

# **JOSHUA**

**by Robert C. Walton**



# JOSHUA I

## Introduction

The book of Joshua plays a significant transitional role in our understanding of the history of redemption as laid out by God in the Scriptures. In it we find an important part of the fulfillment of the promise God had made to Abraham - the possession of the Promised Land. Today, in our first lesson, we will introduce the book and deal with background material that will help us to understand what we are about to study.

### AUTHORSHIP

The idea that Joshua was the author of the book that bears his name has a certain appeal in that it lends greater weight and authenticity if the accounts contained in the narrative were written by an eyewitness and participant. Those who favor this position argue that the few brief references to Joshua's death and events that followed it need eliminate the possibility of Joshua writing the book no more than the account of Moses' death rules him out as the author of the Pentateuch. In fact, the Talmud, written in the Middle Ages, identifies Joshua as the author. Modern scholars, however, tend to reject this idea, and not always for bad reasons; we need not give time or attention to liberal critics who reject any stated biblical authorship out of hand because of their presumption that the inspiration and inerrancy of the text are impossible. Probably the strongest argument against seeing Joshua as the author of the book is found in the repeated use of the phrase "to this day," which occurs at least a dozen times. The phrase implies that the writer was looking back on the events described, but doing so from a time not too far separated from the events themselves. The book is thus anonymous.

### DATE

When dealing with the question of the date of the book, two issues are involved - the date of the events and the date of composition. The date of the events described in the book depends entirely on the date of the Exodus from Egypt. Two time frames have been suggested for the Exodus - 1446 BC, which is based on I Kings 6:1 (the fourth year of Solomon can be dated with some precision) and coheres with the times given for the length of the sojourn in Egypt and the lengths of the reigns of the Judges, and the early thirteenth century (the so-called Late Date for the Exodus), which understands the 480 years in I Kings 6:1 as referring to twelve generations, then suggests that 25-year generations would give the desired time frame. Archaeological factors are involved as well, with supporting evidence on both sides. Because of the games that must be played with biblical numbers to get the thirteenth-century date, I favor the Early Date for the Exodus, thus placing the events of Joshua in the early years of the fourteenth century BC. We should note, however, that the date of the events in the book is not of great moment in their interpretation, though it does affect our use of archaeological evidence.

The date of composition is a matter of somewhat greater significance, largely because of the way in which it has been used by critics to undermine the authenticity of the narrative. As is

commonplace with liberal commentators, this book has been subject to a variety of forms of abuse at their hands. Julius Wellhausen, in his Documentary Hypothesis, saw the same source documents behind the book of Joshua as those he speculated as lying behind the books of Moses, thus leading him to refer to the Hexateuch. As with the Mosaic literature, his fragmenting approach deprived the text of all integrity and proposed a late date - in the Divided Monarchy period, if not later.

While not all critics have fragmented the book in this way, others have tended to view it as a somewhat random collection of legends, mostly intended for etiological purposes (stories explaining how some place got its name, for example). As such, they also favor a date during or after the Divided Monarchy period, arguing that the entire history of Israel as found in the Old Testament was edited into its present form around the time of the Captivity or later. Such approaches simply fail to take the text seriously and usually become a pretext for denying the historicity of the events found in the book. The reference made above to the repeated use of the phrase “to this day” places the writing of the book in the early period of the Judges (Rahab was still alive when the book was written - Joshua 6:25). Other limiting factors are the reference to Jebusites still inhabiting Jerusalem in Joshua 15:63 (David drove them out in II Samuel 4:6-7) and the note that Canaanites lived in Gezer when the book was written in Joshua 16:10 (the Egyptian Pharaoh drove them out in I Kings 9:16, giving the city to Solomon as a dowry).

## STRUCTURE

The structure of the book is fairly simple - Entering the Land (chapters 2-5), Conquering the Land (chapters 6-12), Dividing the Land (chapters 13-22), with an opening Prologue (chapter 1) telling of the commissioning of Joshua and an Epilogue (chapters 23-24) dealing with covenant renewal. The obvious structure is one of the main arguments against the fragmenting approach of Wellhausen and other liberal critics. Some scholars have suggested that the structure mimics that of land grant documents found in contemporary cultures, but such documents take no consistent form (unlike suzerainty treaties, which follow a remarkably standard form), so that any conclusions that might be drawn from the comparison between Joshua and similar writings has little value.

## MAJOR THEMES

Because the book possesses such obvious unity, any discussion of themes must account for all parts of the document. Thus those who see it as primarily a biography of Joshua must explain why it contains so little personal information about him and so much about the division of the land, while those who see in it a manual of military strategy must also explain why relatively little strategic information is given, and why most of what does appear is not in any way replicable (trumpets, collapsing walls, stopping the sun in the sky, and miraculous hailstorms do not sound military strategy make).

When considering major themes, we should note the following:

- The book, like the rest of the Bible, is primarily about God, not about Joshua or the Israelites.

- God's covenant faithfulness is at the center of the narrative. The book contains covenant renewals at the beginning (chapter 5) and the end (chapter 24). The people recommit themselves to God both before and after He gives them the land He had promised to Abraham. Through the patriarchal period, the sojourn in Egypt, and the forty years of wandering in the wilderness, the family that became a nation was waiting for the fulfillment of their nationhood. Here, God gives them what He had promised over half a millennium before.
- Another important theme is God's righteous judgment. The most recent delay had been caused by the sin of the people (only months were required to get from Sinai to Kadesh Barnea), but the sin of the Canaanites was also a factor in the delay (Genesis 15:16); they were only now ripe for God's judgment on their wickedness. Furthermore, the way in which God unleashes His anger against His unfaithful people also demonstrates this truth (the defeat at Ai, the stoning of Achan).
- These latter two events also illustrate the reality of corporate solidarity. As John Donne put it, "No man is an island." When Achan violated God's decree, it affected his entire family and the nation as a whole. Our individualistic culture has difficulty fathoming this.
- The picture of God as Warrior and King is also an important theme. The amazing battles won by the Israelites are won by divine strategy and divine power. When the Israelites fight on their own, they inevitably lose.
- God's sovereign rule over His people is also illustrated by the distribution of the land. God assigns different parcels to different tribes by the casting of lots rather than by conquest or choice. The land and the people are His to dispose of as He chooses.

## IMPORTANT ISSUES

Various matters of controversy arise when seeking to apply the general themes or specific incidents of the book of Joshua. Note the following:

- The incident with Rahab and the spies (Joshua 2) has often been used by Christian ethicists to argue that lying under certain circumstances is acceptable, particularly when life is at stake. We will examine this issue at some length two weeks from now.
- The annihilation of the Canaanites demanded by God is perhaps the most serious moral dilemma raised by the book. We will consider it when we discuss the summary of the Conquest in chapters 10-12.
- Archaeology, as has already been noted, is a problematic issue because the evidence, frankly, is a mixed bag, with some discoveries supporting and others contradicting the text. We will consider archaeological evidence at various times in appropriate places as we go through the book.
- The relationship of Joshua to Jesus has been a matter of much comment over the centuries. They bear the same name, of course, which makes comparisons inevitable, though the New Testament only mentions Joshua twice - once in Stephen's final sermon, noting that Joshua brought the Ark of the Covenant into the Promised Land (Acts 7:45), and once in Hebrews 4:8, where Joshua and Jesus are contrasted because the rest given by God through Joshua was

temporary while that provided by Jesus is permanent. One might easily argue that the meaning of the name, “Yahweh saves,” points from temporal deliverance under Joshua to spiritual deliverance under Christ, yet the connection never encourages us to picture Joshua himself as a type of Christ or to spiritualize the Conquest in a way that detracts from the messages about the nature of God that are listed above (or, worse yet, minimizes the problems raised above by denying the historicity of the accounts).

## THE PREPARATION OF JOSHUA

Though the book of Joshua itself tells us little about the man whose name it bears, we do know quite a bit about him from the Pentateuch. By the time he is called upon to succeed Moses, he is a seasoned, experienced, and godly man who has proven his worth in a variety of ways. Note the following:

- The first mention of Joshua is in Exodus 17:8-16, where he is chosen to lead the army of Israel against the Amalekites. He thus learns very early in life that the battle belongs to the Lord, and He alone gives victory.
- Another indication that Joshua is being groomed for leadership is found in Exodus 24:13, where, after the elders of Israel ascend partway up Mount Sinai with Moses, Joshua alone accompanies him nearer the pinnacle. He thus knew something of the reality of the presence of God.
- Later, in Exodus 32:17, Joshua accompanies Moses down the Mount after the giving of the Ten Commandments and is a witness to the incident of the Golden Calf. He sees the consequences of disobeying God’s commandments (even before they are pronounced); this lesson will be repeated during his own term of leadership.
- In Exodus 33:11, Joshua communes with God at the Tent of Meeting even after Moses leaves. The importance of communion with God is thus impressed upon him at an early age.
- In Numbers 11:28, Joshua urges Moses to stop Eldad and Medad from prophesying. Moses’ rebuke teaches him that God gives His gifts to whom He will, and in the way He chooses.
- We find the incident with the spies sent to explore the Promised Land in Numbers 13-14. Here we see that Joshua is among the respected leaders of his clan and that Moses changes his name from Hoshea (“He saves”) to Joshua (13:16), a constant reminder that only the Lord saves; the name change also brings about the connection with Jesus mentioned above. Furthermore, the fact that only Joshua and Caleb bring back a positive report shows the importance of faith in God and the need to stand up for what is right even when in the minority - the fact that God repeatedly exhorts Joshua to be courageous builds on a lesson learned almost forty years before. Note, too, that Joshua’s courageous stand almost costs him his life (14:10), but results in only him and Caleb surviving to enter the Promised Land, which not even Moses was permitted to do.
- In Numbers 27:18-23, Joshua is commissioned as Moses’ successor (cf. Deuteronomy 31:1-8; 34:9). The emphasis of the ceremony is that the Spirit of God will rest upon him and enable him to lead the people. He is also to be responsible for taking the Israelites across the Jordan (Deuteronomy 3:28) and for the division of the land (Numbers 34:17). God also

warns him about the consequences of disobedience among the people (Deuteronomy 31:14-18).

After forty years of preparation for the job (remember that for Moses, the time of preparation had been *eighty* years), Joshua had finished his apprenticeship and was ready to take on the work to which God had called him.





## JOSHUA II

### Joshua 1

A transition in leadership is always a difficult time for a nation. In the first chapter of Joshua, we find the passing of the torch from Moses to Joshua. As noted in the introductory lesson, Joshua had been designated as Moses' successor prior to Moses' death. But transfer of power can be an uneasy time, especially when that succession is not based on birthright. Too often in history uncertainties about royal succession have led to civil war; the dynastic dispute following the death of Nebuchadnezzar, the chaos in Russia after the death of Peter the Great, as well as the War of Spanish Succession that broke out after the death of Charles II of Spain are examples of this. The extent to which rulers would go to avoid such chaos and violence can be seen in the serial polygamy of Henry VIII in order to produce a male heir and the Pragmatic Sanction initiated by Charles VI of Austria in order to protect the Habsburg lands when his daughter, Maria Theresa, ascended the throne. God had prepared both Joshua and the people for this time, but the repetition found in this chapter shows how important it was for both Joshua and the people to approach the transition in a positive frame of mind.

#### THE CALL OF JOSHUA (verses 1-5)

After forty years of waiting, the time had arrived to enter the Promised Land, and Joshua was the man called by God to implement the fulfillment of God's promise.

Verse 1 - Moses had been the leader of the people as long as most of them could remember. Relatively few of those who were now prepared to enter the Promised Land had experienced slavery in Egypt. The title here ascribed to Moses - the Servant of the Lord - is both common and unusual; common because documents from the era use it frequently to indicate high government officials, and rare because few in Scripture are honored with such a title (Abraham, David, and Joshua himself, along with the Servant of the Lord - the Messiah - in Isaiah). We should note also that cognate uses of the title exist within a polytheistic setting; governors of cities are often referred to as the "Servant of [the city's patron deity]." Moses, on the other hand, is the Servant, not of some parochial god, but of the Lord Almighty.

Verse 2 - The death of Moses is the signal to begin the Conquest because Moses had been told he would not be permitted to enter the Promised Land. God had already given them the land, of course, but now they were to gain in reality what had been theirs in theory since the time of the Abrahamic Covenant. The crossing of a body of water thus marks the terminus of the wilderness wanderings in the same way it had indicated their beginning.

Verse 3 - The promise of God's gift of the land had not just been given to Moses, of course, but to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as well. The reminder that the land the people are about to possess is a gift and not an earned right is also worth noting.

Verse 4 - This verse gives the boundaries of the Promised Land - from the Negev in the south to the Lebanon Valley, the Hittite territory in northern Palestine (present-day Syria), and the northward reaches of the Euphrates in the north. The western boundary is of course the Mediterranean Sea, while the eastern boundary is left somewhat in question (to view the Euphrates as the *eastern* boundary of the land would have extended the territory promised to Abraham almost to his original home in Ur, in which case he never would have needed to leave at all). While God gave the land east of the Jordan to the Transjordan tribes, their territory is sometimes spoken of as outside the Promised Land (Joshua 22:19). Despite uncertainties, the territory described corresponded closely with the Egyptian province of Canaan during the New Kingdom era, along with some disputed Hittite lands in the north. Joshua and the Israelites never conquered all of the land described here and are criticized for their disobedience. The closest Israel came to controlling the territories the borders of which are spelled out in this verse was during the reigns of David and Solomon, the height of the United Monarchy.

Verse 5 - Joshua was an invincible military leader, not because of his own prowess, but because of God's presence with him (note that the only time he loses a battle, at Ai, the Lord was not with him because he didn't bother consulting Him). God's promise never to forsake Joshua implies that He, unlike the capricious deities of the Ancient World, would never change sides in a fit of anger. Jesus gave a similar promise to His disciples in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). We should note that the words of this verse are quoted in Hebrews 13:5 in the context of an exhortation against covetousness and in favor of contentment. We don't have Joshua's enemies, but we have the same temptations to fear and dependence on self.

#### GOD'S CHARGE TO JOSHUA (verses 6-9)

This section appears to be a bit repetitious - the exhortation to "be strong and courageous" appears three times in the span of four verses (and again from the mouths of the people at the end of the chapter). Can we have any doubt as to what Joshua's greatest challenge was as he assumed leadership of the people?

Verse 6 - Anyone succeeding a popular and long-term leader in any endeavor is likely to struggle. Typical responses go from the extremes of being afraid to take any initiative because of the long shadow cast by one's predecessor to wanting to change everything in order to establish one's own authority and program. Joshua was to do neither. He was to maintain continuity with the leadership given by Moses while at the same time leading the people where Moses could not take them - into the Promised Land. The two main parts of the book thus deal with the conquest of the land (chapters 1-12) and the distribution of the land (chapters 13-22).

Verses 7-8 - The foundation for the continuity of leadership was found not in personalities or in leadership methods, but in the Word of God. Moses had already warned the people against deviation from the Word in their worship (Deuteronomy 12:32), but God now places faithfulness to the Word in a broader context. Note in verse 7 that the Pentateuch - the only Scriptures Joshua and the people had - was to play three important roles in Joshua's life: it was to fill his speech - the words he spoke

to the people as he led them; it was to fill his mind (the Hebrew word translated *meditate* means to *mutter*, somewhat similar to the idea of constant prayer advocated by Paul in I Thessalonians 5:17); and it was to control his actions. Joshua as a leader was not to be a hypocrite, but was to apply to his own life the words he spoke to the people and live before them in a way that was consistent with those words.

Verse 9 - Yes, this is repetitious, but these words acknowledge the very real temptation to fall into fear and discouragement. After all, Joshua had seen the way the people had treated Moses in the wilderness; he had even experienced their wrath when he and Caleb had delivered the minority report after the reconnaissance of Canaan almost forty years earlier. But it was not just the past that gave Joshua reason to pause. While he had complete confidence in God, the giants were still in the land and the Jordan was at flood tide. Furthermore, the walled city of Jericho guarded the fords of the Jordan near which they were encamped.

#### JOSHUA'S FIRST ORDERS (verses 10-15)

Sometimes, despite the complaints of those who play the position, second fiddle is the easiest role to fill. After all, one who occupies the position of chief adviser gets plenty of input but no real responsibility. Stepping in and taking charge, however, is another story entirely.

