

Foundations

JOSHUA

Adult Bible Study

FALL 2018



Gospel
Advocate™

Gospel Advocate™

Preparation for study should include reading the biblical text, reading the corresponding lesson in *Companion* and *Foundations* or *Horizons*, and answering the questions at the end of each lesson. Doing so will give the reader a thorough overview of the lesson and provide a solid basis for spiritual growth.

Joshua

The name “Joshua” identifies one of the great Old Testament heroes as well as the sixth book in the Bible. The book of Joshua is the appropriate one to follow Deuteronomy. In that final book of the Pentateuch, Moses reviewed for the people the law of God as given to Moses forty years before. Joshua recounts putting that law into practice, the people’s movements, and the tribal distinctions that came to the fore. It is a book of conflict, success, disappointment, but always a book about moving forward. The secret to Joshua’s success is found in his personal assertion: “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15).

<i>LESSON 1</i>	
Succeeds Moses.....	7
<i>Joshua 1:1-18</i>	
<i>LESSON 2</i>	
Spying out Jericho	19
<i>Joshua 2:1-21</i>	
<i>LESSON 3</i>	
Crossing the Jordan River	31
<i>Joshua 3:1-17</i>	
<i>LESSON 4</i>	
Memorial Stones	42
<i>Joshua 4:1-9, 15-24</i>	

Succeeds Moses

Joshua 1:1-18

¹ After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, it came to pass that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying:

² "Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel.

³ "Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses.

⁴ "From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory.

⁵ "No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.

⁶ "Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.

⁷ "Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go.

⁸ "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

LESSON 5	
Destruction of Jericho	54
<i>Joshua 6:1-25</i>	
LESSON 6	
The Sin of Achan	67
<i>Joshua 7:1-26</i>	
LESSON 7	
Victory at Ai Now Possible	80
<i>Joshua 8:3-25</i>	
LESSON 8	
Gibeon's Treaty	92
<i>Joshua 9:3-21</i>	
LESSON 9	
The Sun Stands Still	103
<i>Joshua 10:1-14</i>	
LESSON 10	
Joshua's Conquests	114
<i>Joshua 11:1-18</i>	
LESSON 11	
Dividing the Land	125
<i>Joshua 14:1-15</i>	
LESSON 12	
Joshua's Farewell	136
<i>Joshua 23:1-16</i>	
LESSON 13	
Joshua and the Covenant	147
<i>Joshua 24:14-33</i>	
Works Cited	159

⁹ “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

¹⁰ Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying,

¹¹ “Pass through the camp and command the people, saying, ‘Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you will cross over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess.’”

¹² And to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh Joshua spoke, saying,

¹³ “Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, ‘The LORD your God is giving you rest and is giving you this land.’

¹⁴ “Your wives, your little ones, and your livestock shall remain in the land which Moses gave you on this side of the Jordan. But you shall pass before your brethren armed, all your mighty men of valor, and help them,

¹⁵ “until the LORD has given your brethren rest, as He gave you, and they also have taken possession of the land which the LORD your God is giving them. Then you shall return to the land of your possession and enjoy it, which Moses the LORD’s servant gave you on this side of the Jordan toward the sunrise.”

¹⁶ So they answered Joshua, saying, “All that you command us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go.

¹⁷ “Just as we heeded Moses in all things, so we will heed you. Only the LORD your God be with you, as He was with Moses.

¹⁸ “Whoever rebels against your command and does not heed your words, in all that you command him, shall be put to death. Only be strong and of good courage.”

Introduction

When we are first introduced to Joshua in Scripture, he led the Israelites to victory over the army of Amalek (Exodus 17:8-13). Eventually, Joshua became Moses’ assistant, serving as both his companion and attendant (Exodus 24:13; 32:17; 33:11; cf. Numbers 11:28). Scripture also reveals that Moses changed his name from Hoshea, which meant “save,” to Joshua, which means “Yahweh is salvation” (13:16)—a fitting designation for one who would have to trust God completely as he led the Israelites into the Promised Land.

Joshua’s courage was displayed when he willingly stood with Caleb and contradicted the report of the ten spies who discouraged the nation from entering Canaan. On that occasion, the two faithful men declared, “The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, ‘a land which flows with milk and honey.’ Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the LORD is with us. Do not fear them” (Numbers 14:7-9). Because of this stand, “Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh remained alive” (v. 38). Additionally, they

were allowed to enter Canaan because they “wholly followed the LORD” (32:12).

When the time came for Moses’ successor to be identified, Joshua was the natural choice. Given his leadership skills, his courage, and his faithfulness to the Lord, he was well prepared for the task of leading God’s people across the Jordan River. Consequently, the Lord instructed Moses, “Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient” (Numbers 27:18-20). Subsequent comments regarding Joshua describe Moses’ efforts to prepare and encourage him (cf. Deuteronomy 3:21-22, 28).

