

Joshua – Part 1

Invading Canaan – Joshua 1-5

Rest is an important concept to grasp when seeking to understand the conquest of the land given to the Israelites, and a significant topic in the Old Testament. It was not “rest” in the sense of freedom from conflict, but rather in contrast to the journey. Even after seven years of conquests, a great deal of land would still need to be taken from the Canaanites and possessed (Josh. 13:1; 23:1-13; 24:1-28; Judg. 1:1). This rest was just the entrance into, the initial participation in, the inheritance the Lord had promised His people.

The concept of rest, “The LORD your God hath given you rest” (Josh. 1:13, 15), is a Godly principle rooted in creation and essential for spiritual health. Although often associated with Canaan as the place of “peace and security” that followed Israel’s long journey through the wilderness, it isn’t just physical. It is also spiritual, encompassing a state of trust and reliance on God’s provision. Ultimately, rest found in Christ by faith. (Heb. 4:8-10).

This “rest” found in Joshua is only the first of several stages in Israel’s history. (II Sam. 7:1; I Chr. 22:9). Comments in Hebrews, obtained from Psalms 95, say: “For if Joshua had given them rest, then would He [Jesus] not afterward have spoken of another day” (Heb. 4:8); “These all received not the promise” (Heb. 11:13-22); “There remaineth, therefore, a rest to the people of God” (4:9-16). The last rest is the finished work of Jesus; the “rests” that precede it are only “catnaps” along the way.

Three concerns are mentioned in the opening chapter of Joshua 1:2-9: the **conquest** that lies before Israel to gain possession of the Promised Land (v. 3-5); the **division of the land** “for an inheritance...that God swore unto their fathers to give them” (v. 6); and Israel’s **loyalty to the covenant** “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth” (v. 8). This helps divide the book into its sections, with a final division showing the renewal of the covenant at Mount Ebal and at Shechem.

At first glance, it might seem like there wasn’t much left to do. Israel was freed from slavery and brought to the brink of their new land, but there are many things yet to accomplish. The land of promise still must be claimed, which means those nations that dwell there must still be defeated and dislodged. But how will Joshua manage to do this? What does Joshua need to fulfil this awesome task? He needs the same things that Moses did, and God will provide the necessary things to fulfill God’s call.

I. Strong and Courageous

Moses has died on Mount Nebo, “Therefore,” God says, “Arise, go over this Jordan...” Joshua has now become the leader of the Israelites. For almost forty years, Joshua had faithfully served as Moses’ servant. He had served in whatever capacity Moses required of him. Just like Jesus spoke of in the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:21), Joshua had been faithful over a few things; now the Lord will entrust him with even greater things. This is always the process of God.

Numerous times in God’s commission, He tells Joshua to “be strong and courageous” (v. 6, 7, 9, 18). Easy to say... but not always easy to do! A story is told about a man who bragged that he had cut off the tail of a man-eating lion with his pocketknife.

When asked why he hadn't cut off the lion's head, he shamefacedly replied, "Someone had already done that." There is a big difference between bravery and telling a big story. Joshua needs the real stuff, and God tells him—and us—how to get it.

Each time that God tells Joshua to be "strong and courageous," it is accompanied by a promise. We know that every time God makes a promise, He keeps it. The first time God tells him this, God says that Joshua will divide the land for the people's inheritance. If we *stand on the promises of God*, He will give us the strength to accomplish what He wants us to do and give us instructions on how to do it...so stand!

As Joshua moved forward, he must have *realized God's presence*. God had told him that "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee" (Josh. 1:5). While he was striving to accomplish the task that God had given him, God promised to be there with him every step of the way; He would not forsake him. Joshua didn't have to wait for God's presence to manifest itself; "every place that the sole of your foot shalt tread upon, that have I *already given unto you*." His presence was there even before His promise!

Joshua needed to *keep his focus* on the prize before him, "...turn not from it to the right hand or to the left..." (Josh. 1:7). It's easy to get distracted by the things of the world. Detours try to drive us off the course of what God's will is, but we must stay on the path. Stay on the path when tragedy strikes, when things get tough, when we get tired of the day-to-day grind, when we feel like giving up, giving in, or the way becomes indistinct. But faithfulness is the key to having the strength and courage to do what's right because we know that God has our best interests at heart. It brings fulfillment!

The only way to have success, though, is to *start the process*. If Joshua didn't begin preparations for the conquest, there would never be a need for courage or strength. The journey must begin to show that he believed what God had said, and then he must demonstrate his faith by moving forward. The Promised Land had been given to the people of Israel, just as the promised life in Christ is made available to us as Christians without any effort on our part. But though the land and eternal life have been given, they still need to be possessed to be claimed.