Verses 10-11 - The time for delay has ended, and Joshua tells the people to get ready to move. He had the advantage of a smoothly-functioning administrative structure through which to communicate messages and commands, and he takes advantage of it. We should note that the structure of the book departs from precise chronology at this point, since the command to move in three days surely would not have been given until after the safe return of the spies at the end of chapter 2.

Verses 12-15 - Maintaining the unity of the nation was important. Two-and-a-half tribes - Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh - had asked Moses' permission to remain in the land conquered at the end of the wilderness wanderings from the Amorites in Transjordan (Numbers 32; Deuteronomy 3). They had been permitted to do so on condition that they would participate in the conquest of Canaan. Joshua now reminds them of that promise, basing his insistence on their involvement both on Moses' command to them and on the principle of fairness - that all had participated in the conquest of Transjordan, therefore all must participate in the conquest of Canaan. Their women and children, along with men not of fighting age, would be allowed to remain. This land became known as Gilead.

#### THE PEOPLE ACKNOWLEDGE JOSHUA'S LEADERSHIP (verses 16-18)

The acclaim given to Joshua as the new leader appears to be unanimous and enthusiastic, much like that later given to Saul (I Samuel 11:12-15). The people acknowledge that Joshua's authority is founded on God's presence with him, and that as such he has the right to put to death any who reject the word that God speaks through him (e.g., Achan in chapter 7).



## JOSHUA III

### Joshua 2

The first step in preparing for the conquest of Canaan was reconnaissance. Moses had sent spies into the land thirty-eight years earlier, entrusting them with the task of checking out the Promised Land in its entirety. These spies had a much narrower mission: to reconnoiter the site of the first battle, the walled city of Jericho.

#### THE SPIES ENTER THE CITY (verse 1)

The use of spies was common in the Ancient Near East, as documents from the period attest. When we compare this mission with the earlier one sent by Moses, we find a few notable differences that go beyond the scope of the assignment. First of all, the spies were sent secretly. Spy missions, of course, are always intended to be kept secret from the enemy, but it appears that this one was kept secret from the Israelites as well; undoubtedly Joshua remembered the brouhaha associated with the earlier endeavor of which he had been a part. Secondly, only two spies are sent rather than twelve, probably due to the significantly smaller target area for the mission. Thirdly, the names of the spies are not given. But the procedure described in selecting the spies for the earlier mission would suggest that they were men of great repute in the land. Could one have been Salmon, the son of Nahshon, a prince of Judah (Numbers 7:12), the man who later married Rahab? We have no way of knowing, of course, but the possibility is intriguing.

The location of Shittim is unknown, but scholars generally assume that it was an outpost on the east bank of the Jordan across from Jericho. The city of Jericho, considered by many to be the oldest inhabited city on the planet (some archaeologists date artifacts as early as the ninth millennium BC), was in a strategic location, guarding the only reliable ford across the Jordan between the Dead Sea and the fords of Adam below the Jabbok more than twenty miles to the north. It also was in a position to guard the trade route through the Jordan Valley and the main road into the mountains leading to Bethel and Jerusalem. Jericho also was an oasis, with springs of water coming from the ground, which in the Dead Sea region is of great value. At this time Jericho was probably a city of about two thousand inhabitants, along with dependent villagers in the outlying regions.

When the spies entered the city, they went to the house of a prostitute named Rahab. This is not as unusual a choice as one might originally think, since in the ancient world prostitutes also served as innkeepers. The connection between such places and espionage was so well-known that the Code of Hammurabi specifies that any innkeeper (a cognate of the same word used here) who was caught harboring spies without reporting them to the king was to be put to death. Rahab's house would therefore be a logical place for strangers to blend in, and also a place where all the town gossip could be heard and information gathered to fulfill the spies' mission.

## THE SPIES ARE DISCOVERED AND PROTECTED (verses 2-7)

Given what we later learn about the fear of the approaching Israelites, however, one should not be surprised that the city watch would have noted the arrival of two strangers.

Verse 2 - The attempt at covert reconnaissance failed, and the watch reported the presence of the spies to the king. Note that the term *king* here may have a variety of meanings. We are not talking about the monarch of an extensive domain. He is either the ruler of an independent city-state or the representative of a larger coalition (we see that these existed in other accounts in the book of Joshua) entrusted with the security of this important town.

Verse 3 - Given the occupation of prostitutes noted above and the connection of inns with espionage activities, one should not be surprised that Rahab's house would be the first place the king would look.

Verses 4-6 - Rahab protects the spies by lying about their identity, their movements, and their whereabouts. She hides them under stalks of flax drying on the flat roof of her house (those who know such things note that damp flax would make a very uncomfortable hiding place because of its odor), and keeps the soldiers from searching the house by emphasizing the need for haste in their pursuit to keep the spies from getting away.

Much is made of this passage because of Rahab's lie, and the account is often used to justify lying under certain circumstances. But we should note that lying is not the only issue here; she also committed treason by aiding and abetting the enemies of her people - a crime that, as we have already seen, carried the death penalty. How should we assess these actions? Note the following:

- The major reason for the controversy is the fact that Rahab is rewarded for her actions by the Israelites and later praised for them in the New Testament (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25). But note carefully that the action for which she is praised is protecting the spies - what the rulers of Jericho would have called treason. In both passages, this is seen as an act of faith; because she trusted in the true God, she threw in her lot with His people rather than with the pagans who were under God's judgment. In other words, she recognized a higher loyalty, and acted accordingly - "we ought to obey God rather than men."
- Her lie is never praised, though some would argue that it is inseparable from the act of treason since it was the means by which she protected the spies. Explanations vary:
  - Rahab's lie was justifiable because it was in defense of human life. This is the most common explanation among those who would support Rahab's actions and argue further that lies in defense of life are always justifiable.
  - Rahab's lie was justifiable because "all is fair in love and war," i.e., the conventions of war include the expectation of deception. Since Rahab had thrown in her lot with the Israelites, she was in fact fighting on their side, and could legitimately deceive the "enemy."

- Others argue that men and women of faith often sin in the process of putting their faith into action, but the fact that God uses such sins for good does not in any way justify them. Who, for instance, would seek to argue that all the actions of Jephthah and Samson were justifiable, despite the fact that both are listed among the men of faith in Hebrews 11:32?
- The bottom line is that God is Truth, and cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18). Because morality involves conformity to the nature of God, lying may not in any way be justified. It is even more inappropriate to use Rahab's lie to justify the lies of others.

Verse 7 - Pursuit in the direction of the fords of the Jordan would be logical. Note also that the care given to locking the city gates at night was appropriate under the threat of war or invasion. The consequence, of course, was that the spies were also locked *in*, and thus trapped in a hostile city.

#### RAHAB'S COVENANT WITH THE SPIES (verses 8-21)

The conversation between Rahab and the spies serves as the centerpiece of the chapter and was clearly the aspect of the story that the author thought most important.

Verses 8-9 - Rahab goes up to the roof where the spies are hiding (presumably this occurred before the soldiers arrived) and tells them about the mood of the city. The people are living in fear. This had been predicted as far back as the Song of Miriam (Exodus 15:15-16). Other documents from the period speak of their kings and armies striking fear into the hearts of their enemies, but this is a rare example of such a testimony in the mouth of one of those enemies rather than simply as a typical rhetorical boast that characterized the self-promotion of most ancient monarchs. Rahab also gives personal testimony to her faith in the God of Israel. She is sure that He will be victorious, though the bedraggled spies hiding in her soggy flax could hardly have inspired her with confidence. This willingness to put her faith into action is the primary reason she is praised in Hebrews and James.

Verses 10-11 - Morale is low because word has reached the inhabitants of the exploits of Israel's God, both in the crossing of the Red Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian army a generation earlier and in the recent defeats of Sihon and Og (note that the word translated here as *completely destroyed* is the Hebrew word *herem*, or *ban*, which implies the utter destruction of an enemy as an act of sacrifice to a deity; we will discuss this in detail later in the course). Rahab here continues her confession of faith by identifying the God of Israel as the God of the entire universe. We have no idea how Rahab may have obtained her knowledge, both of Israel's history and of their God; this would have been completely contrary to the understanding of the nature of deity in which she had been raised. The Canaanites thought of gods as local, devoted to a single tribe, and were convinced that when tribes made war, their gods were also fighting against one another. Rahab now knows better, and has no doubt that the God of the heavens and the earth will win the coming battle.

Verses 12-13 - Rahab here negotiates for her own life and the lives of her family members (no husband or children here; she is, after all, a prostitute). This is another indication of her confidence in an Israelite victory. She looks to the God of Israel to protect her rather than the rulers of her own city.

Verse 14 - The spies agree, swearing a solemn oath in the name of the Lord. The oath is conditional, noting that it depends on Rahab's silence. We should not think here that the spies didn't trust Rahab; after all, she had saved their lives. They are simply emphasizing the importance of her silence for her own sake; if she allows one stray word to escape her lips, she puts her own life in jeopardy, and no one will be able to save her. The implication is that the spies will see that she is treated kindly and fairly if she manages to live that long.

Verse 15 - She lets them down by a rope from her window to enable them to escape from the secured city. Much evidence exists for the building of houses along city walls, including in later ruins at Jericho itself. In some cases, the intent was to fortify the city walls by building structures that would have walls perpendicular to the outer defenses in order to brace them more firmly; in other cases, the outer walls of the houses themselves were built contiguously, thus forming the city wall. Houses at that time were commonly two stories high, so that the drop would not have been a large one (unless the wall overlooked a ravine at the edge of the tel). Windows, for obvious reasons, would have been on the upper floor if the house had any windows at all.

Verse 16 - Rahab's advice here is interesting. The hills in which the spies were told to hide were to the west of Jericho - the opposite direction from that taken by their pursuers. The region is rugged and rocky, and was long the refuge of bandits (this area was the setting for the Parable of the Good Samaritan). The advice to hide for three days also corresponds to a document from the era, the Hittite *Instructions to the Commander of the Border Fortress*, which specifies that suspicious characters are to be pursued for three days, after which the search is to be given up (and failure punished by the authorities). Three days was thus considered a safe time interval, after which the spies could re-cross the Jordan and return to camp.

Verses 17-20 - Further conditions are stipulated before the spies leave Rahab's house. Not only must she maintain secrecy, but she must also mark her house with a scarlet cord at the time of the invasion and gather all her family members inside; otherwise, the spies cannot guarantee their safety (note that the spies had no idea of what would later happen to the walls of Jericho). These conditions are reminiscent of the Passover, when the blood of the sacrificial lamb was painted on the doorposts and lintel of each house and the inhabitants were commanded to remain inside when the Angel of Death passed over the land (though commentators who suggest that the cord is red to represent the blood of Christ go beyond any symbolism affirmed by Scripture). Others have suggested that Rahab, like Noah and Lot on earlier occasions, may have pleaded with the citizens of her town to enter the safety of her house, but failed to convince them, as they chose to ignore her predictions of doom and "eat, drink, and be merry" until judgment fell upon them. Such speculation has no foundation in the text and in fact would have been contrary to the need for silence; we have no indication that Rahab sought to protect anyone outside her extended family.



Verse 21 - Rahab agrees to the conditions and sends the spies away. She wastes no time hanging the cord from her window. Some have noted that the cord must not have been an unusual decoration for her house, since if that were the case it might have attracted suspicion and defeated the very purpose of the pact she made with the spies.

#### THE SPIES REPORT TO JOSHUA (verses 22-24)

The spies follow Rahab's instructions, waiting in the mountains toward the west until the pursuers return from their fruitless search. They then ford the Jordan, return to Joshua and give their report. Note that the intelligence gathered from Rahab was exactly what the Israelites needed. They now knew that God had paved the way for their invasion by undermining the morale of the people of the land, enabling them to approach battle with confidence (God later provided Gideon with similar assurance on the eve of his battle with the Midianites in Judges 7:9-15).

In this chapter, Rahab is not only an example of faith in action, but is also a picture of the marvelous grace of God. Not only did she belong to a people condemned to destruction, but she was an immoral woman as well, yet God changed her heart, saved her life, incorporated her into His people (cf. Joshua 6:25), and actually made her an ancestress of Christ Himself (Matthew 1:5; note that she was also the mother of Boaz, the husband of Ruth).



## JOSHUA IV

Joshua 3-4

After the spies return and give their report, preparations are made for the immediate crossing of the Jordan River. The parallels with the crossing of the Red Sea are numerous and deliberate; the two events serve as bookends for the wilderness wanderings and the fulfillment of God's promises concerning the building of a nation and the provision of a land for them to inhabit.

### PREPARING TO CROSS THE JORDAN (3:1-13)

Unlike the somewhat chaotic crossing of the Red Sea under the eyes of the Egyptian army, the crossing of the Jordan was well-organized and orderly.

Verse 1 - They leave the encampment at Shittim and move to the banks of the Jordan. This trip probably took the better part of a day.

Verses 2-3 - The designated leaders of the people spread the word, transmitting Joshua's instructions. The people are to move in formation similar to their movements in the wilderness, where specific positions were designated for the members of each tribe. The Ark of the Covenant is to go before them. The form of this procession is similar to those found in numerous ancient documents from the period, in which an army going into battle will take with them a symbol of their god, who is expected to fight for them in the coming conflict (cf. the foolish implementation of the same mindset in I Samuel 4). While the Ark here indeed symbolizes the presence of God among His people, it has power only when God is actually present and when the armies of Israel march according to His commands. What we see here is not merely the migration of a people from one home to another, but an army preparing for battle with the Lord as their Commander. It would be a mistake, however, to speak of the ensuing conflicts as "holy war" in some special sense. In the ancient world, all wars were holy wars, viewed as conflicts among people as well as among their gods.

Verse 4 - Like the Pillar of Cloud and Pillar of Fire in the wilderness, the Ark is to serve as a guide, showing the people where to go. In addition to the Ark being a source of confidence, however, it is also to be treated as an object of reverence. The people are to keep their distance (more than half a mile) - a caution that Uzzah would have been wise to observe (II Samuel 6:6-7). Note that the order of march implies that the Ark is in no need of protection by the people; instead, the God who dwells between the cherubim will protect *them*. We should also note that the central place of the Ark is significant because it contained the Law of God - the very words being fulfilled by the crossing of the Jordan into the Promised Land.

Verse 5 - Because of the significance of what was about to occur, the people are commanded to purify themselves (cf. Exodus 19:14-15, where the people were to wash their clothes and abstain from sexual relations in anticipation of God descending on Mount Sinai to give the Law). The reference to "amazing things" concerns the miracle that God is about to do in their presence.

Verse 6 - The priests are told to pick up the Ark and move forward. Note that they are not told what is about to happen, any more than the people were.

Verse 7 - Here we are told one of several reasons for the miracle that is about to occur - to confirm Joshua's leadership, in action as well as in words. This is why the parallels to the crossing of the Red Sea are so important - because they identify Joshua as another Moses, God's chosen leader over His people. We see here that the exaltation of a spiritual leader is the work of God, not of the man himself. Even as Moses was the meekest man on earth (Numbers 12:3), Joshua demonstrates a constant attitude of humility before God and the people, yet both are elevated in the eyes of the people by the works that God does through them.

Verse 8 - Here we see a difference between the crossing of the Jordan and the crossing of the Red Sea. Forty years earlier, Moses had raised his staff and the waters had parted, then the people had crossed on dry ground. Here, the priests must step in before anything happens (cf. Peter stepping out onto the stormy Sea of Galilee in Matthew 14:28-30). Their act of faith is to be an example to the multitude that will follow.

Verses 9-11 - Joshua now instructs the people, and another reason for the miracle is given; it is intended to give the people confidence in the coming conquest of the tribes that inhabit the land. God, the Lord of all the earth, indeed will go before them as they fight. The list of tribes here is one found commonly in the Pentateuch, as well as in Joshua and Judges. Among the tribal groups listed, note the following:

- The terms *Canaanite* and *Amorite* are broad descriptives, sometimes used to characterize all the inhabitants of the land. At other times the designations are more specific, as when the tribes in Transjordan are described as Amorites or when Deborah and Barak go into battle against the Canaanites under Jabin, King of Hazor in Judges 4.
- The Hittites were a once-powerful empire north of Canaan, though the term is sometimes used to describe tribal groups further to the south, such as the ones with whom Abraham negotiated when purchasing a field in which to bury Sarah. They reached the peak of their power during the sojourn of Israel in Egypt, and were by the time of the Conquest a mere shadow of their former glory. An interesting sidelight here is that the Hittite Empire fell so far into obscurity that many nineteenth-century critics used the absence of any evidence of such a group as a means to question the authenticity of the biblical narrative. Among them was Julius Wellhausen, the originator of the Documentary Hypothesis. Ironically, after his death, the capital of the Hittite Empire was unearthed, and Yale, the university at which Wellhausen had taught, established a Chair of Hittitology for the study of the ancient people.
- The Gergashites are little-known, though archaeologists have discovered a few references to them in ancient documents.
- The Hivites, Perizzites, and Jebusites are unknown outside the pages of the Bible, though some scholars have speculated as to their identity through etymological connections with cognate languages. The Jebusites, as the inhabitants of Jerusalem, are the only ones among these tribes about whom the Bible gives us any additional information.