Deuteronomy ends with Moses’ death and Joshua being placed in charge of the people. Describing him, Deuteronomy 34:9 reports, “Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; so the children of Israel heeded him, and did as the LORD had commanded Moses.” The book of Joshua begins at this point and records the Lord instructing Joshua to lead the people across the Jordan: “Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel” (Joshua 1:2). Enough time had been spent mourning the loss of Moses (Deuteronomy 34:8). Israel was on the verge of entering Canaan, and

Joshua, the successor of Moses, was the right man to lead the people to their divinely promised destination.

God Speaks to Joshua

(Joshua 1:1-9)

The death of Moses is recorded in Deuteronomy 34. Although the Lord allowed him to see the Promised Land from Mount Nebo, He did not permit Moses to cross the Jordan with the children of Israel. Instead, Moses, the leader of Israel described as “the servant of the LORD” (Deuteronomy 34:5; Joshua 1:1), died “in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD” (Deuteronomy 34:5). Following his death, the Israelites wept for thirty days (v. 8). When their period of mourning ended, it was time to move on. Their forty-year journey brought them from Egypt to the bank of the Jordan, but it would not be complete until they crossed over to take possession of the land. Thus, God charged Joshua with the task of leading the nation across the river to the land He promised to give to Abraham and his descendants (Joshua 1:2-3; cf. Genesis 12:7; Deuteronomy 34:4).

God not only described the boundaries of the land to Joshua (Joshua 1:4) but also assured the new leader of His divine care. He declared, “No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you” (v. 5). This statement must have reminded Joshua of what he had already been promised (Deuteronomy 3:21-22; 31:7-8): God

intended to help His people conquer the inhabitants of Canaan just as He had helped them defeat the kings of the Transjordan region. The statement also indicates, as David M. Howard Jr. noted, God “would be with [Joshua] just as he was with Moses [and] begins to answer the question whether Joshua would be able to fill Moses’ shoes as a leader” (*Joshua*, 83).

The promise of God’s presence and help was likely a needed boost for Joshua. Whether he was outwardly distressed, the assurance offered by God provided comfort. Dale Ralph Davis surely captured why this was necessary when he described the mood present among God’s people during this uncertain period: “Moses had died. You can imagine the dismay in Israel. Although you expected it, were informed of it, were prepared for it (Deuteronomy 31), what do you do when *the* servant of God dies and a raging river lies between you and the land you are to inherit?” (*Joshua*, 17). The answer, according to God’s declaration to Joshua, is to follow God’s divine law faithfully. So God charged Joshua, “Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go” (Joshua 1:7).

Rather than devising a new plan for Israel, Joshua was to adhere to God’s prescribed plan. He was to meditate upon it (Joshua 1:8), and he was to trust God (v. 9). Joshua and the Israelites were not alone.

God was with them and had given them His word; He made promises to them He intended to keep.

Joshua Speaks to the People

(*Joshua 1:10-15*)

Having received direction and assurances from God, Joshua began to act. Addressing the “officers of the people” (Joshua 1:10), he instructed, “Pass through the camp and command the people, saying, ‘Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you will cross over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess’” (v. 11). That Joshua instructed the people to gather “provisions” is significant. According to Robert L. Hubbard Jr., the term “commonly refers to food carried along to sustain one on a journey. ... Strikingly, Joshua’s instructions to the people focus on food, not on weapons of war” (*The NIV Application Commentary: Joshua*, 84). If anything, this indicates an abiding trust in God’s promise to give the already inhabited land to His people. Joseph Coleson explained, “There would be room neither for human pride of accomplishment nor for human doubt that it could and would be done. This was God’s enterprise; this was God’s time; Joshua was God’s appointed leader” (*Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Joshua*, 45).

Despite Joshua’s confidence in God’s ability to accomplish what He promised, he addressed the tribes that had already claimed their inheritance—Reuben,

Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh (Joshua 1:12). They were not to sit idly by while their brethren fought to secure the land. Instead, they were to join in the effort. So Joshua charged, “But you shall pass before your brethren armed, all your mighty men of valor, and help them, until the LORD has given your brethren rest, as He gave you, and they also have taken possession of the land which the LORD your God is giving them. Then you shall return to the land of your possession and enjoy it, which Moses the LORD’s servant gave you on this side of the Jordan toward the sunrise” (vv. 14-15). God was providing the land, but His people were the instrument used to obtain it. Joshua understood the need for the entire nation to cooperate in the effort—something the tribes who received land on the eastern side of the Jordan previously promised to do (cf. Numbers 32:16-27).

The People Speak to Joshua

(Joshua 1:16-18)

Upon hearing Joshua’s charge, the people responded favorably. They were more than willing to do as he directed and openly stated, “All that you command us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we heeded Moses in all things, so we will heed you. Only the LORD your God be with you, as He was with Moses” (Joshua 1:16-17). In their willingness to comply with Joshua’s terms, the people displayed great respect for Joshua’s position.

He had the right to direct them because he was the rightful replacement for Moses. Joshua was the nation’s new leader, and the people were willing to obey his commands.

