



Joshua

The Promised Land Leader

By Isaac Humphrey

Summary

The life and leadership of Joshua comes at a great moment in Israel's history, and it was under Joshua's leadership that the great triumph came to pass.

Joshua had grown up with the old Israel; the old generation under Moses, who had feared and grumbled through the Exodus, rebelled in the wilderness, and died complaining at God. Joshua led the new Israel, the wiser generation of those who had grown up learning lessons from the failings of their parents. This would be the generation that conquered the promised land, and Joshua was their leader. It was under Joshua's steadfast and faithful leadership that thirty-one kings were brought to their knees, and six mighty tribes were vanquished. It was Joshua who divided the land among the victorious tribes of Israel. At the close of Joshua's life, he was as faithful and firm in his obedience to God as ever, and so was Israel; after his death Israel's decline from the golden age began.

Joshua had grown up in the old Israel and ushered in the new. He had begun in the desert and ended in the promised land.

Moses' Right-Hand Man

*"Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the Spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses, 'Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.' And Joshua the son of Nun, **the assistant of Moses from his youth**, said, 'My lord Moses, stop them.'"*

(Numbers 11:26-28 ESV)

Throughout Moses' leadership of Israel's wilderness journey, through the times of power and those of weariness, through blessings and judgments, Moses was not always by himself. God, of course, was with him, but so was someone else - a young and faithful assistant named Joshua. He had originally been named "Hoshea" (meaning "salvation") and it was Moses who renamed him "Joshua" (meaning "Yahweh is salvation").

During the raid of Amalek, it was Joshua who lead the forces of Israel on the ground while Moses lead from the hill.

It was Joshua who followed Moses up the great and mighty mountain of Sinai to receive the law from the hands of God. It was Joshua who, on the return journey, noted with Moses the noise from the camp. Joshua's sincere and brave nature led him to

believe the enemies of God were attacking Israel and another great battle was being fought. The wiser and sadder Moses (who better understood the fickleness of humans) knew this time that the enemies of God were the people of the camp. Joshua was to learn this sad truth in the coming years of wilderness wanderings and wilderness judgments.

Joshua was a deeply loyal and fervent man, both to Moses and to God. When the tent of meeting was erected, and those who sought the Lord went out to it, Joshua went as well and the text says that he “would not depart from the tent.”

Throughout the desert wanderings Moses often felt alone - alone with a nation of hateful rebels jeering at him. But through good and bad, thick and thin, Joshua was firm and loyal. Though Aaron was unstable, and even Miriam complained against him, Joshua was zealous for Moses and Moses' Leadership.

When Moses, weary with the burden of Israel, begged God to kill him or give him help, God appointed seventy elders to share the responsibility of this great work. When Moses came back down to the tent of meeting, God placed the spirit of prophecy on the elders chosen as they assembled round the door of the tabernacle. Two of these, however, were not by the sacred tent but were prophesying in the congregation. The zealous Joshua (who probably saw them as schismatics and perhaps even rivals of Moses) said *“My lord Moses, forbid them.”* But the wiser Moses, weary with the burden of the people was not jealous for his own position or the gifts of God. *“Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!”*

Joshua's whole-hearted zeal for Moses and God was not unrecognized or unrewarded. He had a brave and noble spirit, a spirit of dedication. He was put to the test and came out strong.

Israel had made it through the wilderness and was on the edge of the promised land. Before going over, 12 spies were chosen to survey the new land - Joshua was chosen to represent the tribe of Ephraim. Joshua and his colleagues viewed both the riches and dangers of the land. It was a good land which God had promised, and Joshua viewed the formidable inhabitants with faith that God could overcome them. Joshua's colleagues did not share that faith. When it came time to address the assembled and expectant Israel, ten of the spies said that the land was full of giants and that they would all be killed. Joshua and one other man, Caleb, said that God could overcome that danger. But they were alone. Israel refused to go into the promised land, and God condemned them to wander for forty years in the desert.