Verse 12 - Nothing is said here about why these twelve men are to be chosen, though we find out in the next chapter.

Verse 13 - Now the people are finally told what is going to happen to enable them to cross over the rain-swollen waters of the Jordan. Note the use of the names of God in this verse. Yahweh, the Covenant God of Israel, is described as the *adonai* of all the earth - the Lord and Master of all, not a local deity like those worshiped by the Canaanite tribes, who were in fact no gods at all.

#### CROSSING THE RIVER (3:14-17)

The miracle described here in some ways duplicates that of Exodus 14, yet we may note several differences as well.

Verses 14-15 - The crossing of the Jordan occurred at the time of the spring harvest, when the river was at flood tide. The reason for this is that winter is the rainy season in the regions that feed the Jordan from the north, including the wadis that only flow at this time of year; in addition, the snows on the mountains of the Hermon range melt somewhat as the weather grows warmer, feeding the Jordan to the point where it overflows its banks. One who views the Jordan today will see a peaceful stream that appears to be easily fordable at the worst of times, but much of its present calmness is due to damming and irrigation to control the flow of water.

Verse 16 - The description here hints at the means by which God performed the miracle here described. Adam, about eighteen miles north of the ford at Jericho, is located near where the Jordan is fed by tributaries and its flow becomes much more rapid. High cliffs surround the river on both sides at Adam, and the frequency of seismic activity along the rift through which the Jordan flows often causes mudslides that occasionally will cut off the waters of the Jordan completely for a period of time (such events have occurred in 1267, 1909, and 1927, with the last blockage lasting 21 hours). The fact that such events have occurred without direct divine intervention, of course, does not minimize the reality of the miracle that is described in this passage. Even if God chose to use secondary means (and the description of the crossing of the Red Sea makes this doubtful, despite some of the far-fetched explanations some critics have used to undermine the narrative of Exodus 14), the miracle of timing cannot be denied. What other than a miracle could cause the flow to stop precisely when the priests placed their feet into the water and that flow to resume as soon as they stepped from the riverbed?

Verse 17 - The Ark carried by the priests protects the people as they cross, indicating God's care for them. Note that the reference to "dry ground" does not necessarily mean "dry as dust" or "bone-dry," but contrasts the *terra firma* of the land with the muddy bottom of the river; the priests are standing on firm ground as the people cross.

## TWO MEMORIALS (4:1-24)

This chapter continues to give reasons for the miracle of the crossing of the Jordan. These reasons are indicated through the construction of two memorials.

Verses 1-3 - Now we find out why the twelve men were chosen in 3:12. Each is to pick up a large stone and carry it to their first encampment at Gilgal.

Verses 4-8 - Here we are given one of the reasons why this is done. The memorial constructed from the stones is to serve as a reminder to the people of the miracle done by God in bringing them across the Jordan and into the Promised Land. The need for a memorial is not surprising. The people frequently demonstrated during the wilderness wanderings that they had short memories, complaining whenever anything of a daunting nature appeared or whenever they got tired, bored, or fearful, even if God had done wondrous things for them in the very recent past. The people of this generation, however, were not like their fathers. They show no signs of complaining or fear, even when they approach the Jordan with no explanation as to how they are to cross; they do not question the report of the spies; they obey Joshua in ways that their fathers had rarely obeyed Moses. They will now have a visible sign to show their children and grandchildren as they speak of the miracle that God had done and in which they had played a part.

Verse 9 - Joshua also set up a second memorial - this one in the middle of the river, where the priests had stood while the crossing occurred. This would only have been visible when the water level was low, but an obviously man-made monument in the middle of the river would have served as a helpful proof of the event in a way that a pile of stones on the shore would not have done. [Note that an ambiguity in the text has led the NIV to translate verse 9 so that it refers to the memorial on shore, but the article “the” in front of “twelve stones” and the past perfect “had been” are not found in the original, so that other translations, including the KJV, NASB, and ESV, give a better sense of the text.]

Verses 10-11 - The priests remain in the middle of the riverbed until all have crossed. The people then stand on shore to watch what will follow.

Verse 12 - The participation of the Transjordan tribes is again emphasized; they are one with their brothers in the Conquest.

Verse 13 - The words translated “forty thousand” can also mean “forty clans” or “forty troops.” Given that the population of Jericho was probably around two thousand people, the latter is more likely; who would have needed the miraculous collapse of the walls with such an overwhelming military advantage? This reading does not in any way constitute a critical emendation or a way in which scholars seek to undermine the authority of the text. In fact, this translation, whenever the Bible gives us census numbers or sizes of armies, actually is more faithful to the unity of Scripture, as has been demonstrated in a paper by Colin J. Humphreys, *The Number of People in the Exodus from Egypt: Decoding Mathematically the Very Large Numbers in Numbers I and XXVI*.

Verse 14 - This incident earned Joshua the undying respect of the people, which was one of its purposes (3:7). [One might wonder, however, the extent to which this was a mixed blessing, for the way “they had revered Moses” sometimes led them to try to stone him . . . ]

Verse 16-18 - As soon as the priests stepped out of the riverbed, the waters returned to flood stage. Given the amount of water that would have been dammed up at Adam by the [probable] mudslide, the sight must have been an awesome one, though still not as magnificent as the drowning of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. Again, the miracle of timing is evident.

Verse 19 - The date places the crossing of the Jordan in the month Nisan, shortly before the time of the Passover (see 5:10).

Verse 20 - The place of their first encampment in the land is called Gilgal. Several locations in Canaan are identified by that name. The word is similar to the Hebrew word for *circle*, appropriate here not only because of the memorial constructed - a circle of stones would be obviously man-made and would attract attention (such circles were common in the ancient world for places of special religious significance; even Stonehenge in Britain fits this purpose, though it is much larger), unlike a pile of rocks, which would be notable in the middle of the Jordan, but not on land.

Verses 21-22 - The stones are to be a reminder to future generations of what God had done in bringing Israel into the Promised Land.

Verse 23 - The connection with the crossing of the Red Sea is again made explicit.

Verse 24 - A fourth purpose for the miraculous crossing is here seen. What were the four?

- The miracle is intended to strengthen Israel for battle because they will know that God is with them and will be fighting for them.
- The miracle is intended to strengthen Joshua’s position of leadership, earning him respect in the eyes of the people.
- The miracle is intended to be a witness to future generations, reminding them of the reality of God’s presence in their midst and His marvelous deeds on their behalf.
- The miracle is intended to be a witness to the nations, who worship impotent gods who are no gods at all, that the God of Israel is the one true and living God. The anthropomorphism used here (“the hand of the Lord”) indicates His prowess in battle.





## JOSHUA V

### Joshua 5

The preparation for the Conquest continues with covenant renewal ceremonies at the edge of the Promised Land. Not surprisingly, the parallels with the Exodus, and between Joshua and Moses, continue.

#### CIRCUMCISING THE PEOPLE (verses 1-9)

The rite of circumcision had been instituted as the sign of God's covenant relationship with His people, and therefore must be carried out in order to fit them for receiving the covenant promise.

Verse 1 - *Amorite* and *Canaanite* are often general terms, including various tribal peoples and their city-states, but here the Amorites are identified with the inhabitants of the hill country of what was later to become Judah in the days of the Divided Monarchy, while the Canaanites inhabit the rich coastal plain through which passed the trade route to Egypt. The fear of the Canaanite kings is confirmed in the Amarna letters, written in the fourteenth century and thus corresponding to the early date of the Exodus. In these letters, various kings of Canaanite city-states complain to the Egyptian pharaoh about the depredations of the *Habiru*, a term used to describe foreigners, but surely in this case including the Hebrews.

We have seen already that such language is common in the boasts of rulers of the day, but here it serves a different purpose. Circumcision was a debilitating operation (cf. Genesis 34:25), and rendering one's entire army *hors de combat* was hardly sound military strategy. Among other things, this verse explains why the inhabitants of the land didn't take advantage of the weakness of the Israelites and attack. One should also note, however, that fear did not lead to repentance, as in the case of Nineveh in the days of Jonah. Instead, as has been the case so often when God has revealed His power, His enemies become even more determined to oppose Him.

Verses 2-3 - Even though metalworking had been practiced for centuries, stone knives, made of flint or, more likely, obsidian, remained in common use, both because of ceremonial tradition and because they kept a smooth, sharp surface almost indefinitely. The command to "circumcise the Israelites again" does not mean that anyone was circumcised twice, but that the rite of circumcision was reestablished after passing from use for a generation in the wilderness. The place name Gibeath Haaraloth means "hill of the foreskins" - a rather graphic reminder to later generations of another important aspect of their national history.

Circumcision as the mark of Israel's covenant relationship with God had been instituted at the time of Abraham (Genesis 17). It was not unique to the Israelites - many of the civilizations in the Ancient Near East practiced it, though it was most frequently an initiatory rite when a young man reached puberty (one tomb relief in Egypt shows a priest circumcising a young man), or even a ceremony performed prior to marriage. While in other societies it signified entrance into manhood, for Israel it symbolized membership in the covenant community. Anyone under the umbrella of God's blessing was to receive it, even those who were not biologically descendants of Abraham, and

anyone who was not circumcised was to be cut off from the people of God (Genesis 17:12-14). Thus the Israelites must bear the sign of the covenant in order to enjoy the blessings of the covenant.

Verses 4-6 - The practice of circumcision had lapsed during the wilderness wanderings - another indication of the faithlessness of the generation that God had determined to destroy for their unbelief. [Note that the reference to Canaan as “a land flowing with milk and honey,” seen frequently in the Pentateuch, speaks of the agricultural abundance of the land; the milk is probably goats’ milk, while the honey is a reference to the sap of the date palm rather than to honey made by bees. A similar description is found in the writings of the Egyptian Sinuhe, who visited Canaan and spoke of a land plentiful in honey with no limit to the number of cattle.]

Verses 7-8 - The young warriors and their children were thus circumcised. Their helplessness before their enemies during the healing process was another reminder of the fact that their safety and success ultimately depended on God rather than on themselves. Another parallel with the life of Moses appears here in that Moses, prior to leading the people out of Egypt, had to circumcise his own sons (Exodus 4:24-26); Joshua figuratively does the same.

Verse 9 - The name Gilgal comes from the verb *to roll*, and here is connected with the rolling away of the foreskins (cf. also the circle of stones set up after the crossing of the Jordan) and with the rolling away of the “reproach of Egypt.” Commentators have advanced many theories about the significance of this phrase, most predicated on a belief that the Egyptians did not circumcise their children and that the Israelites in captivity would not have done so either, but we know that this was not the case (Exodus 12:43-51 implies that the Israelites themselves were already circumcised when the Passover was instituted, so that only aliens among them needed to undergo the rite, and we have already noted the practice among the Egyptians as a rite of passage into puberty). To me the best explanation is that now the bondage of the Israelites was finally ended because they had entered their own land and could prepare to live as a real nation.

#### OBSERVING THE PASSOVER (verses 10-12)

As we have already seen in Exodus 12, circumcision was a necessary prerequisite for observing the Passover. Only the members of the covenant community could share in the communal meal and benefit from the deliverance it represented. Some commentators have noted that, in the same way that circumcision was a necessary precursor to eating the Passover, baptism is a necessary qualification for partaking of the Lord’s Supper. Neither circumcision nor baptism saves, as Scripture makes abundantly clear, but only those who are part of the covenant community may partake of the communal meal. It is also worth noting that the connection is not only relevant among paedobaptists; a physical sign marks one’s entrance into a physical community, while a spiritual sign - identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection as a result of regeneration - marks one’s entrance into a spiritual community. Both signs suggest death, circumcision as a sort of symbolic sacrifice representing the death of the recipient and baptism as a symbol of death, burial, and resurrection, in preparation for a meal representing a substitutionary covering for sins. Note also that, in the same way that the Israelites were “baptized into Moses” through the crossing of the Red

Sea (I Corinthians 10:2), the crossing of the Jordan was a sort of baptism under Joshua, representing death and rebirth, and a greater Joshua celebrated the Passover with His disciples and connected it to His death and eventual return. Thus we see in these symbols the continuity of the covenant God established with His people and fulfilled in Christ.

Another indication that the days of wandering had come to an end is that the people were able to find food in the bountiful land God had given them. As a result, the manna ceased to fall from the heavens each morning. God's miraculous provision of food, like Jesus' feeding of the five thousand, was never intended to provide permanent sustenance. God now feeds them by secondary means, but the provision is no less His because of it. Note also that the provision of the manna in so many different geographical environments rules out any naturalistic explanations that have been proposed over the years to seek to undermine the miraculous nature of God's provision during the wilderness wanderings.

#### THE CAPTAIN OF THE LORD'S HOST (verses 13-15)

Another parallel to the life of Moses appears here in that the theophany that Joshua experiences is in many ways similar to Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush in Exodus 3-4. Other documents from the ancient world include similar encounters with deity in order to communicate battle strategy, though these usually occur in the form of visions or, more frequently, oracles, and never on the night before the battle.

Verse 13 - While on a reconnaissance mission overlooking the city of Jericho, Joshua encounters an armed man. His question is an obvious one - "Are you friend or foe, an Israelite or a Canaanite?"

Verses 14-15 - Joshua's response, both in falling down in worship and removing his shoes by order of the man (cf. Exodus 3:5-6), indicates the identity of the warrior. It is God Himself, in the figure of the personage often identified as the Angel of the Lord (the fact that He receives worship shows that He is no ordinary angel, but according to Judges 13:18 cf. Isaiah 9:6, He is a pre-incarnate manifestation of the Second Person of the Trinity).

His answer to Joshua's question is significant - He is neither Israelite nor Canaanite, neither under Joshua's command nor his enemy. Instead, He is the real commander, not only of the army of Israel, but of the armies of heaven. The reminder to Joshua that he is not ultimately in charge of the invading army was intended to be both humbling and comforting; the battles would be fought and won by a sword far more powerful than his. We should not ask whether God is on our side; we must instead ask if we are on His (cf. Abraham Lincoln's comment in his Second Inaugural Address that, in the Civil War, "each invokes His aid against the other"). Note, too, that the sovereign role of God as the Commander of the Armies of Israel (and of heaven) will be relevant when we later consider the treatment of the Canaanites that God Himself demanded.

Joshua's question about the man's message also receives a strange answer. Though the strategy outlined in 6:2-5 was undoubtedly given to Joshua at this time, these are not the Lord's first words. Instead, He first requires submissive worship, which is after all far more important than any military strategy.



## JOSHUA VI

### Joshua 6

The fall of Jericho is perhaps the best-known story in the book of Joshua, familiar to every child in Sunday School. As is universally the case, this miracle from the hand of God is explained away through a bewildering variety of far-fetched explanations by those who refuse to believe. There is much for us to learn from the study of this passage, however.

#### THE STRATEGY OF THE CONQUEST

This is a good time to give a brief overview of the strategy behind the Conquest. The takeover of the land was to be carried out in three stages - establishing a beachhead, seizing the high ground, and spreading out into the lowlands in order to prepare the land for eventual settlement. The defeat of Jericho is the first step in that process, followed by the defeat of the Southern Confederation, which inhabited the central mountain range and to whose lands Ai provided the gateway, and finally the defeat of the Northern Confederation, centered in what later was to be called Galilee.

#### THE CITY OF JERICHO

Jericho occupied a strategic location at the entrance to the Promised Land. It not only guarded the fords of the Jordan over which the Israelites had just crossed, but it also guarded the roads leading to the central highlands, which would constitute Phase II of Joshua's battle plan. It was an oasis, and thus a center of trade and a good staging ground for further military activity because of the plentiful supply of food and water to be found there.

