

GOD WITH US
Part 2: Conquest and Chaos
Joshua – Judges – Ruth

Message 1 – Entering the Promised Land
Joshua 1-4

Introduction

The book of Joshua is the story of how Israel, under Joshua's leadership, entered the Promised Land and took possession of it by conquering 31 Canaanite kings. Much of the book is devoted to stories of particular conflicts and the apportioning of the land among the 12 tribes after victory. There are deeper messages, however, in the book of Joshua.

Theologically, this book teaches us about *walking in obedience and faith with Yahweh*. The extent of Israel's conquest and appropriation of the land promised to Abraham (Gen.12:1-3) depended on their faithfulness to the covenant with Yahweh, made at Mt. Sinai. To the extent that Israel was faithful to the terms of the covenant, Yahweh would drive out the inhabitants of the land and allow Israel to take possession of it. On the other hand, if Israel was unfaithful to the covenant, then their possession of the land would be more limited. The book of Joshua, then, is a theological treatise on the importance of *walking in step with God and, thereby, enjoying the benefits of His favor in our lifetime*.

Nationally, it is clear in the book of Joshua that God was sending a powerful witness to the Canaanite nations and calling people to turn to Him in faith. At the same time, God was judging these nations for their sinful behavior over many centuries (see Genesis 15:16) and expelling them from their land. Yet, even in judgment, God was offering to individuals in every nation the opportunity to turn to Him in faith and be saved from destruction (eg. Rahab).

Personally, this book chronicles the faith-journey of people like Joshua, Caleb, Rahab and many others. We are given an up-close look how real people struggled to trust God and walk in His ways. There are *many* leadership lessons (and mistakes) in the book, which will be of special interest to all of us who are called to exercise leadership of any fashion.

God's charge to Joshua: 1:1-9

In the opening charge, God declared that *He had already given the land to Joshua and the Israelites*. No one will be able to stand before the God at work in Joshua.

“No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you” (1:5).

Yet, there is a condition that must be met in order to receive this divine protection. They must walk in obedience to the Covenant made with Yahweh at Mt. Sinai, and He would, in turn, drive out their enemies and allow them to inherit the land.

“This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for THEN you will make your way prosperous, and THEN you will have success” (1:8).

There is repeated emphasis here on being ***strong and courageous*** (1:6,7,9). Joshua's strength and courage, however, would not be found in his own power, wisdom or resources; rather, in the fact that *“the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (1:9).*

So often in life, our strength and courage is wrongly sourced. We try to muster up strength and courage from within ourselves. Yet, God encouraged (breathed courage into) Joshua, and told him to not be afraid, because GOD HIMSELF was the source of Joshua's strength. The Scriptures constantly emphasizes that THE LORD is our Helper, the SOURCE of our power. “But as for me, I will watch expectantly for the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me” (Micah 7:7). “When I am afraid I will put my trust in You, in God whose Word I praise, in God I trust” (Psalm 56:3,4). True courage grows when we fix our eyes on God, and take our eyes off the wind, the waves, and ourselves.

Preparations to cross the Jordan: 1:10-18

Joshua instructed the leaders of Israel to prepare the people to cross the Jordan River within three days. He specifically reminded the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh of their previous commitment to accompany their brothers across the Jordan into battle, rather than staying on the east side of the Jordan in the land they desired to inherit for themselves (recall Numbers 32). As before, they again committed to go into battle with their brothers.

“They answered Joshua, saying, “All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you; only may the Lord your God be with you as He was with Moses” (1:16,17).

These “trans-Jordan” tribes would settle into their inheritance only after the Lord had given the entire nation victory together.

The tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh committed to fight with their brothers, rather than separating off and pursuing their own welfare. They were an ancient “Band of Brothers.” Like the ancient Israelites, the first Christians were a band of brothers and sisters, committed to advancing the work of God’s kingdom in their world. Who is your band of brothers and sisters? With whom do you share a significant commitment to advance God’s work, both in your own life, and in the lives of those around you?

Spies sent to Jericho: 2:1-24

Joshua sent two spies into the land. They were to take special note of Jericho (v.1). The spies were aided by a woman named Rahab, who had heard about the Lord’s mighty acts on behalf of Israel.

“I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt . . . for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath” (2:9-11).

There was *mutuality* in their agreement: The spies: *“If you don’t betray us, we will keep our promise and be kind to you when the Lord gives us this land” (2:14).* Rahab: *“I accept your terms” (2:21).* They all kept their promises and were true to their words.