God had given Israel all the land they were willing to take; He has given us every bit of spiritual life in Christ we want. He will never, though, give you more than you are ready to take. If you aren't satisfied with the degree with which you experience victory, then you haven't really wanted more. The land was abundant for Israel, far-reaching, "flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. 3:8). It was as long and wide as they could imagine—"from the desert to Lebanon, and the great river Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Great Sea on the West." It wouldn't be easy, but "no one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life" (Josh. 1:4-5; Gen. 15:18).

So, Joshua called a meeting with the officers of the people to lay out the plans for the journey. He began to relay the "marching orders" by giving them a specific time, three days, when they would cross the Jordan into Canaan. They must bring their own food and water (vituals) and come prepared for battle. Everything must be packed up except for the things necessary for immediate use, such as their weapons of war. Nothing must be left behind; they were going to live in the Promised Land!

The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh were reminded of their promise to fight alongside the remaining nine and a half tribes to gain possession of

their land, as they had promised to do so if they could have the land on the east side of the Jordan River for their inheritance. The mighty men of valor of these two and a half tribes were to lead, with their armor on, ready for battle. (Numb. 32:16-17).

II. Due Diligence

Like any good leader, Joshua needed to know what they were going up against when they crossed the Jordan River. Jericho, the city directly across the Jordan from where they were camped, would be the first city they must conquer. It blocked their passage through the mountain pass to the land beyond. It was a large, walled city situated in the lower Jordan Valley, just west of the Jordan River and about ten miles northwest of the Dead Sea. Unlike the wilderness they had traveled through for so long, Jericho thrived as a fertile, spring-fed oasis. As a border city, it controlled important migration routes from all directions.

Jericho looked impregnable, but God had said He would be with them, and none would be able to stand before them. God said, “Every place... have I given you...” (Josh. 1:3-5). According to God, victory was assured. Joshua secretly sent two men ahead to spy out Jericho and assess their strengths and weaknesses. Secretly, so if it were an unfavorable report, the people wouldn’t panic and refuse to enter Canaan.

Although their presence in the city was discovered, they received protection from a prostitute named Rahab (2:1-7). A prostitute’s house??? They were obviously not there for the typical reasons that a man might visit, but it was probably a good place to avoid detection. No one would think twice about strangers going to visit a prostitute. But Rahab’s location in Jericho would also have been beneficial because it was located on the town wall (Josh. 2:15), and here God provided an escape route.

Rahab’s home and her assistance to the two spies are important for many reasons. Obviously, the authorities were in close pursuit. The spies had come just about the time the city gates were being shut for the night. Rahab took the men in and hid them on her roof under the stalks of flax that she had laid there to dry.

The stalks of flax (Josh. 2:6) reveal that this was about March or April when the flax would have been harvested. This meant that the Jordan River would have been flooding (Josh. 3:15), as it always did at harvest time. It also shows that Rahab’s cultivation and processing of flax helped her supplement her income.

When the king’s guards came to her house seeking the men, Rahab sent the guards in a different direction, protecting the lives of the two Israelite spies. The king would have called this an act of treason, but Rahab was seeing her action from a different perspective. She was beginning to see that the God of Israel was the One in control. Protecting His people was important, so she measured her actions by what she could do for God.

After the guards had gone, she went to the spies and declared her faith. “I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you...The LORD your God, He is God in heaven above, and in the earth beneath” (Josh. 2:9-13; Deut. 2:25). She then asked them to save her and her family from death for helping them.

As a result of Rahab's faith and actions, the two men promised to protect Rahab and her family when the Israelites returned. They told her, "If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the LORD gives us the land" (Josh. 2:14). Since her home was on the town wall, Rahab let the men down by a scarlet cord from the window so they could escape to the mountains. There, they would hide for three days before returning to the Israelite camp. When they attacked Jericho, the scarlet cord would indicate Rahab, and everyone inside would be spared because of her faith and her protection of the men of Israel. (Josh. 6:25).

However, Rahab's name would live on even beyond that. She would be the mother of Boaz and the great-grandmother of King David. (Matt. 1:5). More importantly, she was a direct ancestor of Jesus. Despite her background, her faith and actions saved lives; they revealed her as a woman who believed in God.

While this privilege would have been wonderful, it was even more extraordinary because she was a Gentile, not a Jew. She was without Christ, without hope, without knowledge of the promise of Him, a stranger to the covenants of God. Despite these apparent drawbacks, God brought this Gentile sinner to Himself with a new kind of nearness not yet experienced by Israel. You see, it is not what or who we are, but what grace makes us that is everything to God. Rahab's life showed that anyone who comes to God by faith, no matter their past, will be forgiven and can be used for God's glory.