At the same time, the people wanted Joshua to know how seriously they took his orders. Thus, they declared, “Whoever rebels against your command and does not heed your words, in all that you command him, shall be put to death. Only be strong and of good courage” (Joshua 1:18). Because of his relationship with God (v. 17), the people were not to ignore Joshua’s directives. Rebellion against his authority (and ultimately God’s authority) would not be tolerated (cf. 7:10-26). Mark S. Ziese summarized the flow of the passage: “Back and forth, the reciprocating charges spark an engine to life: Yahweh encourages Joshua to be responsible; Joshua encourages the people to be responsible; the voice of the people encourages Joshua to be responsible” (*Joshua*, 78). Fittingly, the passage ends with the people repeating the very same charge the Lord gave to Joshua: “Only be strong and of good courage” (Joshua 1:18; cf. vv. 6-7, 9).

Applications

- Throughout the lesson text, we are reminded of the importance of promises. God made a promise to the children of Israel to give them the land of Canaan. He likewise promised Joshua that He would be with the new leader. Joshua reminded the people from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh of

their promise to help their brethren secure the land, and the people promised to obey Joshua and follow his commands. Obviously, we can always place confidence in the promises God makes to His people. We must also, however, remember the promises we make are important.

- Although Moses' death left a great void, the nation of Israel could not mourn his loss forever. God's people needed a leader, and Joshua was the man for the job. Joshua prepared for his role as leader by faithfully serving as Moses' assistant, but God charged him to do even more. Joshua was to trust God and meditate upon His word (Joshua 1:8-9). He was also to involve all of God's people in the effort to secure the land (vv. 12-15).

Questions

1. Where did God instruct Joshua to take the people (Joshua 1:2)?
2. What did God promise Joshua regarding his enemies (Joshua 1:5)?

3. What did God say would occur if Joshua would faithfully follow the Law (Joshua 1:7)?
4. What was Joshua supposed to meditate upon "day and night" (Joshua 1:8)?
5. What were the two and one-half tribes Joshua addressed and challenged to help secure the land (Joshua 1:12)?
6. How did the people from those tribes respond to Joshua (Joshua 1:16)?

Discussion

1. Why do you think Joshua 1:1-18 mentions Moses as frequently as it does?

2. What is the significance of the repetition of the phrase "Be strong and of good courage"?
3. Why do you think God charged Joshua to maintain his focus on the "Book of the Law" (Joshua 1:8)?
4. Why was it important for all the tribes to participate in the effort to secure the land?

Spying out Jericho

Joshua 2:1-21

- ¹ Now Joshua the son of Nun sent out two men from Acacia Grove to spy secretly, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." So they went, and came to the house of a harlot named Rahab, and lodged there.
- ² And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, "Behold, men have come here tonight from the children of Israel to search out the country."
- ³ So the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the country."
- ⁴ Then the woman took the two men and hid them. So she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from."
- ⁵ "And it happened as the gate was being shut, when it was dark, that the men went out. Where the men went I do not know; pursue them quickly, for you may overtake them."
- ⁶ (But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order on the roof.)
- ⁷ Then the men pursued them by the road to the Jordan, to the fords. And as soon as those who pursued them had gone out, they shut the gate.
- ⁸ Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof,
- ⁹ and said to the men: "I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you."

¹⁰ “For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed.

¹¹ “And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.

¹² “Now therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the LORD, since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father’s house, and give me a true token,

¹³ “and spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.”

¹⁴ So the men answered her, “Our lives for yours, if none of you tell this business of ours. And it shall be, when the LORD has given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with you.”

¹⁵ Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the city wall; she dwelt on the wall.

¹⁶ And she said to them, “Get to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you. Hide there three days, until the pursuers have returned. Afterward you may go your way.”

¹⁷ So the men said to her: “We will be blameless of this oath of yours which you have made us swear,

¹⁸ “unless, when we come into the land, you bind this line of scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you bring your father, your mother, your brothers, and all your father’s household to your own home.

¹⁹ “So it shall be that whoever goes outside the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own

head, and we will be guiltless. And whoever is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head if a hand is laid on him.

²⁰ “And if you tell this business of ours, then we will be free from your oath which you made us swear.”

²¹ Then she said, “According to your words, so be it.” And she sent them away, and they departed. And she bound the scarlet cord in the window.

Introduction

At the conclusion of Joshua 1, the people of Israel openly pledged their allegiance to Joshua and declared, “Just as we heeded Moses in all things, so we will heed you” (Joshua 1:17). Unlike their fathers, who hesitated when given an opportunity to enter the land years before (cf. Numbers 13–14), the nation was more than ready to follow Joshua across the Jordan River and take possession of Canaan. On the earlier occasion, Joshua and Caleb countered the bad report given by the ten spies and exhorted the people, “Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the LORD is with us. Do not fear them” (14:9). In this instance, the people encouraged Joshua, “Only be strong and of good courage” (Joshua 1:18).