Jericho is considered the oldest inhabited city in the world, going back all the way to the ninth millennium BC. It was heavily fortified, with a strong city wall. Evidence indicates that the wall would have had a stone base, with upper layers of mud brick covered with plaster. It would have been anywhere from ten to twenty-five feet thick, with walls sloping slightly outward at the base to discourage any attempts to undermine the foundations or use scaling ladders. The sole city gate probably would have had multiple compartments that guards could use to rain destruction down on any potential invaders (such a gate has been uncovered in the ruins of Megiddo). The size of the city at this time was about seven acres, with a population in the neighborhood of two thousand people.

Archaeological evidence regarding the city of Jericho is ambiguous at best. The earliest excavation of the site, by Carl Watzinger in 1907, concluded that the city had not even been occupied at the time of Joshua. Later, John Garstang did excavations in the 1930s that led him to conclude that he had found the wall destroyed by God in the Conquest - collapsed outward and containing a burn layer corresponding with the description in Joshua 6. Further work by Kathleen Kenyon between 1952 and 1958 caused her to assert that Garstang had misdated the ruins he had discovered and that Watzinger had been right - the city had been uninhabited during the entire era that could be

any dating system be assigned to the Conquest. More recent scholars have revisited Kenyon's findings, however, and have noted that her conclusions were based on an argument from silence - the absence of a type of imported pottery that had been popular during the era in question. The site contains plenty of local pottery, however, some of which has been dated using radiocarbon techniques to the era in question. Though archaeologists continue to date the wall remnants to an earlier era, the burn layer fits the chronology of Joshua (I visited the site in 1999, and the burn level was visible, even from the observation platform). One should also note that the ruins are in deplorable condition due to early neglect and constant erosion.

Israeli archaeologist Yigael Yadin has noted that five options existed for conquering a walled city - scaling the wall with ladders or siege ramps (e.g., the Roman conquest of Masada), tunneling under the wall (the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus), smashing through the wall (medieval battering rams and catapults), starving the city into submission (Sennacherib's army outside Jerusalem in the time of Hezekiah; the siege of Anabaptist-controlled Münster in the sixteenth century), or the use of subterfuge (the Trojan Horse).

#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE BATTLE (verses 1-5)

The Israelites had never encountered a walled city before, and their fighters were inexperienced in assaulting such a city. Neither had they had any opportunities to practice siege tactics.

Verse 1 - We see here a confirmation of the message given by Rahab to the spies. Jericho is in lockdown mode - nobody in, nobody out.

Verse 2 - Some commentators see these verses as a continuation of the message given to Joshua by the Commander of the Lord's Host at the end of chapter 5. Whether this was a continuation of the same conversation or a later message is irrelevant, however. One thing is clear - the Commander was the Lord Himself, not a mere messenger. The defeat of Jericho is described as a *fait accompli* - an event in the past tense.

Verses 3-5 - Here the actual battle strategy is revealed for the first time. Several points should be noted:

- The seven days occupied by the siege of Jericho would have been the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread following the Passover. Thus the battle of Jericho is carried out in the context of worship, and the celebration of the Passover in Israel takes on another level of meaning for the people.
- The Ark of the Covenant is the focus of the battle array. God is the one who will fight and win this battle. Some commentators have even suggested that the fall of Jericho is somewhat incidental to the flow of the narrative - that the real center of attention should be the further progression of the Ark of the Covenant, representing the presence of God, to its final resting place in Jerusalem, which does not occur until the reign of David. [Though the focus on the

Ark is certainly prominent in the historical books, this is probably stretching things a bit too far given the amount of space given to this battle and its aftermath.]

- The ram's horn was the *shofar*, used for calling solemn assemblies and for calling the people to battle. This is both.
- The number of men in Joshua's army would have been sufficient to surround the city, even given legitimate questions about the translation of certain numbers in the biblical historical books. Thus the attack would be from all sides at once, and would be devastating in the absence of a protective city wall.
- What was the purpose of the strategy? Was it to lull the defenders to sleep so that the attack would come as a surprise after days of pointless circling? Was it to maximize tension and fear among the defenders? Was it to increase the faith of the Israelites, who would surely recognize that their efforts had contributed nothing to the victory? Any such speculations have limited value, since the text itself does not explain the rationale for the strategy.

#### PREPARATORY STEPS (verses 6-14)

What we find here is precise obedience to God's instructions - always a good thing. The silence on the part of the besieging army would have been unusual - shouting, whether intimidating racket or threats and abuse, was commonplace among those carrying out a siege (see II Kings 18:19-25). Yet silence itself can be intimidating. For Israel, this was again a reminder that the battle belonged to the Lord, since the only sounds to be heard were those of the ram's horns.

#### THE FALL OF JERICHO (verses 15-21)

Verses 15-16 - The fall of the city also goes precisely according to plan. Once Jericho has been encompassed seven times, the people are told to shout, the trumpets give a long blast, and the walls collapse. Those who persist in seeking secondary causes really have to stretch for this one. Suggested explanations include sympathetic vibrations set up by the pounding of the feet of the Israelite soldiers over seven days or by the noise of the ram's horns and the shouting of the army (somewhat like an operatic soprano breaking a glass with her voice). A more plausible suggestion would be a miraculously-timed earthquake such as the one that probably set off the cutoff of waters in the Jordan riverbed - an aftershock, perhaps.

Verses 17-19 - The city and all its inhabitants are to be "devoted to the Lord" (*herem*). Like the firstfruits of the land and of the womb, the firstfruits of the Conquest are to be given to God as a sign that all is due to Him (cities conquered later are open to plunder by the Israelite troops). Rahab and her family, who have taken sides and identified with Israel and Israel's God, are devoted to the Lord in a different sense - they become part of His Chosen People. For the rest, however, devotion means destruction, with the exception of the precious metals, which are to be placed in the Tabernacle treasury. Note then that, with both people and things, devotion has a double meaning - either destruction of that which is opposed to God and tainted by corruption or consecration to His service. We should also note the foreshadowing used by the author in these verses; anyone who partakes of

what is to be devoted to God brings the same destruction upon himself, his family, and the entire camp of Israel.

Verses 20-21 - Here the narrative continues, and the fall of Jericho actually occurs as God had said it would. The surrounded city is charged from all sides at once by the Israelite foot soldiers, and total devastation results. That the devastation was partial in one other respect than was intended by God - the thievery carried out by Achan - will become the theme of the next chapter. As for the horror of the total extermination of the city and its inhabitants, including women, children, and animals, we will deal with this in Lesson XI, where we consider the issue of the *herem*, its significance, and its justification. Note in passing that the word used here is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek *anathema* (cf. Luke 21:5; Acts 23:14; Romans 9:3; I Corinthians 12:3; 16:22; Galatians 1:8-9).

### THE DEVOTION OF THE CITY (verses 22-27)

The multi-pronged devotion of the city is now carried out.

Verses 22-23 - The two spies are entrusted with the responsibility of bringing Rahab and her family out of Jericho. This had to be done quickly, with the army charging in from all sides. The event here is parallel to earlier divine acts of destruction - in the Flood, Noah and his family are delivered, and in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot and his family escape. Thus judgment is always accompanied by a reminder of the mercy of God. Rahab's family is given a place of safety outside the camp, presumably to allow for a period of purification. One may assume with considerable assurance that at this point Rahab gave up her former occupation.

Verse 24 - Again, complete obedience, at least to all appearances. We find out later, of course, that something slipped through the cracks (7:1). Note that the burning of the city was relatively unusual in the context of the Conquest - only Ai and Hazor, in addition to Jericho, were burned after being defeated by the Israelites. The major reason for this, of course, is that the Israelites intended to inhabit these cities, and thus did not in general wish to destroy them.

Verse 25 - The fact that Rahab was still alive when the book was written gives a clear indication of its date of composition, though some scholars argue that the text should be understood as saying that "[her descendants] live among the Israelites to this day," though this involves importing into the translation of the text certain presuppositions that are not warranted by anything in the text itself.

Verse 26 - The curse on the rebuilding of the city has several purposes; it not only extends the idea that the city is devoted to God to future generations, but leaves the ruins in place as a reminder to those future generations of the miraculous work of God in winning the first battle in the conquest of the Promised Land, i.e., it is another pile of memorial stones. The resettling of the site does not appear to have been the issue here (see Joshua 18:21; Judges 3:13-14; II Samuel 10:5), but rather fortifying it by rebuilding its walls, which had been the object of God's supernatural destructive power. This rebuilding occurs in the time of Ahab (I Kings 16:34), and is given as a startling example of the godlessness of his reign. At that time Hiel of Bethel defies God's decree by



rebuilding the city walls and gates, resulting in the literal fulfillment of the curse pronounced at the time of Joshua - the deaths of his oldest and youngest sons; whether this occurred as a result of human sacrifice or God striking them down in an act of judgment the text does not indicate. Note that the multiple rebuilding efforts could help to explain the paucity of archaeological evidence, since those who rebuilt cities would often use the rubble from previous settlements to reconstruct buildings and new city walls.

Verse 27 - The overwhelming victory God gives to Israel at Jericho firmly establishes Joshua's position as leader of the people, both among the Israelites and among their enemies.



## JOSHUA VII

### Joshua 7

If the covenant relationship between God and His people is central to the message of the book of Joshua and to the fulfillment of God's promises, then violation of that covenant is a serious matter indeed - one involving the entire nation, and not simply the individual responsible for the infraction, as today's chapter illustrates.

#### ACHAN'S SIN AND THE DEFEAT AT AI (verses 1-5)

As the wilderness wanderings indicated, the fulfillment of the promise of the land to be given to Abraham and his descendants was a conditional one for each generation. Those who obeyed received the promise, but those who disobeyed would be kept from enjoying it. Note that the account given here is unique in the annals of the Ancient Near East because rulers of the era have a habit of ignoring defeats completely or, worse yet, describing them as victories. But God's Word is honest about such things.

Verse 1 - Jericho, the firstfruits of the Conquest, was to be devoted entirely to God as a sign that all belonged to Him. Bringing what belonged to God into your midst meant that you, too, were under the ban. Take careful note of the dual emphasis on corporate responsibility here, both in the assertion that "the Israelites acted unfaithfully" and in the care with which Achan is connected to the people as a whole through an unusually long genealogy. If the whole nation is responsible, the whole nation lies under the wrath of God.

Yet how can this be possible? How can it be fair? We must remember that both sin and salvation are based on a variation of this idea - the federal headship principle brought out by Paul in Romans 5. All are guilty of Adam's sin, and all who are in Christ are credited with His obedience. The sovereignty of God is involved here, and all those who have been saved by His grace are beneficiaries of this same idea. Note, too, that the same idea of corporate responsibility appears in I Corinthians 5:6-13, where the church is seen as accountable for the presence of sin in their midst, though one obvious difference is that, unlike in the case of Achan, the sin was clearly known to the members of the congregation.

Verse 2 - Jericho, as we saw last week, guarded both the fords of the Jordan and the entrance to the main route to the central highlands. At the top of that same pass stood the city of Ai, a small military fortification guarding the larger city of Bethel farther up in the mountains. While Jericho is located 850 feet below sea level, Ai is 2500 feet above sea level. Control of Ai would mean control of the pass into the mountainous highlands, and would in essence drive a wedge into the middle of Canaan. An attack into the central mountains was also good strategy because the greatest military advantage of the Canaanites - their chariots - could not operate there. Joshua again sends spies, and their reconnaissance mission is uneventful.

This is another place in the book of Joshua where archaeological evidence is ambiguous at best. Scholars have attempted to identify the tells that correspond to the three cities mentioned in verse 2, but the ruins most often identified with Ai appear to have been uninhabited for about a

millennium in ancient times, including the time of the Conquest. Several explanations exist; some, of course, use the evidence to deny the historicity of the biblical account, while others suggest that ruins (the meaning of the name *Ai*) were manned by an armed guard protecting the pass. Both explanations are unsatisfactory - the first for obvious reasons, while the second simply does not fit the description of the battle in Joshua 8. Because of these problems, some have suggested that the site of Ai simply has not yet been found by archaeologists, despite numerous attempts to excavate other ruins in the region.

Verse 3 - The spies report that the city is lightly defended and advise sending a token force; note again the translation issue with regard to numbers - three *troops* is preferable to three *thousand* here. The apparent ease with which the city can be taken leads Joshua to send out a small detachment without bothering to consult God; after all, He is only needed for big battles or impossible tasks.

Verses 4-5 - The ensuing rout costs the lives of 36 Israelite soldiers, who are chased down the mountainous pass by the men of Ai - a difficult way to retreat. Though the loss of life was relatively small (though it could easily have been a third or more of the attacking force), the psychological impact of this defeat cannot be underestimated. The fear that filled the hearts of the Canaanites according to Rahab's intelligence now possesses the Israelites instead. They have lost confidence - in themselves, and perhaps in Joshua as well, who had been promised invincibility by God (Joshua 1:5), or even in God Himself.

#### JOSHUA'S PRAYER (verses 6-9)

The defeat weighs heavily on Joshua as well, and the prayer he offers up to God is a mixture of faith and despair.

Verse 6 - The actions are those of deep mourning - rending of garments, prostration, ashes on the head (cf. Jonah 3:6). For what are Joshua and the elders grieving - the defeat or the lack of the presence of God in their midst? Undoubtedly the latter; credit must be given, however, in that their sorrow drove them *to* God rather than *away from* Him.

Verse 7 - This cry sounds uncomfortably like the complaints of the Israelites in the wilderness, who constantly wondered why God had taken them out of Egypt to die in the desert, and at Kadesh Barnea had voiced almost the same words in their fear of the giants in the Promised Land (Numbers 14:1-4). Joshua seems to have forgotten that God had been the one to bring them across the Jordan by a miraculous act, and had then miraculously delivered Jericho into their hands. More than anything else, this cry is an indication of what Joshua knew to be the inevitable result if they were to proceed into Canaan without the presence of God in their midst.

Verse 8 - Joshua is also insecure about his leadership. He knows that his position depends entirely on the fact that God is with him; if God is not going to be with him any longer, he has nothing to say to the people, and he knows it.

Verse 9 - He brings up the other side of the morale problem here. If the Israelites have lost their confidence and their air of invincibility, the Canaanites will now cease viewing the invading army as invincible as well. Since the Canaanites seriously outnumber the Israelites, they can crush them easily if they get up sufficient courage to make the attempt. We should note that Joshua's concern for the honor of God here is not in the least manipulative. Instead, we gain insight into the heart and values of the man the Lord had chosen to lead His people.

#### GOD'S RESPONSE (verses 10-15)

Take careful note at this point that Joshua and the elders are mourning, not repenting. They have no idea that sin is behind this defeat. All they know is that God has left them, and they don't know why. God, however, is not arbitrary like the gods of the polytheistic religions of the nations, and Joshua should have realized this.

Verse 10-11 - God would desert them for one reason and one reason only - the violation of the covenant on the part of Israel. Joshua needs to get up off the ground and deal with the sin that has caused the defeat. Note again the corporate language - the repeated use of the word *they*. The sin is serious because devoted things belong to God, and to take them is to rob God and to conceal them is to lie to God.

Verse 12 - To bring devoted things into the camp is to place the entire camp under the ban. Israel can never enjoy the presence of God until what belongs to God is returned to Him, in this case by destroying it.

Verse 13 - This is the second consecration in the book of Joshua; the first was immediately before the crossing of the Jordan (3:5). The solemn act of cleansing that was to be performed by the community required that the community itself be clean. The entire process invites, even requires, self-examination in the face of sin.

Verse 14 - We are not told how the choices among the tribes, clans, and families were made, though the casting of lots or the Urim and Thummim are the most likely. In any case, the gradual narrowing process again encouraged self-examination and served as a spur for the culprit to confess and repent.

Verse 15 - He who violates the ban comes under the ban; the same punishment that was meted out to Jericho and its inhabitants will be given to the guilty party, wiping him and his posterity from the face of the earth.

#### THE CLEANSING OF THE NATION (verses 16-26)

The covenant relationship between God and His people can only be restored when the cause of the breach is removed.

Verses 16-18 - The slow process unerringly narrows down the guilt to Achan. Why did he refuse to confess? Did he still think to hide his guilt? As the agonizing moments passed, as other members of the nation breathed sighs of relief, as tension built among those remaining in the “lottery,” how could he imagine that his sin would not be revealed? Yet he waits, hoping against hope, and only confesses when he is caught.