III. Passing Over Jordan

When the spies returned, they gave a much different story than the one that ten of the twelve spies had relayed when Joshua and Caleb had gone into Canaan forty years before. This time they said, "Truly the LORD hath delivered into our hands all the land, for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us" (Josh. 2:24).

After hearing the report, Joshua rose early in the morning. Today was the day they were to cross over the Jordan River. They were in Shittim, about 5-6 miles from their crossing point, so they must move there. As they drew near the river, they got a good look at the raging water in its flood stage. Some areas would normally have been easier to cross, but none were usable because of the spring flooding. It was easy to see that there was simply no means of crossing it without God's help.

This terrible river lay at the bottom of the most spectacular gash found in the earth. From its source at Mt. Herman to its entry into the Dead Sea, the lowest point on earth, a direct route would have been only about 65 miles. But, since the river meanders so much, it flows for almost 124 miles. The biggest problem isn't the distance, though, but its steep descent, which falls an average of nine feet per mile, creating rapids and waterfalls. Because of the zigzag current and muddy bed, massive deposits of mud, gravel, driftwood, and exposed tree roots are carried rapidly downstream. Unsuspecting people can easily be swept away in its current, causing it appropriately to be considered a river of death.

That's what the Jordan is like on a normal day, but at this time of the year, it is at its flood stage. Its 90- to 100-foot wide waters have overflowed and almost doubled in size. While it would be treacherous for men to cross without baggage, there is no hope for women, children, animals, and their baggage to be transported across.

So, in such unlikely circumstances, they await instructions from God. It seems that they acted in faithful obedience, proving that they were unlike their fathers, who

would have whined and been ready to return to Egypt. This generation is tough, a lean, hardened, determined group of people who are ready to overcome any hardship.

As they wait, their leaders pass through the crowd and begin to give their instructions for the crossing. This was more than just a military exercise; it had a profound religious significance because God was the One who would lead them against enemies. His presence, symbolized by the Ark of the Covenant, would lead them into this unknown territory. They were to follow but stay at least a half mile from it.

Carried in full view of the people behind them, the Ark would be carried by the priests, the Levites. (Josh. 3:1-6). Normally, the Kohathites carried the Ark, but in some instances, such as this one (Josh. 6:4; II Sam. 15:25; I Ki. 8:6-11), the priests themselves were called upon to do so because they would have no part in the war itself. Joshua told the people to “Sanctify yourselves: for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you.” To enter the Promised Land, they must be clean before God.

No one had any idea how God was going to get them across Jordan. He had only told Joshua, “This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee” (Josh. 3:7). Obedience by faith does not require us to know what is going to happen, nor worry about how things will be accomplished. Our responsibility is to rest on God Himself, knowing He has the power to do whatever He chooses to do, and do it in His perfect timing.

The priests who bore the Ark were to come to the edge of the water and stand still in it—they had to get their feet wet! God was controlling events according to His perfectly timed plan, so that the waters at the river crossing dried up just as the priests stepped in. One commentator says that God stopped the Jordan by a collapse of its banks at the town of Adam, about 15 miles away, that dammed the river at exactly the time the priests stepped in carrying the Ark. While this may have happened, it would be more appropriate to believe that God, at that exact moment, God, by just speaking a word, caused a miracle to stop the water and dry the riverbed at the same time. (Josh. 3:14-17). Why does there need to be a “why” to a miracle???

The priests stood in the middle of the dry riverbed until all the people crossed over, including the 40,000 mighty men of valor from Benjamin, Reuben, and Manasseh had passed over. (Josh. 4:13). 70,580 were left to guard their families and property. While it seems like a decent number of men went to war, they had *all* promised to fight.

Twelve men, one from each tribe, were to go back to the riverbed and get a stone from where the priests’ feet had stood and place it as a memorial at the place where they would camp that night. (Josh. 4:1-8). Another memorial of twelve stones was to be set up in the middle of the river itself. Not until everything was complete and the feet of the priests who carried the Ark were out of the riverbed did God allow the water to return to its place. It then continued to overflow its bank, as it had before.

Joshua took the stones that were brought out of the river and set them up in Gilgal (about 4 miles from the river) as a memorial there, “That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is might: that ye might fear the LORD your God forever” (Josh. 4:24). When the Amorites (all the peoples of Canaan from the highlands) and the Canaanites (all the people dwelling on the coast and lowlands near the Mediterranean Sea) heard about the Israelites’ miraculous crossing of the Jordan, they were filled with fear (Josh. 5:1). They had probably figured that they were safe as

long as the flooded Jordan was between them, but on seeing the undeniable proof that God was on Israel's side, it paralyzed them.