Given the zeal the people exhibited regarding entering the Promised Land, it is somewhat surprising the crossing of the Jordan did not occur immediately. Instead, Joshua first “sent out two men from Acacia Grove to spy secretly, saying, ‘Go, view the land,

especially Jericho” (Joshua 2:1). The experience of these two spies in Jericho—the first city the Israelites would encounter in the new land—is described in detail in our lesson text (vv. 1-21). What becomes quickly evident, however, is the central role a pagan inhabitant of Jericho named Rahab played in helping the spies avoid capture.

Although Rahab’s actions appear to be only minor when compared to the larger events described throughout the book of Joshua, she is a noteworthy individual. Primarily, Rahab is noteworthy because the author of Joshua saw fit to record her involvement in his account. This is especially interesting when we notice the message of Joshua would appear seamless—except for Rahab’s brief appearance in Joshua 6:22-25—if one skipped Joshua 2 altogether. Nevertheless, the author intentionally put the spotlight on Rahab, even if for a brief moment. Far from being coincidental, the text’s focus on a harlot helping God’s people is significant, especially since she is subsequently praised in the New Testament for her efforts (cf. Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25). Perhaps the true reason for this attention is to prepare the reader for her place in the lineage of Jesus (cf. Matthew 1:5). Regardless, Rahab’s inclusion in the account teaches us God’s mercy extends well beyond those who seem to be obvious candidates for it.

Rahab is also noteworthy for her wonderful confession in Joshua 2:8-14. Explaining why she was willing to help the spies from Israel, she declared, “I know that the LORD has given you the land, that

the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed” (vv. 9-10). Rather than basing her actions on her own eyes, she was willing to trust the credible reports she received regarding the protection God provided for Israel. Importantly, she not only heard but also feared. Her significant declaration is sometimes overlooked because of her otherwise unethical behavior. Commenting on this, Dale Ralph Davis observed, “It is tragic when people snag their pants on the nail of Rahab’s lie, quibble endlessly about the matter, and never get around to hearing Rahab’s truth (vv. 8-13), which the writer has conspired to make the center of the whole narrative” (*Joshua*, 26).

What becomes clear after reading Joshua 2 is that Israel’s outlook has changed. A nation that once feared the inhabitants of Canaan (Numbers 14:3) was now feared by the Canaanites (Joshua 2:24). An immoral individual like Rahab was willing to take a great risk to help God’s people, and even the walled city of Jericho was vulnerable.

Rahab Hides the Spies

(Joshua 2:1-7)

Because Joshua was one of the twelve spies sent early in the period of the exodus to investigate the land of promise (Numbers 13:8, 16), he mirrored that earlier precedent and sent spies across the Jordan to scout Jericho before entering the land (Joshua 2:1). Why he chose only two men instead of sending twelve is not stated in the text. Similarities to the former event exist, but there are also differences. The former party was to scout the land and return with its representative bounty (Numbers 13:17-20); the latter party was to focus its attention especially on Jericho (Joshua 2:1).

Upon their arrival in Jericho, the two Israelite spies “came to the house of a harlot named Rahab, and lodged there” (Joshua 2:1). This detail does two things. First, it introduces Rahab and her questionable integrity. Second, it provides a reasonable explanation regarding how the spies sought to gain information. According to David M. Howard Jr., “Rahab’s house was likely a way station, inn, tavern, or a combination of these. It would have been a logical place for spies to frequent, as a public gathering place and a potential source of information, but it is not necessary to suggest that the spies themselves had (or intended to have) a sexual encounter with Rahab” (*Joshua*, 98-99).

Despite the spies being sent out “secretly” (Joshua 2:1), the residents of Jericho were aware of their presence. In fact, the king of the city was

told, “Behold, men have come here tonight from the children of Israel to search out the country” (v. 2). In response, he sent word to Rahab, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the country” (v. 3). Rather than complying with the king’s wishes, Rahab hid the spies and lied to those who came looking for them (vv. 4-7). As previously noted, her behavior has caused great debate, particularly with regard to the question of whether one’s situation determines the rightness or wrongness of one’s actions. Although that discussion is an important one, it does not seem to be the point Joshua 2 is seeking to make. Explaining, Kenneth A. Mathews wrote, “Also, the text does not teach that immorality as a means to an end is acceptable when the outcome is moral (6:25; cf. Exodus 20:16; Colossians 3:9). The text only describes the events and does not render a judgment on Rahab’s occupation or the lie that she tells the king. She is commended for her faith, and the Bible is silent about her deception (Matthew 1:5; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25)” (*Joshua*, 22).

Rahab Makes a Request

(Joshua 2:8-14)

The focus of the chapter is not on the behavior of Rahab but rather on her surprising acknowledgment of Israel’s God. Speaking to the spies, she declared, “I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the

inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you” (Joshua 2:9). Rahab’s knowledge of God was based on what she heard from others. She had, for example, “heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea” when Israel left Egyptian bondage (v. 10)—an event occurring years earlier. She was also aware Israel had more recently conquered the kings of the Amorites, Sihon and Og (v. 10). Consequently, she relayed, “And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath” (v. 11). Describing the result of this expression of faith, Joseph Coleson wrote, “From Israel’s entrance into Canaan, Rahab and her family were just the first of many who would join Israel. Though Canaan as a whole was under judgment (cf. Genesis 15:16), some were delivered by their faith in Israel’s God” (*Joshua*, 49).

