

SESSION #12

JOSHUA

Having finished the five books of Moses, the Pentateuch, we turn now to the 12 books of history. For some, the word “history” is synonymous with “dry and dusty”. But not so here! This is HIS-story and we will see God at work through many interesting stories and memorable characters.

The first book is Joshua, named after the man who succeeded Moses as Israel’s new leader. Joshua contains quite a few stories which are going to be familiar to many of us. It’s a terrific book, one of my favorites in the OT.

Jehoshua means “Jehovah is salvation”. His original name meant “salvation”, period. But Moses changed his name by adding a prefix from Jahweh to the front of his name so that it now means “*Jehovah* is salvation”. His new name, then, is a reminder to this young man with enormous possibilities, tremendous leadership skills and gifts, that all the gifts in the world wouldn’t save God’s people. God alone is salvation. So his name becomes “Joshua” shortened from Jehoshua.

You may have been blessed with many talents and be tempted often to put your trust in your own abilities. Don’t do it! Remember Joshua: “Jehovah is Salvation”. Focus all your trust in Him. Jesus said, “Without me you can do” – how much? “Nothing!” Zero. Zilch. Nada.

The name “Joshua” is the OT form of the name for Jesus in the NT. There is a very real connection and not just by their names. Joshua himself in the OT is a wonderful picture of Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 2:10 Jesus is called “*the captain of*” – what? – “*of our salvation*”. Jesus is the one who leads us into the Promised Land of God’s blessing. He’s our captain, He’s our leader, He makes the way possible, just like Joshua does for the nation of Israel in the OT.

And we realize, as many commentators have pointed out, that Moses, the representative *par excellence* of the Law was unable to bring the people of God into the Promised Land.

By design he was unable. He represented the Law. You cannot be saved by the Law. We cannot possibly keep the Law. We can't get into the Promised Land of blessings by the Law. So Moses dies outside the Land. Only Joshua, '*Jehovah is salvation*', can bring the people into the Promised Land, which he does.

As a result, this is an upbeat kind of book because the theme has to do with victory, victory and faith. Or the Victory of Faith, in particular.

It's in direct contrast to the book of Numbers which was a failure book, failure because of the exact opposite of faith: unbelief. A failure to enter the land, a failure to overcome, a failure to occupy. Failure, failure, failure.

Now Joshua flips the coin over and it's going to be a story of victory because of faith, as they *do* enter, they *do* overcome and they *do* occupy the land. First John 5:4 says that "*this is the victory that overcomes the world (in our case)...*" And what is it? "*...even our faith.*"

So this is a wonderful book with lots of parallel pictures that are helpful for us as faith-living people in our day.

A word about Canaan to begin with because it is so central to the whole story of the book of Joshua. Canaan is an important *type* picture, in other words a picture of something far greater than simply it's material reality. But Canaan does not represent heaven in spite of the hymns that you and I sing that say it is. Canaan is not a picture of heaven. After all, what happens to the people of Israel under Joshua's leadership in Canaan?

They fight. It's a place of conflict, it's a place of war, it's a place of victories and defeats at times. It's a picture of what happens in realistic terms in living out the Christian life. It's not a picture of heaven. Romans 15:29 perhaps gives us the NT phrase that best describes Canaan: "*the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ*". What is it like to live obediently under God's leadership with His blessings upon us? That is Canaan. And what happens to the people here as they move into the Land will help us to understand how we are to live under God's leadership and with His blessing.

God had promised to Israel when they moved into Canaan that He would give them rest from their wanderings; their wilderness experience would not be their situation any longer. There would be plenty for them. It would be a place with lots to eat – a land of milk and honey. It would be a place of triumph instead of constant defeats. Victory was assured for them.

And if you want to follow a NT-OT analogy take a look at the book of Ephesians, especially chapter 1. Notice the phrase “*in heavenly places*” and it will provide a comparison with the book of Joshua because the book of Ephesians associates various truths for the Christian life with the phrase “*in heavenly places*”. These NT truths have to do with the *spiritual* life we live in *heavenly* places in *Christ Jesus*, centered in Him. The OT parallel is in the book of Joshua. It has to do with Israel’s *material* blessings in *earthly* places in *Abraham*, the promises made to Abraham and through him now to the people of Israel.

But what happens to them in the material world, in the geography of Canaan, has built into it some tremendous principles of how you and I live our lives on the spiritual level in our relationships with God and with one another.

Here’s a quick overview of the structure of the book of Joshua. There are three parts: entering the land, overcoming the land, and then occupying the land.

