

Joshua Chapter 1

Introduction to the book of Joshua:

The book of Joshua tells the story of Israel's crossing of the Jordan and the conquest of Canaan. The 'Promised Land' is not a picture of heaven – Hebrews 3 and 4 shows Canaan as a picture of the rest and victory that can be enjoyed by every Christian believer in this life. Many scholars connect the book of Joshua with Paul's letter to the Ephesians, which describes a spiritual walk of promise, wealth, and victory that are ours in Christ.

The Greek name *Jesus* translates the Hebrew name יהושוע (*Yehow-shuwa*, or *Joshua*, 'God saves'). Whatever Israel received in the Promised Land, they received through the hand of Joshua; whatever we receive from God we receive through Jesus Christ, our 'Joshua'...

The history of Israel from Egypt to Canaan:

- (i) Israel was delivered from Egypt, symbolizing our deliverance from the bondage of sin;
- (ii) Israel, led by Moses, wandered in the Sinai wilderness; during that time, Israel experienced supernatural providence such as the supply of manna, water from rocks, the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, and they also received God's revelation, the Law;
- (iii) the land of Canaan (the Promised Land) represents the destination of God's people after they have been set free from sin's bondage. See 1 Corinthians 10 v 11.

Joshua's personal background:

Joshua was the eldest son of Nun – his genealogy is given in 1 Chronicles 7 v 20 to 27 and shows that some of his ancestors were cattle thieves! He first appears fighting the Amalekites just two months after the exodus from Egypt (Exodus 17 v 8 to 16), and he was with Moses on Mount Sinai in the golden calf episode (Exodus 32 v 15 to 20).

Joshua was one of the 12 sent to spy out the land of Canaan; he and Caleb were the only ones to bring back a good report – and the only ones to enter the Promised Land, after 40 years wandering in the wilderness (for an abridged version of the story, read the attached excerpts from Numbers 13 and 14).

God commissions Joshua (Joshua 1 v 1 to 9)

"After the death of Moses" (v 1) – Moses, who exemplified the Law, could not lead Israel into the land of promise and rest: entering the Promised Land took place after Moses had died. Joshua was not a young man when the Lord spoke to him: he had spent his career previously as "Moses' assistant", and now finds that it is his own time to lead...

- What promises did God make to Joshua?
- What commandments did he give?
- On what conditions would Joshua enjoy "good success" (v 8)?

"I have given to you" (v 3) – the whole land was given, but they could only possess the land which they claimed, and whatever land they took had to be fought for against determined opposition.

"From the wilderness... as far as the great river" (v 4) – this was no 'pie in the sky' promise: it described real land with real boundaries.

"I will be with you" (v 5) – victory is assured, not because Joshua is a great leader, or because Israel is a great nation, but because God is a great God, and he promises to be with Joshua. This promise is enough for anyone who seeks to do God's will...

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Joshua had to take great care to observe the Law (v 7, 8). God's Word and Joshua's commitment to it would be the pillars supporting his success. Joshua did not only need to read God's Word – it had to be on his lips (“shall not depart from your mouth”); in his mind (“meditate on it day and night”); and he had to do it (“careful to do according to all that is written”).

Keeping God's Word leads to success in the Christian life – not that it promises a life without problems, but it does ensure a life able to deal with anything, because it takes full advantage of God's presence and promises...

Joshua takes command (Joshua 1 v 10 to 18)

- What did Joshua command the people, and what special instructions did he give to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh?
- How did the two-and-a-half tribes respond?
- How would their response have encouraged Joshua?

The Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh had decided to settle on the east side of the Jordan river (land that Israel had already conquered), and had promised to cross over and help the rest of the nation take the land on the west side of the Jordan (see Numbers 32 v 16 to 27).

“All the men of valour among you shall pass over armed before your brothers and shall help them” (v 14) – this same principle operates within the Body of Christ. When one member has a need, it should be the common need of the Body (see 1 Corinthians 12 v 25 to 26). We should never refuse to help a brother or sister in need because our own situation is settled.

The two-and-a-half tribes express their willingness to obey Joshua (v 16 to 18), but their original desire was for ‘sheepfolds for their livestock’ (Numbers 32 v 16) – they would rather be prosperous than dwell with their brothers and sisters in the Promised Land west of Jordan. They were to settle so far from Israel's place of worship that eventually they had to erect a special monument to remind their children of their heritage, bringing the threat of civil war (see Joshua 22 v 10 and following).