Rahab did not want to be destroyed along with the inhabitants of Jericho. Instead, she requested deliverance for both herself and her family (Joshua 2:12-13). Because she shielded the spies from their pursuers, she asked for similar treatment. In response, the spies declared, “Our lives for yours, if none of you tell this business of ours. And it shall be, when the LORD has given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with you” (v. 14).

Rahab Receives Instructions

(Joshua 2:15-21)

Having requested protection from the coming Israelite assault on Jericho, Rahab demonstrated her devotion to the spies by helping them escape from the walled city. Because the gates of the city were shut (Joshua 2:7), “she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the city wall” (v. 15). She not only facilitated their escape from Jericho but also gave them advice regarding how they might avoid being discovered. She continued, “Get to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you. Hide there three days, until the pursuers have returned. Afterward you may go your way” (v. 16).

Thankful for the harlot’s help, the two spies reaffirmed the promise they made to protect Rahab and her family and gave her specific instructions to follow when the time of Israel’s assault on Jericho drew near (Joshua 2:17-20). Just as the Israelites had to follow God’s instructions to be spared from the tenth plague (cf. Exodus 12:13), Rahab and her family members had to follow the instructions of the spies to be spared when Israel came against Jericho. She readily agreed to their terms and, in preparation, “bound the scarlet cord in the window” (Joshua 2:21). This act was both practical and symbolic, as Robert L. Hubbard Jr. observed, “Besides guiding Israel to her house—the dangling rope symbolizes Rahab’s expectant hope of survival” (*The NIV Application Commentary: Joshua*, 127).

Applications

- Rahab's story reminds us of the wonderful mercy of God. No matter what one has done in his or her life, God is willing to forgive those who submit their lives to Him. In our case, submission requires gospel obedience. This is why the author of Hebrews said of Jesus, "And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him" (Hebrews 5:9).

- Rahab also illustrated the power of faith. She was not present when Israel crossed the Red Sea on dry land. Neither was she a witness to the destruction of the Amorite kings. Nevertheless, she believed the reports she heard about those events and concluded she should seek deliverance from the Lord who caused them. Like her, we must act in faith. In our case, that means we act on the basis of the credible testimony of Scripture.

Questions

1. How many men did Joshua send to spy on Jericho (Joshua 2:1)?
2. Where did the spies stay when they entered the city (Joshua 2:1)?
3. Who heard about the spies' presence in Jericho (Joshua 2:3)?
4. What had the spies' host heard about the Lord (Joshua 2:9-10)?
5. How did the spies escape from Jericho (Joshua 2:15)?
6. What did the spies require their host to tie to her window (Joshua 2:18)?

Discussion

1. Why do you think Joshua sent spies into Jericho?
Did this show a lack of faith on his part?

2. What lessons can we learn from Rahab?

3. What is the main point of this passage?

Crossing the Jordan River

Joshua 3:1-17

¹ Then Joshua rose early in the morning; and they set out from Acacia Grove and came to the Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they crossed over.

² So it was, after three days, that the officers went through the camp;

³ and they commanded the people, saying, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, the Levites, bearing it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it.

⁴ "Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you must go, for you have not passed this way before."

⁵ And Joshua said to the people, "Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you."

⁶ Then Joshua spoke to the priests, saying, "Take up the ark of the covenant and cross over before the people." So they took up the ark of the covenant and went before the people.

⁷ And the LORD said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you.

⁸ “You shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, saying, ‘When you have come to the edge of the water of the Jordan, you shall stand in the Jordan.’”

⁹ So Joshua said to the children of Israel, “Come here, and hear the words of the LORD your God.”

¹⁰ And Joshua said, “By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Hivites and the Perizzites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Jebusites:

¹¹ “Behold, the ark of the covenant of the LORD of all the earth is crossing over before you into the Jordan.

¹² “Now therefore, take for yourselves twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man from every tribe.

¹³ “And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the LORD, the LORD of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, that the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, the waters that come down from upstream, and they shall stand as a heap.”

¹⁴ So it was, when the people set out from their camp to cross over the Jordan, with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people,

¹⁵ and as those who bore the ark came to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks during the whole time of harvest),

¹⁶ that the waters which came down from upstream stood still, and rose in a heap very far away at Adam, the city that is beside Zaretan. So the waters that went down into the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, failed, and were cut off; and the people crossed over opposite Jericho.

¹⁷ Then the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan;

and all Israel crossed over on dry ground, until all the people had crossed completely over the Jordan.

Introduction

Israel did not wander in the wilderness forty years to remain on the east side of the Jordan River. God brought them to the Promised Land and intended for the nation to inhabit it. He declared this plainly to Joshua, “Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel” (Joshua 1:2).