Verse 19 - Joshua implores him to speak the truth and give up his web of lies and concealment (cf. John 9:24, where the Pharisees use similar language to try to get the man who had been healed of his congenital blindness by Jesus to *deny* the truth). God is praised when people speak the truth and is blasphemed when they lie.

Verse 20 - Achan finally confesses, acknowledging that his sin is against God. Though the people have suffered, the name of God has suffered more, both from the doubt engendered in Israel and the loss of fear among the Canaanite tribes.

Verse 21 - The shekel was a unit of weight, not coinage, and the amounts represented are substantial - about five or six pounds of silver and more than a pound of gold. The Babylonian garment, though costly, was more of a status symbol than anything else (cf. designer clothing today). Several things should be noted here:

- The pattern of seeing, coveting, and taking is similar to that of Eve in Genesis 3:6. Sin of the heart always precedes sin of the hand. The Tenth Commandment, though dealing with the unobservable and intangible, inevitably leads to very visible sins of all kinds.
- The fact that Achan hid the devoted things shows that he knew that his actions were wrong. The issue was not likely to be fear that someone would steal from him what he had stolen, though the idea of honor among thieves is generally a myth. No, he was afraid of being caught because he knew he had sinned.

Verses 22-23 - The justice described in this passage depends on more than the Lord’s identification of the guilty party by whatever means the determination was made. Confession and concrete evidence are also part of the guilty verdict, and surely would have strengthened the resolve of the people to carry out the punishment they were expected to implement. The contraband goods are also spread out before the Lord, though He hardly needed visible evidence of Achan’s guilt.

Verse 24-25 - Achan, the stolen goods, and all his family and possessions are taken to a nearby valley, stoned to death, and then burned - the ban is carried out. Note the following:

- Achan, his family, and his goods were taken outside the camp for judgment so that the camp might not be polluted, either with their sin or with their blood. In light of this, note the significance of the description and implications of the sacrifice of Christ “outside the camp” in Hebrews 13:11-14.
- Stoning was particularly suitable for this offense, since it had resulted in corporate guilt and corporate punishment. The sentence is carried out by the people themselves. They thus

acknowledge the justice of the punishment, and Achan is punished by the injured parties - the entire nation.

- The precious metals were supposed to go into the Tabernacle treasury, but such tainted goods were now not fit for such a purpose, so they too were burned. As far back as Hammurabi's law code, theft of temple property was to be punished by death by burning.
- His possessions, like those of the inhabitants of Jericho, were burned. The list of Achan's possessions indicates a man of considerable wealth; he certainly had not stolen the forbidden goods out of any sense of need, but rather because of greed.
- The death of Achan's children is perhaps the most difficult part of this entire story. Some have sought to excuse it by arguing that they shared his guilt because they could not possibly have been unaware of something buried under the floor of their tent or that severe measures are necessary in time of war, but this is beside the point. In the same way that the Canaanites had to be eliminated so their posterity could not corrupt Israel, so the family of Achan, now sharing the ban under which the Canaanites had been placed, had to be purged from Israel for the same reason. His family would have no inheritance in the land that was the fulfillment of God's covenant promise to Israel.

Verse 26 - There is a play on words here. The repeated use of the word "trouble" is a pun on Achan's name (*Achor* means *trouble*). A burial cairn is raised over Achan and everything pertaining to him, which then gave a new name to the valley. Such cairns exist in great numbers in Israel, but this one had a special purpose; again, it was intended for remembrance.

When the passage speaks of God turning from His fierce anger, we see a picture of the death of the sinner providing propitiation - the removal of wrath. How much better is the propitiation found in Christ, who removed the wrath of God against sinners who deserved death by giving His own life? God turning trouble into hope by His grace is also alluded to in the reference to the Valley of Achor in Hosea 2:15.

Commentators have often noted the similarities between this story and the sin of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. Note the following:

- In both cases, the guilty parties covet both material wealth and the praise of men. Achan could have waited another week and gotten all the plunder he wanted from other cities; Ananias and Sapphira could have kept all or part of the proceeds of the land had they chosen to do so as long as they had been honest about it. Achan desired the status of the Babylonian garment, while Ananias and Sapphira wanted the status that they thought would go with a reputation for generosity.
- In both cases, the offenders think that, by hiding what they have done from men, they can hide it from God also. Such practical atheism is the height of folly, as they soon discovered.
- The punishment in both cases is severe because, being at the beginning of a critical transitional period - the Conquest and the formation of the Church - an example needed to be set for the good of the people and of unbelievers who were observing events.

- In both cases, the punishment is mandated by God, though only in the case of Ananias and Sapphira does God actually carry it out (though the words of Peter are instruments in the process).



## JOSHUA VIII

### Joshua 8

Now that sin in the camp has been dealt with, the people of Israel are ready to resume the Conquest. God is again with them and will lead them to victory as He had promised.

#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR BATTLE (verses 1-8)

As noted last week, Ai was a fortress guarding the road into the central highlands and protecting the city of Bethel and mile and a half away. The fortress was strong, but was likely protected by a relatively small garrison of men who lived there with their families.

Verse 1 - Sin had been cleansed from the nation, so God again assures Joshua of His presence and the coming victory, reasserts the need for courage, and orders him to attack with his entire fighting force. One interesting note here is the contrast between this passage and the defeat of the Midianites by Gideon in Judges 6-7. While in the latter passage God demonstrates His presence with the people and the fact that the victory is His by severely limiting the number of the attacking force, here He teaches the people the importance of His presence by insisting on the involvement of the entire army. What is the difference? In the present case, the attempt to assault Ai with a token force had been a sign, not of the people's faith in God, but of their *lack* of faith - they were trusting themselves rather than the Lord. God thus wants every fighting man in Israel to be a witness to what happens when God directs the battle.

Verse 2 - The *herem* is carried out here somewhat differently. Total destruction of the people and the city is still commanded because God's judgment continues to be decreed upon the sins of the Amorites, but this time the Israelites are permitted to keep the plunder. The firstfruits have been given to God at Jericho, and the incident with Achan has underscored the fact that all belongs to God. Now, the people may keep for themselves the fruit of the land that God had promised to give them. Note that a practical issue was also involved here. As long as they were camped in the fertile Jordan Valley at Gilgal, provisions were plentiful, but the rocky slopes of the mountains would yield little to supply an army, let alone the entire nation. Plunder thus became a means by which God provided for the needs of His people, supplanting the manna and tiding them over until they could establish settled agriculture of their own.

The instruction to set an ambush has also raised questions in the minds of some. Is this not deception? Does it not implicate God in a lie? We should note here that if war itself is justifiable, then sound strategy is also justifiable - espionage, ambushes and feints in warfare are no more lies than the hidden ball trick in baseball or a play-action pass in football. This is not to suggest, however, that "all is fair in love and war." Breaking an oath or treaty in the context of war is clearly immoral, as the sacredness of the promise given to Rahab in chapter 2 and the fulfillment of the treaty made with the Gibeonites (under false pretenses) in chapter 9 indicate. Nor does the context of war justify atrocities, though we will consider the special circumstances of the ban in Lesson XI.

Note, too, that this battle is to be won by sound military strategy rather than by miraculous intervention. God is no less the author of the victory in this case, but the people must understand

that He normally works through secondary causes and that His presence with them does not allow them to become complacent or lazy, thinking that they need do nothing to secure the promises He has given them.

Verses 3-8 - The ambush is set the night before the battle. Note the following:

- Night battles are not unknown in the era. Several documents from the wars of the Egyptians and the Assyrians speak of such battles; even the ambush technique mentioned here appears elsewhere, but nowhere in the annals of ancient warfare is a battle described in such detail in a way that gives credit to the army as well as to the commander.
- The numbers involved in the battles continue to be problematic. A translation of “troop” or even “clan” rather than “thousand” is preferable here.
- A comparison between verses 3 and 12 shows that verse 3 enumerates the entire company, while verse 12 speaks of the contingent sent to set up the ambush.
- The mountainous terrain allowed for a significant body of troops to hide to the west of the city. Meanwhile, the main body of the army advanced up the same ravine through which the defeated force had fled in chapter 7 (a long uphill march), camping in preparation for the battle the next morning.
- Joshua had been worried about the increasing confidence of the Canaanites and its possible consequences, but the strategy used here depends on that confidence for its success. Only a confident commander would leave his fortification defenseless in order to carry out a sortie against an invading army.
- The main force charges, then feints a retreat, duplicating what had happened during the earlier battle. When the forces from the city emerge for pursuit and the expected rout (note that the success of the strategy depended on the defenders being convinced that they were facing the same situation as the one that occurred in the earlier battle), the Israelites draw them into the ravine leading to the Jordan Valley. Meanwhile, the ambush troops enter the undefended city and light a signal fire to indicate that the city is secured. Joshua and his army then turn on the pursuing men of Ai, the men who set the ambush come out of the city to join the battle, and the army of Ai is surrounded - sitting ducks in a narrow ravine.

#### THE DEFEAT OF AI (verses 9-29)

The people obey God’s words to the letter and God keeps His promise - the victory is secured.

Verse 9 - The placement of the ambush between Ai and Bethel is significant. It not only provided a good place of concealment near enough to carry out the surprise attack, but also prevented the larger military contingent from Bethel from entering the fray too soon. Note too that Joshua spends the night in camp with his men; their morale certainly needed a boost after the earlier defeat. The scene is somewhat reminiscent of that prior to the battle of Agincourt in Shakespeare’s *Henry V*.

Verses 10-13 - The Israelites camp on the northern side of Ai, with the ambush being set on the west. The plan is being carried out precisely.

Verses 14-17 - The feint has the desired effect - the entire fighting force of Ai pursues the Israelites, expecting another easy victory. Note that the main body of troops from Bethel also joins the battle and is caught in the trap prepared by Joshua and his men.

Verses 18-19 - The raising of the javelin was a prearranged signal (the word here probably refers to a sickle sword, which was a common weapon in the warfare of the day); scouts would have been on the lookout for it and have transmitted the word to the waiting ambush. The men then rushed out of hiding, took the city, and set a signal fire to alert the main army.

Verses 20-22 - The timing of this operation needed to be precise, from the feint and its effects to the taking of the city to the counterattack of the Israelite troops with support from the ambush force. Note that the fire set in Ai served not only as a signal to Joshua, but also demoralized the men of Ai, who were not only surrounded, but were witnessing the destruction of all they held dear.

Verses 23-25 - The commander of Ai is temporarily spared, but everyone else is slaughtered, both fighting men and their families. The ban here extends to posterity, as it had in the cases of Jericho and Achan. Again, twelve thousand should probably be twelve clans or twelve troops, but in any case it included the entire population of the fortification.

Verse 26 - Joshua's action here, so similar to that of Moses in Exodus 17:8-13, makes the same point - that the victory belongs to the Lord.

Verses 27-28 - This time, as already noted, plunder is permitted. The fire originally set by the ambush force must have been a signal fire because Joshua burns the city after victory is secured, and the taking of plunder would not have been possible had the city been devastated before the battle really started.

Verse 29 - Now the commander of Ai is executed and his body is put on public display. This was not only a means of humiliating the enemy (cf. I Samuel 31:10; II Samuel 21:12) and building the morale of the victorious Israelites, but it also served as a mark of God's curse upon the Canaanites. This visible sign of God's victory was to serve as an example, both to the Israelites and to any Canaanites who might be tempted to oppose themselves to the power of the Lord. The body is then buried because leaving a dead body overnight would pollute the land, which God intended to be holy (Deuteronomy 21:22-23). Note the similarities with the death of Achan, over whose remains a burial cairn was also raised.

#### COVENANT RENEWAL AT EBAL AND GERAZIM (verses 30-35)

This is the second of three covenant renewals in the book of Joshua. This had been commanded by Moses in Deuteronomy 27:1-8, and is here fulfilled to the letter by Joshua.

Verses 30-31 - Note the following about the ritual here enacted:

- With the central highlands now secured, Joshua leads the people between 20 and 30 miles to the north. The two mountains in question overlook the town of Shechem, and nearby is a natural amphitheater where the people could gather and hear the reading of the law (the site still exists today and the acoustic effect is still observable).
- Shechem was already a part of Israelite history (Genesis 33:18; 35:4; 37:12-14) and would take on more significance later. It was the place of Joseph's burial (Joshua 24:32) and the location from which Joshua gave his farewell address (Joshua 24:1), rebel ruler Abimelech (Judges 9) and Solomon's son Rehoboam (I Kings 12:1) were both crowned there, and Jesus conversed there, at the foot of Mount Gerazim, with the Samaritan woman (John 4). The town was also the birthplace of second-century apologist Justin Martyr.
- The requirement that the altar be built of uncut stones was similar to that found in Exodus 20:24-25. Two reasons for this have often been cited. One is that offerings to God are not to be tainted by the product of human effort; while this explanation was clearly in mind in Exodus 20, the instructions for building the altar of sacrifice for the Tabernacle and later the Temple show that this is not to be seen as a general principle. A more likely explanation in this case is that the altar was to be temporary. God would only establish His name permanently in one place; rival shrines would only lead to confusion, competition, and possible idolatry.
- The irony here is that many believe the remains of the altar on Mount Ebal still exist. Archaeologists have found an altar on one of its peaks, and many of its characteristics fit what is described here; even the animal remains suit the requirements of Israelite sacrifices. Like much else from the era, however, the altar dates to the twelfth century BC, and thus is problematic in terms of its correspondence with the events of Joshua.
- Note that the altar is built on Mount Ebal, the Mount of Cursing, rather than on Mount Gerazim, the Mount of Blessing. The reason is obvious - only when the people disobeyed the law were they in need of sacrifice to cover their sins.

Verse 32 - The copying of the Law was necessary in order to preserve and communicate it faithfully. The way in which this was done is narrated in Deuteronomy 27 - stones were covered with plaster, then the law was written on the plaster; presumably this was done on the side of the altar itself. What was written? Certainly not the entire Pentateuch, possibly the Decalogue, but most likely the curses and blessings from Deuteronomy 27:9-28:68.

Verses 33-35 - The amphitheater is used to good effect. Note that the listeners include the entire nation, women and children as well as men, along with the aliens such as Rahab who had joined themselves to the people of God. All are under the covenant and all will be subject to its curses and blessings. Regular public reading of legal pronouncements was essential in an age when few could read and fewer were able to own written documents. The presence of the Ark of the Covenant at the center indicates again the presence of God and the fact that the Law that was being read, along with the blessings and curses that were being pronounced, came from Him. God's covenant may have

been unconditional, but the enjoyment of its blessings by the people of Israel as individuals and as a group at any given time was conditioned upon their obedience.



## JOSHUA IX

### Joshua 9

Having secured the desired wedge into the center of the mountain range that served as the spine of the Promised Land, The Israelites were now prepared to expand their control of the region, first by moving southward, and then by turning to the north. Knowing what was about to happen, the rulers of the southern cities formed an alliance to oppose Israel. In the same way that Rahab chose to submit rather than resist when the Israelites were about to attack Jericho, however, one group of cities sought protection rather than military opposition - the Gibeonite League.

#### THE SOUTHERN ALLIANCE (verses 1-2)

Word of the Israelite victories at Jericho and Ai spread fast throughout the entire Promised Land. Rather than allowing themselves to be picked off one city at a time, the major towns of Canaan formed military alliances - one in the south and one in the north, forcing Joshua and his troops to fight much larger battles against opponents who were both more numerous and better prepared.

A word about the political situation in Canaan might be helpful here. The region was technically an Egyptian province, but the Egyptians had long neglected the area to give attention to more serious threats. As long as Israel stayed in the mountains and didn't threaten the *Via Maris* (the Way of the Sea - the busy trade route along the Mediterranean coast), Egypt could be counted on to ignore their activities. The inhabitants of the cities located in the mountains were clearly aware of this problem. The Amarna letters, written to several pharaohs of Egypt by various Canaanite rulers in the first half of the fourteenth century BC (the period of the Conquest according to the early date of the Exodus), begged the rulers of Egypt for military assistance against invading tribes collectively referred to as the *Habiru*. The term means "displaced peoples," and refers to many others besides the Israelites (the word appears in documents throughout the second millennium BC, including the era when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt) though the Israelites surely were among the *Habiru* in question (in fact, the use of the term *Hebrew* to describe the Israelites is thought by some to be derived from this earlier appellation). Despite promises of aid, help never materialized and the Canaanite kings were left to their own devices. What we witness in this middle section of the book of Joshua indicates the steps they took to protect themselves.