Recall the fundamental *purpose* of Israel: to be a nation of priests representing Yahweh to the world so that people in other nations would have the opportunity to place their faith (trust) in Yahweh and be saved (see Exodus 19:5,6). Here, in the case of Rahab, we see this playing out. She was a harlot living in Jericho . . . but she had received the testimony of Yahweh’s character as demonstrated in His dealings with the people of Israel. She decided to place her trust in the God of Israel. ***“For the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath” (2:11).*** (Note how Joshua used similar wording to describe his faith in God: *“the Lord of all the earth” 3:11,13).* Thus, she hid the two spies and asked for

protection when Israel invaded her city. She was, in fact, protected and brought into the community of Israel (see 6:23-25).

But the story of Rahab gets even better! Rahab is mentioned three times in the New Testament. First, she is an exemplar of what it means to have *faith* in God (Hebrews 11:31). Second, she showed what it means to *demonstrate* one's faith through *works* (James 2:25). Third, and most importantly, Rahab married a prominent leader in Israel (Salmon, the father of Boaz – see Ruth 4:21) and found a place in the genealogy of King David and, ultimately, of Jesus the Messiah (Matthew 1:5)!

The Old Testament narrative reads, primarily, on the 'national level.' It is much like watching the evening news as national events are covered. Yet, the story of Rahab gives us a glimpse into what was going on at the individual level. It is like one of those 'personal interest' stories inserted at the end of the evening news. In Rahab, we find an example of God's love and care for individuals. God was inviting men and women everywhere to exercise simple faith and to enter into a personal relationship with Him. But even more, we see in Rahab what God can do when a single soul turns to Him. God took this harlot from Jericho and turned her into a woman of great faith, and a conveyor of the GREATEST BLESSING of all – a Messiah and Savior for the world! It should come as no surprise, then, that when God the Son came into our world, He displayed consistent love toward "tax collectors and sinners." He even allowed a "sinful woman" to become the example of what it means to love Him and trust Him (Luke 7:36-50). Jesus was, and is, "the friend of sinners!"

Crossing the Jordan River: 3:1-4:24

The first act in the inheritance of the Promised Land was the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River by the hand of God. This event served two purposes: 1) It confirmed Joshua's role as the new leader of Israel (3:7). 2) It assured the people that Yahweh was going before them to drive out the inhabitants of Canaan: ***"Today you will KNOW that the LIVING GOD is among you" (3:10).*** The priests were instructed to lead the way by standing in the river while carrying the sacred Ark of the Covenant. Once the priests had obediently taken their stand in the river (a 'step of faith'), then the waters were stopped and the people crossed over.

Note: ***"It was harvest season, and the Jordan was overflowing its banks" (3:15).*** God did not part the waters during a dry spell; rather, He did His miraculous work when the waters were at their

highest. This is often God's way with His children. He does His greatest work in our most desperate circumstances, so that He may be glorified in and through us.

Not only was GOD glorified through this miraculous event, but: ***“On that day the Lord made Joshua a great leader in the eyes of all the Israelites” (4:14).*** Moses had led the 1st generation through the waters of the Red Sea. Joshua led the 2nd generation through the waters of the Jordan River. There is repeated emphasis in the book of Joshua on the *continuity* of God's work between Moses and the 1st generation, and Joshua and the 2nd generation: ***“Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you”*** (see 1:3,5,7,13,17; 2:10f, 2:24; 3:7,11,15-17; 4:10,14,23,24).

Influence in any place of leadership (family, team, work, church, small group, etc.) needs to be a result of faithful and humble courage and obedience to God. “Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God opposes the proud (those who use position to demand respect), but gives grace to the humble. Therefore, humble yourselves under God's mighty hand, that HE may lift you up in His proper time” (1Peter 5:5,6).

After the people had crossed over, memorial stones were set up in order to commemorate this event for future generations. Twelve stones were set up in the middle of the Jordan where the priests' feet had stood (4:9), and twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan River were set up on the Gilgal side (4:20-24) to serve as a monument for future generations to remember God's faithfulness.

“When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, ‘What are these stones?’ then you shall inform your children, saying, ‘Israel crossed this Jordan on dry ground.’ For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed, just as the Lord your God had done to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed; that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, so that you may fear the Lord your God forever” (21-24).

When we moved into our building, a co-worker (Debbie Brunk) went back to every location where OPC had met during our first 10 years of ‘wandering.’ From each location, she picked a stone, piling them into a mini-monument and gave it to me. Every time I look at it, I am reminded of God's faithfulness in leading and providing for this flock. That mini-monument is, to me, a major incentive to believe that God will be faithful to guide us and provide for His flock in the future. Is there some act of God's past faithfulness that you might want to commemorate in some way?