Joshua. Like we have to be, Joshua was faithful in his generation. Without war horses or chariots, Joshua conquered cities, fortresses, and nations in about seven years while in his 80’s!

I. ENTERING THE LAND (Ch’s 1-5)

The Command to Joshua (Ch.1)

A brand new era has begun. It starts with God’s voice, and the first thing He says is to “Get up” (1.2). The people had been obviously mourning over Moses and dwelling on the past. Hence, Joshua and the people are told to rise up and look ahead to the land (v.2). There comes a time that we must experience death to self, trust God, and rise up in resurrection life (Col.3.1-17). Without the past chained to their heels, there was therefore now no condemnation (Ro.8.1-2) to bind them from moving on in the purposes of God.

Significantly, the first thing God asks Joshua to do is the impossible -- cross the Jordan! (v.2). Joshua is going to need God right from the very start, and it will be good practice for him because he is going to have to look impossibility in the face all throughout his conquest of Canaan. The point is: what we conquer was already given us by God! (“which I am giving you” - v’s 2-3). Yet Joshua had to recognize his God-given limitations, and the Lord describes the boundaries (v.4). Joshua will need confidence in God’s enablement, and is told that “no man will be able to stand before you” (v.5). What wonderful assurance to know that God “will be with you” (v.5)!

The remainder of the chapter focuses on the necessity of Joshua’s strength and courage to do God’s will. “Be strong and courageous” is the plea four times:

- (i) for the peoples sake (v.6)

- (ii) for the sake of keeping the word (v.7)
- (iii) for his destiny's sake (v.9)
- (iv) for the rebel's sake (v.18).

To be strong and courageous is a trait necessary for all spiritual leadership, otherwise they will only flounder and wallow like a cork in the ocean.

Meditation and obedience are clearly keys to success, as v.8 exhorts, "...you shall meditate on it [the word] day and night..." It speaks volumes to us today. How can the Christian life ever be strong and victorious if it does not live by the Word? Note the results of spending time in God's word:

- you may be careful to do it
- you will make your way prosperous
- you will have success.

Authority and a chain of command is evident from v.10, for Joshua commands the officers of the people. God's work is never accomplished by His people doing their own thing. It is accomplished when people rise up in unity and work together with a common purpose under clearly defined guidelines of authority. Despite the spiritual goals and command of the Lord, Joshua would never have been able to conquer Canaan without some ordered structure of authority. God is a God of order! As the Roman Centurion knew, authority comes from being under authority ("for I myself am a man under authority" - Matt.8.9). Paul even describes the necessity of order when it comes to using the spiritual gifts (1Cor. Ch's 13-14).

Finally, the two and one-half tribes on the east side of the Jordan (Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh) are addressed (v's 12-18). They are reminded that they cannot rest until their brothers have claimed their inheritance (v.15). In other words, they were not just to consider themselves, but to consider others in the body of Christ. In fact, the main purpose of the five-fold ministry (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers) is to bring others to maturity. Notice also the obedience of the two and one-half tribes: "we will obey you" (v.17). This was no time for a spirit of independence. This was no time for raw self-interest. This was no time for "charismatic butterflies" (said to be believers who continually hop from church to church and never settle anywhere) doing their own thing. This was a time to work together in order to rout the enemy and extend the kingdom.

The Jericho Spies (Ch.2)

In this chapter we can note seven things about the spies:

A. Spies detached (v.1). "The land" was promised as an inheritance long before ("The land that will be given to you as an inheritance" - Deut.34.2). Only two spies are dispatched

this time (in marked contrast to the 12 sent out at the time of the evil report), and they are told to “view the land, especially Jericho.” It seems that the spying technique this time is to go one step at a time. The earlier 12 saw all the cities, and decided it was too much for them. But these 2 spies essentially saw one city, and focused their faith on that city to start with. They were not “biting off more than they could chew.” It is a good lesson even now to walk one step at a time, for taking on too much at once may simply overwhelm us in the end. A good and godly vision can be too overwhelming if not broken down into manageable steps. “Today has enough troubles of its own” (Matt.6.34).

An unusual character comes along early in this Book -- Rahab. This person had at least three things against her:

- She was a woman (considered at a lower social level)
- She was a pagan (who worshipped idols)
- She was a prostitute (a terrible sinner).

Can the Lord ever use a woman like this? Perhaps the Lord was using the base things of this world to manifest His glory, for in such circumstances no man can take the credit. Yet Rahab has one remarkable characteristic -- faith in the Lord! With such strong faith, God could see the potential for this woman to be mightily used in the taking of the first Canaanite city. He could also have seen that such a woman was fully capable of leaving behind the old carnal life and becoming a virtuous woman of Israel -- virtuous enough to even become an ancestor of David and Jesus (notice her name in the Matt.Ch.1 genealogy). The gospel message is what transforms lives just as powerfully now.

B. Spies concealed (v's 2-7). The king of Jericho is informed that “men from the sons of Israel” have come to spy out the city and land (v.2). Despite a search, Rahab hides the spies in stalks of flax on her rooftop. These men were supernaturally concealed by the Lord as the searchers went out of the city on Rahab’s “red herring” suggestion of some road they presumably went on. God knows how to conceal His people, Moses also once having been concealed for a time as a baby.

C. Spies informed (v's 8-11). Rahab reveals some critical information -- Jericho and all of Canaan are fearful of Israel. The hearts of the inhabitants had “melted away” (v.9). Significantly, she says, “I know that the Lord has given you the land” (v.9), which suggests that she had revelation knowledge of the mind of the Lord. The mighty works of the Lord had gone before Israel (v.10), so that now “no courage remained” in Canaan. Further notice that the real fear is not so much of Israel -- the real fear is of God Himself: “For the Lord your God, He is a God in heaven above and on earth beneath” (v.11). Once fear enters the heart, you are already defeated! Fear should be as foreign to a believer as a lizard in Antarctica.