The Israelites knew the land God was providing was bountiful. Evidence of its fruitfulness, presented by a former generation (cf. Numbers 13:23-27), was likely not forgotten. Nevertheless, the people also knew the dangerous inhabitants of the land would need to be subdued (cf. Joshua 1:13-15). Even more daunting, perhaps, was the Jordan itself—a river that had overflowed its banks (3:15). Questions begged to be answered. How could an entire nation cross a flooded river? How could wilderness wanderers conquer fortified cities? And could their new leader really take the place of Moses?

Answers to the Israelites’ questions came in one powerful moment. God provided passage into Canaan by holding back the waters of the Jordan (Joshua 3:16). So Dale Ralph Davis observed, “It is Yahweh himself who leads his people into Canaan, who cuts off flooding waters and holds them back as it were with his hand. The whole affair is Yahweh’s feat

and the Israelites, though active, are still primarily spectators” (*Joshua*, 33). Describing the powerful event before it happened, Joshua announced the miraculous crossing would not only get the nation into the land but also validate God’s ability to deliver victory over the hostile inhabitants of it (vv. 10-13). God is shown to be in control, and Joshua is clearly identified as the one God has chosen to lead His people into the Promised Land.

Preparation Made

(*Joshua 3:1-8*)

Joshua modeled numerous qualities those who wish to lead God’s people should seek to imitate. Besides his complete dedication to God, his consistent efforts to prepare the nation (including the way he communicated with the people) are commendable. In this text, Joshua moved the people from their camp at Acacia Grove to the bank of the Jordan. Knowing God’s plan was for Israel to cross the river and enter Canaan, he positioned them to be ready (*Joshua 3:1*). Three days after their arrival at the Jordan, Joshua sent officers throughout the camp to inform the people of what was about to happen. They declared, “When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, the Levites, bearing it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it. Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure. Do not come near

it, that you may know the way by which you must go, for you have not passed this way before” (vv. 3-4).

The ark of the covenant was, of course, a tangible symbol of God’s presence with His people (cf. *Numbers 7:89*). Consequently, it is not surprising to find Israel instructed to remain a specific distance from the ark. Those familiar with what occurred later in Israel’s history when Uzzah touched the ark understand (cf. *2 Samuel 6:6-7*). Even so, it appears there is another reason for the instruction: Israel was to stay far enough behind the ark to appreciate the direction God provided. Summarizing the point, Trent C. Butler wrote, “Here the problem is one of transportation. Israel is entering a foreign territory. She must have a guide. That is the ark. She must not get too close. ... The concept of keeping a distance from divine holiness has entered the passage. Our text thus gives two emphases for the ark. It shows God’s people God’s way into the Promised Land, but it also represents a holy presence from which the people must keep their distance” (*Joshua*, 46).

Having announced the way God planned to lead the nation across the Jordan, Joshua charged the people, “Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you” (*Joshua 3:5*). The term “sanctify” (NKJV) is also translated “consecrate” (ESV, NASB). It carries the idea of purification and demands separation from evil. Joseph Coleson explained, “God intended to bring across the Jordan a holy people, who had separated themselves to Yahweh, the God of Israel, and from all the gods of their neighbors.

This involved ritual acts of purification from all that was unclean, all that would bar an Israelite from coming into the presence of God in the Tabernacle” (*Joshua*, 54). Joshua’s order implied the people would not only see the power of God but also be in God’s presence. The crossing was not merely going to be a ceremonial parade. God, in a show of great force, was going to lead His people into Canaan.

When the time for the crossing arrived, Joshua instructed the priests—a clear demonstration of his authority, “Take up the ark of the covenant and cross over before the people” (*Joshua* 3:6). At this point, God spoke to Joshua reaffirming Joshua’s position as leader of Israel and providing him with further instructions. According to David M. Howard Jr., “The purpose of God’s exalting Joshua was not for Joshua’s own sake. Rather, it was for the larger purpose that Israel would know that God was with him. ... How would they know this? Through the great miracle that God would perform” (*Joshua*, 124).

Instruction Given

(*Joshua* 3:9-13)

Rather than attempting to exalt himself before the people, Joshua called for them to “hear the words of the LORD your God” (*Joshua* 3:9). As any good leader should do, Joshua gave credit to the appropriate source. God was with His people and was going to lead them across the Jordan River. Importantly, God’s ability to lead the people to the Promised Land was

supposed to convince them He would be with them as they sought to secure it. So Joshua stated, “By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Hivites and the Perizzites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Jebusites” (v. 10).

The means God used to assure the Israelites of His continued protection and support was His miraculous control over the Jordan. To show the people God was at work, the priests were instructed to carry the ark of the Lord into the stream. Describing what would take place at that moment, Joshua continued, “And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, that the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, the waters that come down from upstream, and they shall stand as a heap” (*Joshua* 3:13). The similarities between this event and the nation’s previous crossing of the Red Sea are evident (cf. *Exodus* 14:21-22; 15:8; *Psalms* 78:12-13). God made a way for His people to cross what seemed to be an insurmountable barrier when they escaped from Egypt, and He promised to do so again as they entered Canaan.