#### THE GIBEONITE DECEPTION (verses 3-6)

The other significant power in the area of Canaan was the Mitanni, Hurrians with whom the Hivites, one of the Canaanite tribes, were associated. The confederation of towns led by Gibeon had been settled by Hivites. The Mitanni kingdom was in decline and on the verge of collapse, however, so their Hivite relations could expect no more help from that quarter than the towns of the Southern Confederation could expect from Egypt. Thus they decide to save themselves by deception, clearly believing that warfare against the God of Israel would be a losing proposition.

Verse 3 - The four towns of the Gibeonite League were located about halfway between Shechem, the site of the covenant renewal at Mounts Ebal and Gerazim, and Jerusalem, the chief city of the Southern Confederation. Thus they knew they were likely to be Israel's next targets. Excavations at the site have shown Gibeon to be a major settlement, far larger than Ai, with a complicated and ingenious water system that would allow it to withstand a lengthy siege (cf. II Samuel 2:13; also note Hezekiah's tunnel in II Chronicles 32:30), and that engaged in a booming wine trade. Nonetheless, they sought peace rather than confrontation, unlike their southern neighbors.

Verses 4-5 - The basic tactic here was to fool the Israelites into thinking that they were not local people, but had come from a great distance and traveled for many days (though given the fact that, according to Deuteronomy 29:5, the clothes and sandals of the Israelites had not worn out during the entire forty years of the wilderness wanderings, the credibility of their ratty-garment trick must have been seriously limited).

Verse 6 - Why would they do this? The obvious answer is that God had ordered the extermination of the Canaanite tribes, and they were willing to go to great lengths to avoid this consequence. Yet their desire to make a treaty reveals another hole in their ruse. Why would Israel even want to make a treaty with a distant tribe of whom they had never heard? Why not just ignore them instead? Perhaps some of this is an appeal to ego - "Your great victories have spread your reputation far and wide, and we have come many miles to seek an alliance with such a great nation as yours" - but it would have taken leaders who were prideful indeed to fall for such a piece of flattery. Note that the reference to Gilgal is unlikely to be the encampment outside Jericho where circumcision had been reinstated and the Passover had been celebrated - why would the Israelites return down a 3000-foot drop after securing the highlands? Because the name means "circle," it could refer to any encampment in that shape.

#### THE TREATY WITH THE GIBEONITES (verses 7-15)

The desire for a treaty should have been an immediate tipoff that something was amiss here, and indeed Joshua and the elders do become suspicious.

Verses 7-8a - Joshua knows fully well that he cannot contract a treaty relationship with any of the Canaanite cities or tribes because God had decreed their destruction. Furthermore, the kind of treaty used in those days involved swearing before the gods of the parties involved, and thus would have drawn the Israelites into acknowledging the very gods whose worship the Lord was determined to wipe off the face of the earth. The Gibeonite response is an indirect one; they could not, of course, afford to admit the truth. Instead, they offer to become Israel's vassals, swearing their allegiance while depending on Israel to protect them from their enemies (which would become necessary in the next chapter). Such voluntary submission is seen in other records from the era, though in those cases the deception used by the Gibeonites is not observable; the cities in question simply presented themselves before the threatening power, offering submission in order to avoid annihilation.



Verses 8b-10 - Joshua continues to pursue the central question and again gets a vague answer that is really no answer at all. Even the acknowledgment of the power of the God of Israel (the word translated *fame* here is really *name*, reflecting the connection between name and character commonplace in the Ancient Near East) is deceptive, not in what it says, but in what it doesn't say; the Gibeonites mention the defeats of Egypt and the Amorites of Transjordan, but say nothing about the victories at Jericho and Ai, since anyone coming from far off wouldn't have known about those very recent events.

Nonetheless, it is this acknowledgment of the Lord that saves them. In the same way that Rahab responded to the news of Israel's victories by casting in her lot with them rather than with her own people, the Gibeonites choose to surrender rather than fight along with the other cities of the Southern Confederation. What the leaders of Gibeon didn't realize, of course, was that bowing before the God of Israel would have saved them without the need for trickery, even as it had saved Rahab and her family from the decreed extermination of the inhabitants of Jericho. That their submission to the God of Israel was genuine, and not merely an effort to save their skins, will become evident later in the story (as well as in the larger biblical narrative).

Verses 11-13 - They perpetuate the fraud, sticking to their story even under repeated questioning. One side note here is that no king of Gibeon is mentioned, but instead the ambassadors speak of elders of the city. Archaeological evidence has shown that the towns of the Hurrians were governed by a council of elders rather than by a king, as were most of the cities of Canaan. This detail confirms the accuracy of the narrative.

Verses 14-15 - For the second time in the Conquest, Joshua fails to consult the Lord. On the basis of very slim evidence indeed - the evidence of their eyes - Joshua and the elders conclude a treaty with the Gibeonites, granting them their lives in exchange for fealty to Israel and Israel's God (presumably the treaty contracted would *not* have made reference to the gods of the Hurrians, since the Gibeonites were now switching their allegiance to Yahweh). The ratification of the treaty by an oath sworn in the name of God is crucial here; such oaths were inviolable.

#### THE RUSE DISCOVERED (verses 16-27)

The thinness of the deception is revealed almost immediately, but little can be done because the treaty has already been made and sworn to.

Verses 16-17 - How the Israelites discovered the deception is not indicated. Three of the four cities in the Gibeonite League have been positively identified by archaeologists, with only the location of Beeroth being uncertain. In any case, the Israelites soon set out toward the towns of the Gibeonite League, possibly with the intent of doing what the folly of their leaders had prevented them from doing originally.

Verses 18-19 - The oath given to the Gibeonites was inviolable, however, even if given under false pretenses. The unquestioned loyalty of the Israelite leaders was to God, in whose name the oath had been sworn, rather than to the deceptive Gibeonites to whom they had sworn it. The people

complained briefly; whether this was because they regretted the loss of potential plunder from the destruction of the cities or whether they feared God's judgment for failing to carry out His commands is unknown. In any case, the oath is kept and the treaty preserved.

Verses 20-21 - The compromise solution reached by Joshua and the elders was to spare the lives of the Gibeonites but reduce them to servitude, employing them to cut wood and carry water for the community and for the maintenance of the sacrifices at the sanctuary. Such tasks were humble and humiliating, but would bring them into contact with the worship of God; this eventually bore good fruit among the Gibeonites; no indication exists that they continued in idolatry or ensnared the Israelites.

Verses 22-23 - Joshua asks a question of the Gibeonite leaders, the answer to which should have been obvious. He then relays the decision of the Israelite elders, in the process emphasizing the wrongness of the deception practiced by the Gibeonite League.

Verses 24-25 - The answer given by the Gibeonites is the anticipated one - they acted out of fear for their lives. But note that the answer also implies a belief in God's power to do what He had promised, and that in committing themselves into the hands of the Israelite leaders, they are also committing themselves into the hands of Israel's God.

Verses 26-27 - The treaty and all its provisions are then implemented. The relationship still existed at the time of the writing of the book, but later dealings between Israel and Gibeon are worth noting:

- The treaty allows Israel to expand its control of the central highlands peacefully, without the need for warfare or conquest. The rest must have been beneficial after the emotional strains associated with the two battles at Ai.
- The treaty immediately brings down the wrath of the Southern Confederation, which mounts an attack on Gibeon to try to force it back into the anti-Israel alliance (Joshua 10:1-4), leading to the great battle that we will consider next week.
- The cities of the Gibeonite League become part of the territory assigned to Benjamin (Joshua 18:25).
- Gibeon becomes one of the Levitical cities (Joshua 21:17), which makes sense given the role of the Gibeonites in caring for the sanctuary.
- Gibeon is the site of a pitched battle between Abner and Joab and their men (II Samuel 2:8-32), and Joab later murders Amasa there (II Samuel 20:8-10).
- Saul's family in particular and Israel in general suffered grave calamity because Saul had broken the treaty with the Gibeonites and tried to exterminate them (II Samuel 21:1-9) despite the fact that he was related to them by blood (I Chronicles 8:29-33), showing the extent of their assimilation by the time of the United Monarchy.
- One of David's mighty men was a Gibeonite (I Chronicles 12:4).
- The Ark of the Covenant was located at Gibeon, among other places, before its final move to Jerusalem (I Chronicles 16:39-42).
- Solomon asked God for wisdom at a shrine established at Gibeon (I Kings 3:1-14).

- Complete assimilation has occurred by the time of the return from the Babylonian Captivity under Nehemiah (Nehemiah 3:7; 7:25), as the Gibeonites are listed among the returning exiles and assist in the construction of the walls of Jerusalem.

Thus the Gibeonites, like Rahab and her family, become part of the nation of Israel, and another indication of the grace of God that reaches out to liars and prostitutes who trust Him rather than seeking safety in the world. At the same time God uses the failure of His people to trust Him rather than their own common sense to accomplish His purposes and do them good despite themselves.



## JOSHUA X

### Joshua 10

This week we will study the defeat of the Southern Confederation. The battles described here were initiated by the pact made between Israel and the Gibeonites. The incident to which we will devote most of our attention is the miracle of Joshua's "Long Day," which has been a source of much controversy and ridicule on the part of those who seek to discredit the Scriptures.

#### THE DEFEAT OF THE SOUTHERN CONFEDERATION AT GIBEON (10:1-15)

The alliance between Israel and the Gibeonites meant trouble for the inhabitants of Canaan, and the kings of the southern city-states are quick to respond.

Verses 1-2 - While Jericho and Ai guarded the pass into the central mountain range, the location of Gibeon was even more strategic. It guarded the main road along the central spine of the country, and also gave access to the Shephelah (hill country) and coastal plain in the west, toward the Mediterranean. Such an important location could not be allowed to pass so easily into Israelite hands, especially since the Israelites had now been strengthened by allying with the warriors of Gibeon.

Verses 3-5 - The king of Jerusalem, the strongest fortified city in the southern part of the central mountains, forms a coalition to move to besiege Gibeon and reestablish control over the city. One note of interest here, though perhaps not of great significance, is that the name of the king of Jerusalem, Adoni-Zedek ("Lord of Righteousness"), is very similar in meaning to that of Melchizedek ("King of Righteousness").

Verses 6-8 - The Gibeonites immediately call upon Joshua to fulfill their treaty relationship and deliver them from the invading armies. If Joshua was of two minds here - wanting the too-clever-by-far Gibeonites to get what they deserved versus holding an important city in the center of the country - we have no indication of it. He is faithful to the treaty he has made despite the trickery by which it was established. We see here that God uses man's sin for His purposes, in that the whole incident gives Joshua both a pretext for encountering the next set of enemies and the opportunity to do so all at once rather than by confronting one enemy at a time. That this is ultimately God's doing is seen in His words of assurance to Joshua before he goes into battle.

Verses 9-10 - The basic strategy here is a surprise attack following an all-night forced march. The besieging forces are not prepared for an assault at dawn, and the coalition forces are routed, pursued by the Israelites back in the direction from which they came.

Verse 11 - God's involvement in the battle is seen in two ways. The first of these is the well-timed and well-placed hailstorm that rains down on the enemies of Israel as they retreat, killing more than the men of Joshua did with their swords.

Verses 12-14 - The second form of divine intervention is the so-called “Long Day” of Joshua, when the sun and moon stand still in order to allow the Israelites to gain the victory they sought. This merits some discussion because of its controversial nature.

In Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee’s play *Inherit the Wind*, a highly fictionalized version of the 1925 Scopes Trial, the playwrights put the following words into the mouth of defense attorney Henry Drummond (i.e., Clarence Darrow):

Now if what you say factually happened - if Joshua halted the sun in the sky - that means the earth stopped spinning on its axis; continents toppled over each other, mountains flew out into space. And the earth, arrested in its orbit, shriveled to a cinder and crashed into the sun. How come they missed *this* tidbit of news?

Lawrence and Lee (and millions of people since) find this a totally convincing argument that gives them license to ridicule the Christian faith. What are we to say about this? Did the sun really stand still in the heavens? Note the following:

- If God is God, He can make His creation act in any way He chooses. To suggest that, were He so foolish as to stop the sun, the earth would self-destruct is to impose a naturalistic worldview on biblical truth.
- This is not the only story in the Bible that involves miraculous behavior by the heavenly bodies. We not only have the reversal of the sundial shadow in II Kings 20:8-11, but also the numerous heavenly disruptions predicted in the book of Revelation. Such things only lack credibility if God is not God.
- Verse 13 seems clearly to indicate an extended day to allow for the completion of the Israelite victory. As to why the extra time would be needed - after all, God is not hampered by time constraints - several suggestions have been made.
  - It was important for the battle to be completed in a single day so the fleeing coalition troops could not reach their fortified cities and regroup for a counterattack. This seems to be the most obvious explanation, and the one that best fits the text.
  - Some commentators have noted that Gibeon is east of Aijalon, meaning that Joshua’s prayer would have been offered at dawn rather than at sunset. This could mean that Joshua was asking that the heat of the day be postponed so his tired troops, who had marched all night, would not be drained in the course of the conflict.
  - The reference to the book of Jasher is of little help, since we don’t know what it was and it hasn’t survived (cf. II Samuel 1:18).
- Others have argued that the text does not require an extended day, but should be understood to mean something else. Note the following:
  - The language of verses 12-13 is poetic, suggesting that a literal reading might not be necessary and justifying the expectation of figures of speech.
  - Some have suggested that the language is better translated as a request for an eclipse, which was considered an evil omen by the superstitious heathen of the Ancient Near East (and many other places as well). This is not possible, however, because solar eclipses can be traced backward in time, and none occurred remotely near the time of the Conquest, whether one takes the early date or the late date for the Exodus.

Furthermore, no eclipse can occur when the sun is in the east and the moon is in the west.

- Another way of interpreting the text that depends on the superstitions of the Canaanites has to do with their belief concerning the relative positions of the sun and the moon. The Canaanites used a lunar calendar, with each month beginning at the new moon. The middle of the month, when the full moon occurred, was considered to be highly significant. If the sun and moon rested on opposite horizons simultaneously on the fourteenth of the month, that meant their calendar was on track - that the month would consist of “full days” - and this was considered a good omen. Furthermore, the words used to describe this alignment are the same ones translated “stood still” and “stopped” in the present text. If, on the other hand, the alignment of sun and moon on opposite horizons occurred on the thirteenth or the fifteenth, it was a bad omen - time was out of joint. In this reading, the battle of Gibeon occurred on the fifteenth of the month, and Joshua was asking the Lord for a celestial sign that he knew would confound and demoralize his enemies. Like the bad omens in the heavens that appear repeatedly in Shakespeare’s plays, this would throw the enemy into confusion and seriously discourage them in the course of the battle. Is this a plausible reading of the text? Perhaps, but the claim of uniqueness in verse 14 would seem to rule out a phenomenon that would have been fairly commonplace.
- The claim to uniqueness certainly suggests an unusual celestial occurrence, but note that the rationale given for the claim is that “the Lord listened to a man.” Certainly God often listens to the prayers of His people in Scripture. Is this mere hyperbole? Some have speculated that the unique feature here is that Joshua, rather than God, initiated the idea for the kind of miracle that would be performed, but didn’t Hezekiah, in choosing to have the shadow of the sundial move backwards, Peter asking to walk on the water, and various others do the same? Minimizing the unusual nature of what occurred here does no favors to the greatness of the God of Israel.

Verse 15 - The remainder of the chapter is written in flashback form, since the return to base camp at Gilgal didn’t occur until the pacification of the south had been completed (verse 43).

#### THE EXECUTION OF THE LEADERS OF THE CONFEDERATION (10:16-27)

The execution of the kings of the coalition is similar to that carried out against the king of Ai in Joshua 8:29, and the actions were taken for the same reasons. A few brief notes:

Verse 24 - Putting one’s feet on the neck of a conquered foe was common symbolism in the Ancient Near East, as archaeological remains from places like Egypt and Assyria attest. The Bible also alludes to it elsewhere (cf. Genesis 49:8; Psalm 110:1).

Verse 25 - Joshua gives the same message to the people that the Lord had repeatedly communicated to him.

Verse 27 - Another memorial is established to commemorate the power of God - one that is still in place at the time of the writing of the book.