From this old generation of rebels, the generation that often put Moses and Joshua in the minority, only Joshua and Caleb would live to see Israel have another chance at entering the promised land. Joshua would be their leader.

After forty years of wandering, when once again Israel was on the brink of Canaan's land, a new leader was needed. It was a different Israel that was assembled there, a better, more faithful Israel that had learned deep lessons from their parent's failings.

Moses could not go into the promised land, and was soon to die. A new leader was needed. *“Moses spoke to the LORD, saying, “Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep that have no shepherd.” So the LORD said to Moses, “Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him. Make him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation, and you shall commission him in their sight. You shall invest him with some of your authority, that all the congregation of the people of Israel may obey. And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the LORD. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the people of Israel with him, the whole congregation.” And Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and made him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole congregation, and he laid his hands on him and commissioned him as the LORD directed through Moses.”* (Numbers 27:15-23 ESV)

Moses, who cared deeply about this people wanted them to succeed at last. There was not a better man than Joshua. Older and more experienced by now than the new generation; a man practiced and suited for the many battles they would have to fight; a man deeply faithful to God and to his covenant. Joshua was to be Israel's new leader.

The Promised Land

Moses had died, and Israel was on the brink of the river Jordan. Joshua was their undisputed leader - a man chosen by God. He sent in more spies. This time the mission and number were different. Two men were sent to spy out the city of Jericho - the first that barred their entrance after crossing the Jordan. This time the intelligence brought back was different. Instead of mournful wailing's from rebels against God, it was the cheerful confidence of those faithful to God. The inhabitants stood in great fear and dread of Israel - they would surely fall before the people of God.

The Lord confirmed this faith that Joshua and Israel showed by opening a path through the flooding river Jordan to let his ark and his people pass. The God who could hold back rivers could drive out their enemies.

There stood Joshua, encamped on the other bank of Jordan. The new generation had just been circumcised for the first time, as their rebellious parents neglected to place on them the sign of the covenant. The passover had been observed - and what a significant passover! Joshua stood looking at Jericho, shut up and sealed, with its inhabitants full of deep misgivings. Then Joshua's attention was riveted by a man in front of him: a man with a drawn sword. Was this man an Israelite, one of Joshua's troops? Was he a Canaanite bent on a mischievous design against Israel? “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?” Joshua demanded. One moment later, Joshua was bowing with his face to the ground before this mysterious stranger for it was none other than the “commander of the army of the LORD.” This was Joshua's “burning bush,” and he too was commanded to remove his shoes as he stood there on holy ground.

The Conquest

Jericho was the first city of Canaan, and it would be completely sacrificed to God. By God's direction, they marched around the city once a day for six days. On the seventh day, they marched around Jericho seven times and then attacked. The walls of the city fell at their feet, and in they rushed. The city was completely destroyed as God commanded. Only one family was spared. That was the family of a woman named Rahab, who had aided Israel's spies, and put her trust in Israel's promise. She was a woman who had faith in Israel's God - and she was rewarded.

With the commander of the LORD's hosts on his side, and Jericho defeated before him, what could stop Joshua's conquering progress? A small city named Ai stood next in their path, and a small force was detailed for its capture. For a second time, Joshua fell with his face to the ground. This time it was with grief and confusion: Israel had been defeated before Ai! How could this be? Why had God deserted them? It was because there was one disobedient man, Achan, who had disobeyed God's express commands regarding Jericho's complete consecration. This could not be tolerated - not in the new generation that was completely dedicated to God. No hint of disobedience to God, recalling the sins of the wilderness generation, could be in the promised land. The blot called Achan was removed, and Israel was once again pure. Joshua could now be assured of God's help in the second attack on Ai.

Joshua did not sit idly down and expect a miracle. He came up with a plan. They would set an ambush behind Ai; the rest of Israel would attack, and then pretend to be defeated to draw off the men of Ai; then the ambush would take the city. Joshua's plan worked and Ai fell.