While these nations were afraid, God told Joshua to circumcise all the males. This practice had not been followed while they were in the wilderness, so none of the Israelites were circumcised. Now, they were to enter the land of promise, and God wanted them to perform this symbolic act. They would, in effect, be cutting away the part of their heart that lusted after worldly things. God wanted a people whose heart longed for the Spirit (Deut. 30:6). God wanted them to enter a new relationship with Him. It was an act of declaring themselves a people unto God.

While in Gilgal, they kept the Passover for the first time in the plains of Jericho, their new home. Their meal consisted of the old corn of the land, unleavened cakes, and parched corn. And the manna ceased. Now they would be eating of the fruit of the land of Canaan. Their lives would be changed as they began a new relationship with God.

Conclusion:

As Joshua and the Israelites enter Canaan, there are many parallels to someone accepting Christ as Savior and entering a life of victory, followed by a promised rest that only God can provide. Instead of land, we must conquer the giants of the flesh that threaten our relationship with God. These first few books of the Old Testament have shown God leading Israel through the lives of different men, but none could truly bring them rest from their sinful lives.

For Christians, crossing the Jordan isn't just a type of our death and entrance into heaven, like some songs suggest. Entering the land also parallels our willingness to "cross the Jordan" and engage the enemy. It is a decision to submit to the lordship of Christ, resting in His work on the cross to save us. Our salvation rests, not with a *do*, but with a *done*, "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30). After entering God's rest, we labor and trust God for victory in our spiritual battles. This brings us into the enjoyment of eternal life now through dedication to Christ and walking in the Spirit.

The wilderness wanderings mimic the experience of the redeemed believer who, although saved, has not yet fully committed themselves to God and is still walking in the flesh. When the Israelites cross the Jordan, they will encounter enemies that they will have to contend with, just as a believer must contend with their spiritual adversaries after they dedicate themselves to God. Our rest, then, is not the absence of hostility, but the beginning of the blessings God has promised us.

Have you entered the Promised Land here on earth, fighting battles because of your desire to walk with and please God? Or are you still wandering in the wilderness, not quite willing to give up the ways of the world? Jesus will not only bring you into the land but help you conquer it as well. And then, He will bring us into His glorious rest. brought them only into the land, not into the rest, but Jesus has brought us into a glorious rest.

How can we practice God's rest now? Set aside a day of rest to attend church and be renewed with worship and fellowship with other believers, spend time in prayer and meditation on Scripture, retreat from the world's busyness with intentional moments of stillness, prayer, and self-reflection. When we connect with God with these practices, our faith becomes deeper. It reinforces our reliance on Him rather than on our own strength. This not only brings peace but also realigns our priorities with

God's purposes. It helps alleviate feelings of guilt or the constant need to be productive when we take time to rest. "Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him" (Ps. 37:7a).

Battles and Blessings (Joshua Part 2)

1) Read Joshua 6-10. If you had lived in Jericho at this time, describe some of the thoughts you may have been thinking when you saw the people of Israel outside the gates.

2) Describe the process that God had said to conquer the city. Would this have seemed logical?

3) Who was to be saved when they took Jericho?

4) What happened after the victory of Jericho? What caused the problem? What was the punishment?

5) How happened after the second battle with Ai?

6) What did Joshua do after the victory with Ai? What was the significance of what Joshua did and how he did it?

7) What was Gibeon's plan to save themselves?

8) How did Joshua win the battle against the five kings who came out to fight?

Conclusion:

Throughout Scripture, we see a God who fights for His people in ways that are incomprehensible to human understanding. He does not need man's strength or a big army for victory. In this lesson, we see a completely unbelievable method of destroying a city. We also see God's power against kings and armies that should have completely annihilated Israel. Even His methods of winning battles are unique to each battle.

Many times, the problems that surround us look insurmountable. We worry and fret over the details. Nothing may even seem probable that any good can come of it. We look at it from this angle, and it doesn't work, so we try another angle. Again, that one doesn't work. We lie awake at night worrying about something that may or may not even happen! Our minds build up the problem until we have tied ourselves in knots over "what could be," all the while leaving God completely out of the picture.

Zephaniah 3:17 tells us that the LORD our God is a Mighty Warrior who saves! He doesn't just fight for us or tell us how to win the battle. He didn't tell Joshua how He was going to get across the Jordan River. He didn't know what was going to happen until the priests took the step into the raging river by faith, and then God showed His power.

Jericho was much the same way. March around quietly, no talking, for six days, and on the seventh, blow your horns and shout! Really??? Like that's going to take out a 7½ foot outer wall with a 13-foot-thick inner wall, 12-17 feet high!!! But with God's power, it did! When we struggle with impossible situations, let's practice going to God FIRST, not as a last resort. He's the One who has the power over impossible things, the Mighty Warrior who can save us, the One who has given us the victory before the battle even begins.

Will you trust Him with your worries and cares? "And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD'S, and He will give you into our hands" (I Sam. 17:47).