#### THE COMPLETION OF THE CONQUEST IN THE SOUTH (10:28-43)

The entire southern part of Canaan is subdued as the Conquest continues. In city after city, God gives victory and the Canaanites are exterminated - the ban is carried out as God intended it to be. The central mountains, the Shephelah, and the Negev are all brought under Israelite control. When the south has been fully pacified, Joshua and his army return to the camp at Gilgal near Shechem.



## JOSHUA XI

### Joshua 11-12

This week we arrive at the end of the description of the Conquest of Canaan. Most of these chapters are taken up with brief summaries and lists of cities conquered and kings defeated, and are intended to show the fulfillment of the promise that God had given to His people as far back as the time of Abraham. Aside from brief comments on the lists given in these chapters, we will devote most of our attention to the question that has, perhaps more than any other, been used to justify rejection of the God of Israel and the Christian faith as a whole - the extermination of the Canaanites.

#### THE DEFEAT OF THE NORTHERN CONFEDERATION (11:1-11)

The path of the Conquest leads Israel into increasingly more difficult battles. First they must defeat individual city-states, then an armed coalition. Finally, in order to complete the work that God has given them to do, they must meet in battle the much stronger Northern Confederation, centered around the city of Hazor.

Verses 1-3 - Hazor, located about twenty miles north of the Sea of Galilee, was the biggest walled city in Canaan; it covered about two hundred acres (Jericho, if you recall, was about seven acres). The coalition put together by the king of Hazor extended from the region later called Galilee (Kinnereth) to the foot of Mount Hermon in the north to the Jordan valley in the east (the Arabah) to Dor on the Mediterranean coast on the west and included representatives from almost every tribal group in Canaan.

Verses 4-5 - These city-states, unlike those in the south, possessed war chariots, fast and maneuverable and carrying an archer or spearman in addition to the driver; these would have been useless for fighting in the central mountains, but were ideal for open spaces like the Plain of Jezreel near Megiddo. The coalition gathered at the Waters of Merom - not an ideal location for fighting with chariots, but a good place to plan and provision an army near a dependable water supply.

Verse 6 - God again assures the Israelites of victory and encourages them to enter the battle with confidence. The command to hamstring the horses and burn the chariots could mean one of three things. In the first place, doing so would deprive their enemies of future use of their most potent weapons. Secondly, the Israelites had no experience with chariot fighting, so such advanced weaponry would have been useless to them. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, in the same way that God did not want them to depend on clever military strategy, He also did not want them to depend on high-tech weapons, but on His power to bring them victory (Deuteronomy 17:16; Psalm 20:7).

Verses 7-9 - The plan was again a surprise attack. Much like the strategy of Lord Nelson at Trafalgar, Joshua trapped his enemies in a place where they had little room to maneuver, destroying them before they ever had the opportunity to deploy their most deadly weapons. Again, he carries out God's command to the letter.

Verses 10-11 - Hazor, the center of the Northern Confederation, is given special treatment. It, along with Jericho and Ai, are the only cities said to be burned during the Conquest (God for the most part intended the Israelites to inhabit the cities they conquered - cf. Deuteronomy 6:10-11). Note that the ruins of Hazor show burn levels corresponding to both early and late dates of the Exodus.

#### SUMMARIZING THE CONQUEST (11:12-12:24)

The next one and a half chapters summarize the Conquest, emphasizing Joshua's obedience to the commands given by God to Moses and him as well. A few brief comments should be noted:

11:16-17 - The totality of the Conquest must be understood to mean control and domination rather than the defeat and occupation of every city. We know from the early portions of Judges that not all the Canaanites were driven out. Key cities that were not occupied by the Israelites were Jerusalem (under Jebusite rule until the time of David), Gezer, Megiddo, and what were later to become the five cities of the Philistines - Gath, Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron.

11:18 - The Conquest is here said to have taken "a long time"; the best estimate is derived from Joshua 14:10, where Caleb speaks of the end of the Conquest as occurring forty-five years after the spy mission from Kadesh Barnea, which took place thirty-eight years before the end of the wilderness wanderings. Thus the Conquest took seven years to complete.

11:19-20 - The refusal of all but the Gibeonites to make peace is here ascribed to God hardening the hearts of the Canaanites in order to visit His judgment upon them. He did much the same with Pharaoh at the time of the Exodus.

11:21-22 - The sons of Anak had been one of the major arguments used by the spies who had spoken out against invading the land at Kadesh Barnea (Numbers 13:28). These giants are now defeated by Joshua (archaeologists have discovered two female skeletons in the region described here that are more than seven feet tall), surviving only in the cities of the Philistines. Goliath, of course, was from Gath.

11:23 - God gives His people rest after seven years of hard fighting.

Chapter 12 then lists the conquered kings, including the two defeated in the time of Moses on the other side of the Jordan. A total of thirty-one kings defeated by Joshua are listed. Note that many of these are not mentioned in earlier chapters, indicating that the descriptions of battles and victories are selective. We should also note that, while all of these kings were defeated, not all of their cities were conquered; some remained in Canaanite hands (cf. 13:1-7).

#### THE EXTERMINATION OF THE CANAANITES

We now must turn to an examination of *herem* - the ban under which God placed the inhabitants of Canaan. The seriousness of this issue is seen, not only in the criticism it has brought

from enemies of Christianity, but also from what it has produced in some who profess to follow the faith. After all, we not only must deal with people who view the God of the Old Testament as vengeful and violent and who reject Christianity as a whole because of stories like these, but we must also admit that the Canaanite genocide has been used as a justification for horrifying actions like the murders of thousands of Jews and Muslims during the Crusades. Is not genocide indisputably *evil*? Note the following:

- Some try to minimize the problem by such expedients as arguing that the descriptions in these chapters are exercises in hyperbole - the Lord didn't *really* demand the death of every man, woman, and child, nor did Joshua carry it out. To say this is to refuse to take the Scriptures seriously and grapple with a truth that tells us something important about God.
- Others argue that this simply reflects the mores of a primitive culture. Mesha king of Moab did the same when he attacked the Israelite city of Nebo in the ninth century BC in the name of his god Chemosh. But this again fails to take seriously the character of God and His commands to His people.
- God is God, and can do what He chooses with His creatures (Romans 9:14-24). This does not, of course, mean that He is arbitrary. He is completely just.
- God has the right to judge sin, and the Canaanites by all accounts were corrupt beyond measure. If God could righteously destroy most of the world's population in the Flood and incinerate the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of the perversions in which they were engaged, He certainly could visit the same judgment on the Canaanites, whose religious practices included deplorable cult prostitution and human sacrifice (cf. Genesis 9:24-27). What is amazing is not that God chose to exterminate the Canaanites, but that He has not chosen to exterminate modern civilizations that engage openly in practices that are far worse. The only thing that makes the extermination of the Conquest stand out is because God chose to use human instruments to carry it out, unlike what He did in the other examples given above.
- Deuteronomy 7:1-6 restricts this treatment to the Canaanite tribes. Israel was never commanded to treat other civilizations in this way, and the example of the Conquest certainly cannot be used to justify the Crusades, the Holocaust, or anything else to which it has been so inappropriately applied.
- The elimination of the Canaanites was an act of grace on God's part. He did it to protect His people from idolatry. The reality of this threat can be seen by looking at the consequences that flowed from the incomplete way in which the extermination was carried out. Not only do we see the cycles of apostasy, repentance, and deliverance in Judges, but we also can see the same principle working its way out in the monarchy period, whether as a result of Solomon's many wives or the introduction of Baal worship by Jezebel.
- In our individualistic age, the concept of communal responsibility is foreign to us. In the ancient world, however, everyone understood that the actions of one affected all (cf. the defeat of the Israelites at the first battle of Ai). The destruction of an entire civilization would not have been thought strange in the least.

- We must remember that escape from judgment was always available. Both Rahab and the Gibeonites chose to align themselves with the God of Israel and were ultimately incorporated into His covenant people.
- In the same way that deliverance was available to any Canaanite who chose to follow the true God, so was judgment the lot of any Israelite who turned to the perversions that brought on God's judgment. We see this not only in the case of Achan, but also in the ultimate defeats and captivities experienced by the disobedient Israelites.

## JOSHUA XII

### Joshua 13-22

Almost half of the book of Joshua deals with the division of the land after the Conquest. The central idea here is God's sovereignty over the land He has given His people; it is to be divided according to His will rather than according to their strength or choice, and it is to be used according to His command. Our approach today will be to give an overview, stopping at appropriate places for brief comments.

#### INCOMPLETE CONQUEST (13:1-7)

The heart of the Promised Land was now under Israelite control, but mopping-up operations remained. The extent to which this task remained uncompleted became a major source of temptation in the period of the judges and beyond, as the Canaanites in their midst often drew the Israelites into idolatry.

Verse 1 - Joshua was getting old by this time; if Caleb was 85 (Joshua 14:10), Joshua was probably about the same age.

Verses 2-5 - The largest unoccupied territories were along the coast and in the far north. The cities that would later be occupied by the Philistines (the reference here is an anachronism such as occasionally occur in the Pentateuch) along the southern Mediterranean coast had not been conquered, nor the lands along the Mediterranean in the north that would be the territory of the Phoenicians. The Lebanon Valley in the north also had not been secured.

Verses 6-7 - God here tells Joshua to distribute this land to the tribes anyway. Several reasons could be given for this. The first is that God had promised them this land; the fact that it was now possessed by pagan tribes was irrelevant. Secondly, if the Israelites really trusted God, they would complete the task that He had given them of conquering the land. Their failure to pursue this task becomes a cause for criticism in Judges 1. In any case, the completion of the Conquest is now the responsibility of the individual tribes rather than the army of the nation.

#### DIVISION OF THE LAND IN TRANSJORDAN (13:8-33)

Verses 8-13 - This land had already been assigned to Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh by Moses at their request. Reuben received land in the south, Gad in the center (what came to be called Gilead), and Manasseh in the north. Here, too, the Conquest was incomplete.

Verses 14,33 - The Levites were to receive no land, but were to be supported by the tithes of the people. We are told that the Lord was their inheritance rather than land that He provided.

Verses 15-23 - The land given to Reuben included former Midianite and Moabite territory. Here Sihon king of the Amorites had been defeated, the incident with Balaam had occurred, and Moses had viewed the Promised Land from the top of Mount Nebo.

Verses 24-28 - The tribe of Gad was given part of Sihon's land along with territory previously belonging to the Ammonites, extending northward to the southern end of the Sea of Galilee.

Verses 29-31 - The descendants of Manasseh's oldest son Makir received the land in Transjordan belonging to Og king of Bashan, north and east of the Sea of Galilee.

#### ALLOTMENTS FOR THE MAJOR TRIBES (14:1-17:18)

Perhaps here a comment is appropriate regarding the connection of the distribution of the land with the patriarchal blessings in Genesis 48-49. In a land where primogeniture was practiced, the oldest son would receive a double portion of the inheritance. Under normal circumstances, that lot would have fallen to Reuben. But Reuben disqualified himself by sleeping with his father's concubine Bilhah (Genesis 35:22), and Simeon and Levi did the same by their wicked deception and murder of the men of Shechem (Genesis 34). Reuben thus loses the place of prominence that would have been his (Genesis 49:4), and Simeon and Levi are condemned to be scattered, possessing no inheritance among the nation of Israel (Genesis 49:7). This leaves Judah in the place of prominence. This involves not only the largest plot of land in Canaan, but also the monarchy (Genesis 49:10).

The question of primogeniture, however, is further complicated by the fact that Joseph, the firstborn of Jacob's favorite wife Rachel, receives the double portion of the inheritance rather than Judah. Both of his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, become fathers of tribes, though the younger, as is so often the case as God displays the priority of His sovereign choice over human tradition, takes precedence over the older. The confusion with regard to primacy that results leads to continual conflict between Judah and Ephraim. While Joshua, an Ephraimite, and Caleb, of the tribe of Judah, show no animosity or rivalry of any kind, the generations that follow never seem to get over the battle for supremacy. Many of the internecine conflicts in the book of Judges can be traced back to this rivalry, along with disputes during the reign of David and, ultimately, the division of the kingdom between a king from Judah (Rehoboam) and one from Ephraim (Jeroboam).

14:1-2 - Joshua and Eleazar, the son of Aaron and now the high priest, supervise the distribution of the land, which is determined by the casting of lots. The land belongs to God, and He will give it out as He chooses.

14:8-15 - Caleb asks Joshua to fulfill the promise made to him by the Lord through Moses in Deuteronomy 1:36, and Joshua happily agrees. The faith of Caleb is apparent here. Unlike the other spies, who had feared the sons of Anak, Caleb had, long years ago, been confident that God could defeat them. That confidence remained, and he undertook and carried out the task of subduing the remaining cities around Hebron. He did not use his advanced years as an excuse for inactivity, but

pursued God's fight in his old age. He wanted nothing to do with a soft retirement, but chose to take on the enemy at its strongest point, confident that God would defeat them through him.

15:1-12 - The boundaries of the tribal territories are defined in great detail, evidence that the book of Joshua was preserved as a legal record to settle future disputes among the tribes. Judah's territory was by far the largest, stretching from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean, including the future Philistine cities, and from Kadesh Barnea to Jerusalem; the future capital was on the boundary between Judah and Benjamin.

15:13-19 - Caleb continues to subdue the cities in his domain. Debir was a particular challenge because it was heavily fortified, and Caleb offers his daughter as a reward to whomever can take the city. His nephew Othniel, who would become the first judge of Israel, steps forward and wins the prize. The daughter in question, Acsah, notes that her dowry is wanting in one important commodity - water - and Caleb readily compensates for the oversight.

It is interesting to note that various commentators put very different twists on this little story. While one writer accuses Caleb of sharp dealing with his nephew/son-in-law, Calvin accuses Acsah of greed because she is not satisfied with the inheritance her father has given her. In my opinion, neither reading is correct; Acsah's request is perfectly reasonable, as is Caleb's irenic response.

15:63 - Not all the men of Judah were like Caleb; both Jerusalem and the Philistine cities remained unconquered at the time of the writing of the book.

16:1-10 - Ephraim received prime territory from Jericho up into the central mountain range, including important locations like Bethel and Shiloh. The major shortcoming of the Ephraimites was their failure to subdue Gezer.

17:3-4 - Zelophehad's daughters had requested and been granted an inheritance from their father, who had no sons yet was faithful to God (Numbers 27:1-7; 36:1-12), and had promised to keep that inheritance within the tribe of Manasseh. Here Joshua fulfills that promise and grants them land among the territories of their tribe.

17:5-13 - Manasseh was given land north of the territory of Ephraim, including the key cities of Beth Shan and Megiddo, but they failed to subdue and occupy these cities. They finally settled for subjecting the Canaanites to forced labor, but this did not keep their baleful influence from affecting the Israelites.

17:14-18 - The jealousy of the Joseph tribes here shows its ugly head (cf. Judges 12:1). They are dissatisfied with their allotment, despite the fact that it is among the best land in Canaan. Joshua's response is perfectly reasonable - if you want more land, conquer what you've already been given! Their complaint about iron chariots is seen for the phony excuse it is when one considers the victory Barak won over those same chariots in Judges 4-5. Again, the power of God is evident, as a sudden rainstorm bogged the chariots down in the mud and made them worse than useless. The lack of faith of the Joseph tribes stands out in stark contrast to the faith of Caleb in chapter 14.

## DIVISION OF THE REMAINDER OF THE LAND (18:1-19:51)

18:1-3 - At this point seven tribes had not yet received their tribal allotments, but they seemed in no great hurry to disperse throughout the land and claim what was theirs.

18:4-7 - The land that remains is to be surveyed, divided evenly, and distributed by lot (how this was done, whether by using the Urim and Thummim or in some other way, we have no way of knowing). Judah, the Joseph tribes, Reuben and Gad have already gotten their share, and of course the tribe of Levi is to get no land.

18:8-10 - The main encampment has now been moved to Shiloh, in the territory of Ephraim. This will serve as the location of the Tabernacle and the central shrine for most of the next four hundred years until David moves the Ark to Jerusalem and the Temple is built by Solomon.

18:11-28 - Benjamin received the land between that of Judah and that of Ephraim, thus serving as a sort of buffer between the two rivals for power. When the final rift between the two occurs, Benjamin sides with Judah. Jerusalem is on Benjamin's southern border.

19:1-9 - Jacob's prophecy that Simeon should be dispersed is here fulfilled in that the tribe receives only scattered cities in the territory of Judah. The reason given here is that Judah had more land than it needed, but the result is that Simeon is assimilated and soon loses its tribal identity.