Let’s take a look at entering the land, first of all. Chapter 1 gives us the basis of faith, God’s promise in what is a famous portion of Scripture. In verse 6 God says to Joshua,

“Be strong and courageous because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you. Do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this book of the law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”

The basis for faith for the people of Israel is expressed here in this wonderful promise to Joshua. The basis is “*know God’s word and stick to it*”. That will provide the basis for victory in living out the Christian life.

It's not going to be easy, so God tells him straightaway in chapter 1 "*be strong and be courageous*" because there will be a lot of tough things coming down the road towards you.

Chapter 2: the prudence of faith. We had this terrific chapter one, all about faith in God's promises and being strong and Joshua responding... Then you turn to chapter 2 and all of a sudden you find Joshua sending spies across the Jordan River into the Land. And you say, "*What's going here? I thought this was going to be an exercise of faith? And here's Joshua sending spies! Why?*" Ah, this action is not incompatible with faith.

Joshua does use some planning and some strategy but it isn't in contrast to faith; it's an outworking of faith. As James says, "*faith will be evidenced by...*" – what? – "*...by your works*", by what you do. If you really believe God's going to do this, then step out and start doing something about it. Joshua does exactly that in chapter 2.

But he's smart. The last time spies were sent out into the Promised Land, how many spies were sent? Twelve. How many came back with a good report? Two. How many spies does Joshua send? Two! Never mind the other 10 guys. That was a waste of time and energy. Just send two this time. So he does.

Two guys go in to spy out the first city in the land, the city of Jericho. And as you read chapter 2 you begin to think this whole story is going to be about spying and all of that kind of stuff. But God does a twist in the story and this chapter isn't about spying at all.

The whole chapter is about a wonderful lady who is a highlight personality, not just in this chapter or this book, but in the entire Bible: Rahab. A person whose faith is absolutely astonishing. The book of Hebrews, in the Faith Hall of Fame of chapter 11, doesn't mention the name of Joshua at all. But it does mention Rahab.

When James picks out two people to be illustrative of faith in action, out of all the characters of human history, he picks Abraham (no surprise there, after all he's the father of faith), and the second personality James chooses is this lady, Rahab.

Her faith is incredible, and was clearly demonstrated by hiding the spies at great personal risk.

Running through the biblical record is a scarlet thread of the necessity for a substitutionary sacrifice, all the way from the clothings of skin for Adam and Eve to the 'Lamb as it had been slain' in the Book of Revelation. We've seen it quite a few times already in our studies.

And here in Rahab's story, it shows up as a physical scarlet rope hanging from her window and protecting all those in her house from the coming destruction.

If you don't know anything about Rahab read Joshua chapter two because she's worth knowing. She is a phenomenal lady, and a model of faith indeed.

Then chapter 3, the crisis of faith. As the people begin to move towards the Promised Land they come to the first barrier: it's the flood waters of the Jordan River. And they wonder how in the world they're ever going to get across. It's a realistic picture right from the beginning of the Christian life.

Between God's blessings on the other side and where you are at the moment may often flow a river of impossibility. And you wonder, "*how in the world am I ever going to get there?*" How can we get across to where God seems to be calling us? There's something in the way here that's looks just impossible.

But God makes a way and the crisis of faith is passed as the people move out in faith, put their feet in the water, and God dries up the Jordan River and piles up the waters way upstream in order to make a path across for them.

Then chapter 4, the witness of faith. Having crossed the Jordan River, they pile up two sets of stones: one in the midst of the Jordan before the water comes back over them, and one outside on the river bank as a witness to faith. They were to tell their children for generations after, when they came past that particular spot during school holidays on their way down to vacation at the Dead Sea. As they went past these stones, the kids looking out the window of the car, would say, "*Hey Dad, what are those stones all about?*" Dad was supposed to say, "*I'm glad you asked, because those stones show where God brought us across Jordan with terrific power and brought us into the Promised Land.*" It was a wonderful witness of faith.

And a reminder to us to use teachable moments to pass along God's truths to our children.

Chapter 5: the submission of faith. In verse 13 of chapter 5, Joshua, the leader of the people of Israel, goes out in the evening, out beyond the camp towards Jericho, pondering what he's going to do next. And a man comes out apparently from Jericho with a sword in his hand.

And Joshua says, *"Hey, just a minute. Whose side are you on?"* He wants to know whose side this person is on, and this person turns out to be God. And God says, *"I'm not on anybody's side. I don't take sides. I'm the commander of the Lord's army."*

And Joshua bows at his feet, as well he should. God came to take over and He does. And when He comes to you and me He does the same thing: He comes to take over.

In our next session we'll complete our survey of the book of Joshua.