D. Spies beseeched (v's 12-13). Rahab requests to be spared, along with her family, when Jericho is eventually taken. She is wise enough to have the spies swear by the same God she

has revelation knowledge of (v.12), making sure to take no chances. These verses also speak something of the protection there can be in families, for Rahab and her family will be together when Israel finally arrives.

E. Spies promise safety (v's 14-20). Rahab and her family will be spared the judgment of the Lord if she follows certain conditions, such as tying the cord of scarlet thread in her window, having the family together in one place (v.18), and telling no one about the deal they have made (v.20). There is only one way of salvation -- God's way! The scarlet (red) cord symbolizes redemption, and salvation is being offered to an entire household that believes in the Lord and His promises. We might also recollect Lydia's family at this point (Acts 16.15) in which her entire household was baptized and saved following her belief and her obedience.

F. Spies escape (v's 21-22). Rahab did not hesitate one moment to tie the scarlet cord in her window! For her and the entire household, salvation was a matter of utmost priority. There was no waiting for "tomorrow." The two spies then hid themselves in the hill country. Today is the day of salvation (2Cor.6.2).

G. Spies report to Joshua (v's 23-24). What a different report to forty-odd years before ("We are not able to go up against this people for they are too strong for us" - Nu.13.21)! Now they say; "Surely the Lord has given all the land into our hands, and all the inhabitants of the land" (v.24). They already had the victory in their hearts. Occasionally we have to ask ourselves; "Do I really believe we can do this?"

Hence, this chapter is more about Rahab than about Joshua. In the genealogy of Matt. Ch.1, Rahab is listed in the line of Jesus (Matt.1.5). She was the mother of Boaz -- the man who married another great woman of faith; Ruth. The two spies had reached out to the pagan Rahab as Boaz had reached out to the pagan Ruth. Finally, Rahab is listed in Hebrews Ch.11 as one of the great faith people of the Bible.

The Crossing of the Jordan (Ch.3)

A. People commanded to follow the Ark (v's 1-6). The prominence of the Ark of the covenant is brought to light again as the centre of importance. Without the presence of God, the people could go nowhere nor accomplish anything. Israel arrives at the Jordan river (v.1). They are given instructions to follow the ark and the priests carrying it (v.3). Leadership declares the direction of the Lord (v's 2-3). Significantly, the people are reminded that they "have not passed this way before" (v.4). Every new path in life is, at least, a little bit different. Every new generation must experience God for themselves. One cannot ride on another person's faith or another person's leadership throughout life. There comes a time of personal conviction for all of us. Also, the people are told to consecrate themselves (v.5). Holiness is essential to entering the purposes of God! Recall that the theme of "redemption" in Exodus Ch's 1-18 was followed by the theme of "consecration" in Ch's 19-40.

B. Priests stand in the Jordan river (v's 7-8). Now we read; "the Lord said to Joshua" (v.7). It is as if the heavenly Joshua (the name meaning the same as "Jesus" or "salvation") is speaking to the earthly Joshua, or the heavenly saviour is speaking to the earthly saviour. Salvation is obviously on God's mind in bringing His people into a land of their own. The priests are to "stand still" in the Jordan and see the salvation of the Lord.

C. Promises given (v's 9-13). The leaders challenge the people with the word of God. Prior to crossing the river into a whole new era of history, the people are told to "hear the words of the Lord your God" (v.9). They are reminded that He is a "living God" (v.10). The miracle of crossing the Jordan in flood time (v.15) will be a sign to them that the Lord will surely dispossess the nations before them. Seven specific enemies are mentioned (v.10). In a way, they speak of the enemies we continue to face (as suggested below).

- Canaanite, meaning "merchant or greed," which speaks of rampant materialism;
- Hittite, meaning "terror or fear," which speaks of the spirit of fear;
- Hivite, meaning "wickedness or blatant sin," which speaks of a callous disregard for the things of God;
- Perizzite, meaning "dwelling in unwalled villages," which speaks of a failure to draw personal boundaries or a failure to live within the bounds of the word of God;
- Gergashite, meaning "strangers drawing near," which speaks about compromise;
- Amorite, meaning "highlander or bitter rebels," which speaks of the high philosophies of this world that attempt to rule our morals, values and personal ethics;
- Jebusite, meaning "treading down," which speaks of the discouragement and confusion that attempts to engulf us.

Once the soles of the feet of the priests rest in the waters of Jordan, the waters will be cut off and will stand as a walled heap (v.13). This is a supernatural event! The people shall also then be comforted with the knowledge that the Lord is with Joshua as He was with Moses (v.7). This kind of confirmation of leadership is nothing new in the Bible. King Saul, for instance, was confirmed in his leadership after winning a decisive battle (1Sam.Ch.11).

D. Jordan crossed (v's 14-17). The impossible happened. As the priests stood on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, the people crossed over dry shod (v.17). The Lord made a bridge between the old life and the new. This was an historic moment, and one that Moses had desired to see. This was part of the promise given long ago to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The event was also significant in that the crossing was reminiscent of the earlier miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, as told by their parents. Finally, the people set foot in the new land. Even now we need to request the Lord as to how to bridge our present circumstances with what the Lord has laid on our hearts. It may look totally impossible. We need God's supernatural provision, preparation, and enablement in order for us to be able to do it.