19:10-16 - Zebulun, again according to Jacob's prophecy (Genesis 49:13), was allotted land along the seacoast in the north.

19:17-23 - Issachar receives prime agricultural land in the fertile Jezreel Valley.

19:24-31 - Asher receives coastal land, including the region around Mount Carmel and the prominent cities of Tyre and Sidon, later controlled by the Phoenicians.

19:32-39 - Naphtali got land near the Sea of Galilee, including Beth Shemesh and what was left of Hazor.

19:40-48 - Dan's allotment is interesting because their land borders on that eventually occupied by the Philistines. The fact that they can do little against the formidable Sea Peoples is seen in the Samson stories in Judges (Samson was born in Zorah and married a woman from Timnath). The migration alluded to in verse 47 is actually described in the deplorable story in Judges 18.

19:49-50 - In the same way that the land given to Caleb begins the narrative of the distribution of the land, so the description of the land given to Joshua ends it. Like Caleb, Joshua did not seek the easy way out; the land he took for his own means "leftover."



## THE CITIES OF REFUGE (20:1-9)

Provisions for the cities of refuge had already been made in the law given by Moses (Numbers 35:6-34; Deuteronomy 19:1-13). The purpose of these cities, which have no parallel in other ancient cultures and go far beyond any laws of sanctuary, was to distinguish between willful murder and accidental death. Someone who inadvertently caused the death of another could flee to a city of refuge, where he would face trial to determine if the death had really been an accident. If it had not been accidental, he was subject to the full penalty of the law and his own death would result. If it had indeed been an accident, he must remain in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest, which apparently involved a period of amnesty. Note that this legal provision demonstrates the sanctity of human life in God's eyes in two ways: it both preserves the life of one who takes life accidentally and makes the penalty for accidental death sufficiently severe to discourage carelessness. If you risked separation from your family for a decade or more, you would make very sure that the head of your axe was fastened on tightly before you started chopping a tree when your neighbor was in range. Note, too, that the cities were chosen for easy access by any Israelite - six cities, three on each side of the Jordan, in the north, the center, and the south - and that this rule of justice applied to resident aliens as well as to the people of Israel.

## LEVITICAL CITIES (21:1-45)

The scattering of the sons of Levi was very different from the scattering of the sons of Reuben; some have suggested that the zeal of the Levites for the honor of God in Exodus 32:25-29 is the reason for this. A total of forty-eight towns were given to the Levites. Because they were devoted to the service of God, they were to receive their main support through tithes and offerings. But this scattering had another effect; it meant that every part of the Promised Land was blessed with the presence of God's servants, who were supposed to be living examples of selfless commitment to the work of the Lord. Note that many of the towns were important ones, and that all of the cities of refuge were assigned to the Levites.

## THE RETURN OF THE TRANSJORDAN TRIBES (22:1-9)

The Transjordan tribes had fulfilled their promise to help their brothers conquer the Promised Land, and now it was time for them to return home. Many had not seen their wives and families for seven years, and understandably were anxious to return. Joshua exhorts them always to remember the name of the Lord and sends them home with his blessing - along with a considerable amount of plunder, which they are to divide with those they left behind to care for the women and children.

## THE RIVAL ALTAR (22:10-34)

A simple misunderstanding here had the potential to turn into civil war, but the handling of the crisis teaches some important lessons.

Verses 10-12 - Once they cross the Jordan, the returning tribes build a large altar in Gilead. They intend no harm, but their brethren see a threat serious enough to go to war. Why would such an action lead to war? Rival shrines had been forbidden by God (Leviticus 17:8-9), especially if they involved the worship of strange gods (Deuteronomy 13:12-15). The reality of the danger can easily be seen when one considers the rival shrines set up by Jeroboam at Bethel and Dan to keep the people of the Northern Kingdom from going to worship in Jerusalem; these golden calves are throughout the books of history seen as the foundational sin of the rulers of the North.

Verses 13-14 - While the zeal for the Lord shown by the tribes in Canaan is admirable - after all, they were war-weary and wanted peace every bit as much as the Transjordan tribes - so is their restraint, in that they refuse to act precipitately without examining the situation first. Representatives of all the Canaan tribes are sent as part of the embassy, which is headed by Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the high priest, who has already established a reputation for zeal for the glory of God (Numbers 25:6-13).

Verses 15-16 - The ambassadors state their case clearly - they are concerned that the Transjordan tribes have broken God's explicit command by setting up a rival shrine.

Verses 17-18 - The punishment of the whole nation for the sin of false worship in Numbers 25 makes them fear the wrath of God on all for the sins of some, and therefore they are determined to address the issue before God is forced to do so.

Verses 19-20 - The fact that their hearts are in the right place can be seen in their open invitation to the Transjordan tribes to share the allotments they have just received on the western side of the Jordan. They are greedy for the glory of God, not for the land He has given them.

Verses 21-23 - The Transjordan tribes are horrified at the thought that they would turn away from God in such a way, even to the extent of calling down God's wrath on them should they do so.

Verses 24-29 - They now clarify their motives - the altar never was intended to be for sacrifices, but was a memorial like so many others that had already been erected by God's people. In this case, it was intended to bear witness to the fact that the Transjordan tribes were one with the tribes in Canaan, not only as a nation, but also as true worshipers of God.

Verses 30-34 - Phinehas and the others are satisfied with this explanation and praise God, not only because war has been averted, but also because God again has demonstrated His presence among His people.

## JOSHUA XIII

Joshua 23-24

Today we complete our study of the book of Joshua. The final two chapters of the book deal with the reaffirmation of the covenant between God and His people, and are in some ways so similar that some scholars have argued that they constitute two descriptions of the same event. The text allows for no such interpretation, however. It is better to view the two chapters, each of which is complete and self-contained, as describing two different incidents - the final farewell of Joshua to the leaders of the people in chapter 23 and the covenant renewal involving the nation as a whole in chapter 24.

### JOSHUA'S FAREWELL SERMON (23:1-16)

Joshua here gathers the leaders of the people shortly before his death and exhorts them, much as Moses did in the book of Deuteronomy and as Paul did when he met with the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:17-37.

Verse 1 - Approximately twenty-five years pass between the end of the Conquest and the death of Joshua (Caleb was 85 when the Conquest ended and Joshua was 110 when he died, and the two must have been about the same age). Note that the use of the term "rest" here is relative, since the Canaanites were not entirely eradicated, and that the word becomes the basis for some wordplay and application to the work of Christ by the author of Hebrews (Hebrews 4:8-11).

Verse 2 - The various levels of leadership among the people are here summoned to hear Joshua's farewell.

Verses 3-4 - This brief summary of God's gracious provision for His people in fulfilling His promises is expanded in the next chapter when Joshua addresses the people as a whole. The events mentioned correspond to the major divisions of this book - the Conquest of the Land and the Division of the Land. God's role is paramount - He is the one who fought for them, and He is the one who apportioned the land. The description of the land as reaching from the Jordan to the Mediterranean indicates that this chapter, like the following one, relates to the nine and a half tribes who settled west of the Jordan; the Transjordan tribes had long ago recrossed the river to possess their inheritance.

Verse 5 - The promise of victory still holds; if Israel pursues its God-given task, God will give them victory. We know from subsequent history, of course, that they fail to do so, with dire consequences (Judges 2:1-3).

Verse 6 - The exhortation to be strong echoes the call Joshua himself had received in the opening chapter of the book. The need for this on the part of God's people never goes away; perseverance is always necessary. Note that following God's law is the essence of perseverance.

Verses 7-8 - The main concern of Joshua here, as in the following chapter, is apostasy. The temptation to follow the gods of the Canaanites - to engage in religious syncretism - proves irresistible to the Israelites. Note that the statement about the faithfulness of the people is general rather than universal, as the next chapter will indicate.

Verses 9-11 - The presence of God and the power of God have been pervasive themes throughout the book, and are reiterated here. God has fulfilled His promise, and the people must be faithful in return. It is worth noting at this point that the exhortation is to love God rather than the more familiar command to fear Him. The two are by no means incompatible, and both are appropriate responses to God's grace and provision.

Verse 12 - Alliance and intermarriage are both seen here as threats to religious purity, since both involved invoking the names of pagan deities and opening oneself up to their worship. We find a similar exhortation in II Corinthians 6:14-18. Though these verses are most frequently understood as prohibiting the marriage of believers to unbelievers, we should note that Paul says nothing about marriage in the passage; thus the prohibition must be understood more broadly, in a way that corresponds more fully to what we find here in the words of Joshua.

Verse 13 - The threat, of course, is one that God carries out, both in the book of Judges and in the Babylonian Captivity. The imagery here speaks of capture, enslavement, and blindness prior to ultimate ejection from the land.

Verses 14-16 - Joshua, in speaking of his own coming death, acknowledges that death is universal, harking back to the curse pronounced by God after the Fall (cf. Romans 5:12). God is faithful, and His covenant promises are unconditional. But the enjoyment of those promises by any particular generation is conditioned upon obedience, as future generations will ultimately discover.

#### COVENANT RENEWAL AT SHECHEM (24:1-27)

While the location of the gathering in the previous chapter is not indicated, Joshua now tells the leaders of the people to summon the entire nation for the covenant renewal ceremony at Shechem. We have already seen in Joshua 8 that the valley between Ebal and Gerazim was suitable for such a gathering. The components of the covenant renewal ceremony correspond to the Hittite Treaty Formula in use throughout the Middle East at this time. The suzerainty treaty included a summary of the relationships between the signatories, a review of the treaty stipulations, an oath to keep the treaty, blessings and curses for those who keep or break it, the calling to witness of the respective gods of the signatories, provisions for the preservation and perpetuation of the treaty documents, and succession arrangements in the event of the deaths of the principals.

Verses 1-4 - The covenant renewal ceremony begins with a recitation of the history of the relationship between God and Israel. Joshua notes that their forefathers had been idolaters, every bit as worthy of destruction as the Canaanites whom their descendants had conquered by God's power (the River here is the Euphrates). God's electing grace continues to be emphasized in the

reference to the choice of Isaac over Ishmael and of Jacob over Esau. The choice of the younger over the elder emphasizes God's sovereignty. Note, however, that God's choice of Jacob entailed suffering, while Esau and his descendants were given land, albeit outside the Land of Promise, without a long period of enslavement (Seir is the barren region south of the Dead Sea that for many years was Edomite territory).

Verses 5-7 - These verses describe the Exodus under the leadership of Moses and Aaron, but the frequent use of the first-person singular pronoun emphasizes that all that happened was the work of God. Some have remarked at the peculiarity of the use of second-person pronouns here; though a few senior citizens like Joshua and Caleb would still be alive who were eyewitnesses of the Exodus, the language here should be understood as corporate - the people to whom Joshua was speaking were, as a group, the beneficiaries of what God had done.

Verses 8-10 - Here the subject is the conquest of the Amorite region east of the Jordan. Though the focus here is on the defeat of the Moabites during the time of Balak and Balaam (Numbers 22-25), God also gave them victory over the Amorite kings Sihon and Og (Numbers 21).

Verse 11 - The summary of the Conquest is a brief one, since these events would have been familiar to Joshua's listeners. God's sovereign power is here seen in giving victory; the parting of the Jordan and the collapse of the walls of Jericho are not even mentioned.

Verse 12 - Here the Amorite kings are included, albeit out of chronological order. The reference to hornets has proved a puzzle for commentators. Some think it speaks of literal stinging insects that God used somehow in the Conquest, though such an event is mentioned nowhere else. Others argue that this constitutes a metaphorical reference, either to Egypt, whose occasional incursions softened up the Canaanite cities prior to the Israelite invasion, or to the fear and terror with which God filled the inhabitants in the face of the armies of Israel (cf. Deuteronomy 7:20).

Verse 13 - We see here the reason that God did not in most cases order the cities and fields of the Canaanites to be destroyed. Part of His provision for His people was that they would have homes and farms to inhabit and work as soon as they conquered the land.

Verses 14-15 - Typically the suzerainty treaties of the era involved the gods of the signatories being called to witness. In this case, Joshua makes it clear to the people that no other god is capable of serving such a function; all are to be discarded (syncretism appears to have crept in already!), since only the Lord is the true and living God who is able to keep the covenants He makes. Polytheism is not an option; the people must choose between the Living God and dead idols. Joshua makes his choice clear; he had made this choice long ago and had demonstrated his faithfulness to the Lord from Mount Sinai to the battle against the Amalekites to the spy mission from Kadesh Barnea to the Conquest itself. He reaffirms that commitment, noting that temptations to backslide are always present and perseverance is essential in order for God's people to remain faithful.

Verses 16-18 - Here we have recorded the oath to keep the treaty, as the people follow Joshua in committing themselves to the service of God, again reciting His works on their behalf.

Verses 19-20 - This seems rather odd at first glance. Joshua has just told the people that they must choose to follow the Lord, but when they affirm their desire to do so, he tells them that they are unable to do it. Is he trying to turn them away from God or drive them into despair? Not at all. The fact of the matter is that perseverance is every bit as much a work of grace as God's deliverance. The people of Israel can no more persevere on their own than they could have taken Canaan on their own. He reminds them of the holiness of God and alludes to the curses that had been read to them from Mount Ebal. A commitment to the Lord is not to be made lightly, or without understanding that to which one is committing oneself. Grace is free, but it is not cheap.

Verses 21-22 - The people reaffirm their commitment, and Joshua notes that their own words will bear witness against them should they disobey the Lord.

Verses 23-24 - Commitment to the Lord must be total, and in this case had to begin by rejecting any form of syncretism. Those who had already begun to honor Canaanite gods in addition to serving the Lord had to purge the idols from their midst. Partial obedience is disobedience; partial allegiance is no allegiance at all.

Verses 25-26a - Here we have the means of the preservation of the treaty documents. Joshua preserved the covenant in writing and put the scroll in the Ark with the other sacred documents. We do not know, of course, of what this document consisted. Was it the Book of the Covenant? Was it the Cursings and Blessings from Deuteronomy? Was it the text of the current book? We have no idea, but whatever it was, it was recognized immediately as the Word of God to His people. This, then, is another small hint at how the canonization process occurred in the Old Testament era.

Verses 26b-27 - The standing stone, presumably with parts of the covenant engraved upon it, served as a public witness, like the other monuments described in the book, in addition to the witness of the document placed in the Ark, to which the people would not normally have access.

## TWO DEATHS AND THREE BURIALS (24:28-33)

The absence of succession arrangements is notable here. When Moses renewed the covenant with the Israelites prior to his death, the passing on of leadership was explicitly part of the ceremony. Here, however, the principals die and no successor is appointed. The book of Judges points out how serious a problem this turned out to be (Judges 21:25), and God Himself finally remedied the problem with the provision of the monarchy.

Verses 28-30 - After the people return home, Joshua dies at the age of 110. Some have noted that this was ten years less than Moses lived and the same lifespan as that enjoyed by Joseph, though these facts are of little significance. What is more important here is God's epitaph for this faithful

leader - he is called the Servant of the Lord, as Moses had been; the only time in the book where this occurs. He is then buried on the land that had been allotted to him and his family after the Conquest.

Verse 31 - The influence of Joshua was profound in that Israel remained faithful to the Lord throughout the era of his generation. Sadly, Judges 2:10 indicates that the next generation, having no personal experience of the great works of God during the days of their parents, turned away and followed idols. How difficult it is, and how important, to pass on the faith to our children and grandchildren, though the effectiveness of such teaching ultimately lies only in the power of God.

Verse 32 - Here the last wish of Joseph is carried out (Genesis 50:25). He is buried in the plot of land purchased by Jacob (Genesis 33:19) in what became the hill country of Ephraim, the land given to Joseph's descendants, thus bearing witness to the faithfulness of God to His promises (cf. Hebrews 11:22).

Verse 33 - The death of Eleazar the high priest puts a period on the story of the Exodus, as the last representative of the wilderness generation dies and is buried. He is succeeded by his faithful son Phinehas, but ensuing references to the priesthood (the disgusting accounts in Judges 17-18 and the weak and ineffective leadership provided by Eli in I Samuel) demonstrate the deplorable condition into which it soon sank. The record of faithfulness demonstrated by Joshua's generation was not perpetuated, and soon the Lord had to demonstrate His faithfulness to His covenant people anew, bringing them to repentance and delivering them by His power.