The Crossing

(*Joshua* 3:14-17)

The actual crossing of the Jordan occurred just as Joshua had prescribed. The priests, bearing the ark of

the Lord, went before the people and stepped into the river (Joshua 3:14-15). According to Joshua's record, when this occurred, "the waters which came down from upstream stood still, and rose in a heap very far away at Adam, the city that is beside Zaretan. So the waters that went down into the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, failed, and were cut off; and the people crossed over opposite Jericho" (v. 16).

The details provided in the text heighten the significance of the miracle. Geographically, the water of the Jordan was halted at the city of Adam. The precise location where this occurred is debated. Even so, some scholars equate Adam with Tell ed-Damiya, approximately eighteen miles north of Jericho. Regardless, the miraculous event stopped the water that flowed from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. This would have given the Israelites an area of several miles to cross into the new land. The other detail that elevates the miracle is the status of the Jordan River at the time the crossing occurred. Evidently, the Jordan was overflowing its banks at the time (Joshua 3:15). This fact, as Kenneth A. Mathews observed, "highlights the marvel of the miracle since it shows that the drying of the riverbed is not by lucky coincidence or natural means. The river is at its highest point and at its most dangerous moment" (*Joshua*, 26). Ultimately, God proved Himself faithful to His people, "and all Israel crossed over on dry ground" (v. 17).

Applications

- Joshua exhibited such wonderful qualities that those who wish to be leaders should seek to reproduce in their own lives. Chief among these characteristics was his ability to communicate openly yet authoritatively with his people. When Joshua understood God's plan for Israel, he did not hesitate to move the people from Acacia Grove to the banks of the Jordan. Nevertheless, he did not run ahead of God. Instead, he challenged the people to prepare themselves to be in the Lord's presence. After clearly explaining what would take place, Joshua allowed the people to do as they had been told. Because of his wonderful leadership, the entire nation did as instructed.
- Joshua's confidence in God, even before the miraculous crossing of the Jordan occurred, is significant. He described God as "living" (Joshua 3:10) and as "the Lord of all the earth" (v. 11). He did not doubt God could do as He promised, for he knew God was not like the worthless idols worshipped by the pagans.
- We should never become so accustomed to God's miraculous power that we take it for granted. His ability to stop the Jordan River and allow His people to enter Canaan on dry ground should motivate all who learn about that act to yield their will to His own.

Questions

1. What was the sign for the people to begin crossing the Jordan (Joshua 3:3)?
2. Why were the people told to avoid coming near the ark of the covenant (Joshua 3:4)?
3. What did Joshua charge the people to do prior to the crossing of the Jordan (Joshua 3:5)?
4. What did God promise to do for Joshua (Joshua 3:7)?
5. How were the people supposed to know God would help them defeat the enemies they would face in Canaan (Joshua 3:10-13)?
6. What was the status of the Jordan at the time of the crossing (Joshua 3:15)?

7. When did the waters of the Jordan stand still (Joshua 3:15-16)?

Discussion

1. Why were the Israelites not to come near the ark of the covenant?
2. What can we learn from Joshua's instructions to the people in Joshua 3:5?
3. What does this text teach us about God's concern for His people?
4. What desirable leadership qualities did Joshua possess?

Memorial Stones

Joshua 4:1-9, 15-24

¹ And it came to pass, when all the people had completely crossed over the Jordan, that the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying:

² “Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from every tribe,

³ “and command them, saying, ‘Take for yourselves twelve stones from here, out of the midst of the Jordan, from the place where the priests’ feet stood firm. You shall carry them over with you and leave them in the lodging place where you lodge tonight.’”

⁴ Then Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the children of Israel, one man from every tribe;

⁵ and Joshua said to them: “Cross over before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of the Jordan, and each one of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel,

⁶ “that this may be a sign among you when your children ask in time to come, saying, ‘What do these stones mean to you?’

⁷ “Then you shall answer them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. And these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever.”

⁸ And the children of Israel did so, just as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones from the midst of the Jordan, as the LORD had spoken to Joshua, according

to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, and carried them over with them to the place where they lodged, and laid them down there.

⁹ Then Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests who bore the ark of the covenant stood; and they are there to this day.

Joshua 4:15-24

¹⁵ Then the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying,

¹⁶ “Command the priests who bear the ark of the Testimony to come up from the Jordan.”

¹⁷ Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, “Come up from the Jordan.”

¹⁸ And it came to pass, when the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD had come from the midst of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests’ feet touched the dry land, that the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks as before.

¹⁹ Now the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they camped in Gilgal on the east border of Jericho.

²⁰ And those twelve stones which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal.

²¹ Then he spoke to the children of Israel, saying: “When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, ‘What are these stones?’

²² “then you shall let your children know, saying, ‘Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry land’;

²³ “for the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over,

²⁴ “that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever.”