Joshua was expecting a coalition of enemies to form against him as Israel swept forward on its unstoppable progress, but the next people that appeared did not seem to be enemies. They were apparently ambassadors from a far-off country who were so concerned with the news they heard about Israel's exodus from Egypt, and their wilderness conquests, that they had come to beg for a treaty of peace between themselves and Israel. They wore the appearance of travel-weary men whose provisions were nigh exhaustion and whose news was limited to events before the fall of Jericho. Joshua and Israel's other leaders were satisfied. The veracity of their story seemed plain enough and not worth consulting God about. Thus a treaty was made. The story was false, and these ambassadors "from a far country" were none other than the Gibeonites, close neighbors who were soon to have felt the conquering hand of Israel. Though cheated, Joshua and Israel kept their word; the Gibeonites were made servants of Israel and not killed.

Joshua soon came into contact with the coalition that was expected. Five kings - the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon banded together. Their first object was to avenge themselves on Gibeon who they regarded as traitors to the enemy. Joshua and Israel were not affected directly, but their honor to their treaty compelled them to defend Gibeon. And what a defense that was! A forced night march,

and a sudden attack; the retreating enemy thrown into total confusion; hailstones from heaven to add to the route; and finally, when day was running out, the very sun and moon were held still to accommodate the overthrow of Israel's enemies.

Thus the conquering progress of Joshua and Israel proceeded - God fighting for them. Against new coalitions Joshua fought, and the enemy was overthrown. Numerous cities Joshua and Israel overthrew and vanquished. God's strict command to conquer completely was faithfully executed by Joshua. Thirty-one kings were vanquished and their lands divided among the tribes of Israel. The Canaanite nations, however, were not completely destroyed - much work had yet to be done.

There is a natural question that presents itself to the minds of us today who read Joshua. Why did God want to annihilate and exterminate the Canaanites? When such things are done in the world we naturally (and especially from a Christian perspective) think it a terrible and grievous sin. It is the extreme of violence and bloodshed, both of which we know are abhorrent to God. But we must remember that in the case of the Canaanites it was God, the God who could see the past, present, and future: the God who watched from heaven as violence and evil pervaded the Canaanite nations. For hundreds of years, from before the time of Abraham, He had been merciful to them. "...the iniquity of the Amorites," God told Abraham, "is not yet full." It was about four-hundred years later when the judgment finally came. The same sense of justice that condemns massacres today, condemned the hundreds of years of violence in Canaan. The God of the physical and spiritual worlds decided it was time for the entire people of Canaan to be removed from the physical to the spiritual side and be judged by him. The nation of Israel was commissioned to do just that.

"The LORD is long-suffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation." (Numbers 14:18 KJV)

Joshua's Last Days

Joshua had been faithful to fight the LORD's battles all of his life. Now, in his old age, he was given a period of rest and peace. He got to see the twelve tribes settle into their various inheritances. There were more conquests they would have to complete in order to fully carry out God's instructions, but under Joshua the strength of the Canaanites had been broken.

In his old age, Joshua was as faithful and zealous for God as he had been when, as a young man, he had stayed by the Tabernacle of God and did not depart. Joshua called together Israel, with its leaders to tell them something that was on his heart.

"Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left; That ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them: But cleave unto the LORD your God, as ye have done unto this day."

For the LORD hath driven out from before you great nations and strong: but as for you, no man hath been able to stand before you unto this day. One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the LORD your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you. Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the LORD your God.” (Joshua 23:6-11 KJV)

“Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” (Joshua 24:14-15 KJV)

That is the heart of Joshua - the man that cleaved unto the LORD his God, the man that feared and served the LORD in sincerity and truth. The man who said “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

Joshua died at the grand old age of 110, surrounded by a sincere and faithful Israel. But would Israel remain faithful and firm to God once the next generation came? Would they complete the work of conquest and remain untouched by the idolatry of the nations around them? One must turn to the book of Judges, and find out what happened to the nation of Israel.