Introduction

God does not want us to forget the many ways we have been blessed by Him. This is why James 1:17 declares, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” Lest we begin to think we are the source or cause of the good things we enjoy in life, we are reminded differently. David put it beautifully when he wrote, “Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits” (Psalm 103:1-2). How wonderful to know we serve a God who “gives to all life, breath, and all things” (Acts 17:25)!

Because He knows us, God has provided tangible reminders of His goodness. For example, He has given us the opportunity to live in a wonderful yet intricate world that points to His existence. Stressing this, Paul declared, “Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17).

Besides revealing Himself through nature, God has also provided reminders of the many ways He blesses humanity in Scripture. Throughout its pages, we learn how God has cared for His people in the past, what He has done for us by sending Jesus to die

in our place, and how He remains willing to hear our prayers and care for us through His providence. We also learn of specific reminders God has ordained in order to keep us from forgetting what He has done. Chief among these is the establishment of the Lord’s Supper. According to Jesus, we partake of the emblems of that memorial feast in order to remember His death (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:24-25). The observation of the Lord’s Supper provides those who participate with a weekly reminder of Jesus’ willingness to take on flesh and shed His blood so that our sins could be forgiven.

In our lesson text—Joshua 4—God instructed the Israelites to erect a memorial after their miraculous crossing of the Jordan River was complete. The memorial, composed of twelve stones representing each of the twelve tribes, was intended to remind future generations of the magnificent way God brought His people into the Promised Land. Joshua revealed the memorial’s purpose: “That all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever” (v. 24).

Select Twelve Stones

(Joshua 4:1-9)

The record of events in Joshua 4 is intended to complement the material presented in Joshua 3. Rather than providing new information, the text explains the previously presented narrative. Intentionally placed

statements and consistent language tie the chapters together. For instance, Joshua 3 ends by declaring, “All the people had crossed completely over the Jordan” (v. 17); Joshua 4 begins similarly, “All the people had completely crossed over the Jordan” (v. 1). Explaining the connection and overlap between the two chapters, Joseph Coleson wrote, “Chapter 4 is not a sequel. The first section (4:1-9) brings the reader back to the 12 tribal representatives of 3:12 and their task of gathering stones. Likewise, 4:10-18 reports the movements of the priests who carried the Ark. Both paragraphs fill in details that would have distracted from the straightforward narrative of chapter 3” (*Joshua*, 60). In other words, Joshua 3 provides a broad look at the crossing of the Jordan; Joshua 4 narrows the view and focuses on some of the significant details of the event.

One of the significant details of Israel’s crossing of the Jordan was mentioned only in passing in the initial recounting of the event. Without providing any explanation, Joshua instructed the people, “Now therefore, take for yourselves twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man from every tribe” (Joshua 3:12). If one read only chapter 3, he or she would not know why Joshua instructed the tribes to make such a selection. Chapter 4, however, clears up the mystery. The chosen men were each to select a stone from the midst of the Jordan and carry it across to the Promised Land. The Lord told Joshua, “Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from every tribe, and command them saying, ‘Take

for yourselves twelve stones from here, out of the midst of the Jordan, from the place where the priests’ feet stood firm. You shall carry them over with you and leave them in the lodging place where you lodge tonight” (vv. 2-3).

Relaying the directions to the chosen men, Joshua charged, “Cross over before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of the Jordan, and each one of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, that this may be a sign among you when your children ask in time to come, saying, ‘What do these stones mean to you?’ Then you shall answer them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. And these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever” (Joshua 4:5-7). Marten H. Woudstra summarized the point, “The ark is the very symbol of the covenant of the Lord. Thus the full light falls on the redemptive significance of the event. No mere recalling of a miracle is envisaged. The miracle is to be viewed as an expression of covenant fidelity. By repeating the reference to the cutting-off of the waters the explanation highlights its tremendous significance. The purpose in setting up the stones is finally summed up in the word ‘memorial’” (*The Book of Joshua*, 91).

Not surprisingly, the men did as Joshua instructed “and took up twelve stones from the midst of the Jordan, as the LORD had spoken to Joshua ... and carried

them over with them to the place where they lodged, and laid them down there” (Joshua 4:8). Interestingly, this was not the only memorial built on that occasion, for Joshua, while the riverbed was still dry, “set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests who bore the ark of the covenant stood” (v. 9). Whether intentional, Joshua’s actions are reminiscent of Moses’ after he delivered the law to Israel (cf. Exodus 24:4). Explaining the significance of the two memorials, Mark S. Ziese wrote, “If the first construction memorializes the ‘crossing over’ in the collective memory of Israel; the second emphasizes the personal leadership of Joshua in the collective activity of Israel” (*Joshua*, 121).

The Ark Crossed

(*Joshua 4:15-18*)

The text does not tell us how long the priests stood in the midst of the Jordan with the ark of the Lord. We know when the “soles of the feet of the priests” carrying the ark touched the water, the river stopped flowing (Joshua 3:13, 15-16). We also know the entire nation was able to pass across the Jordan while the priests waited (v. 17; 4:1). Likewise, we know when “the soles of the priests’ feet touched the dry land, that the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks as before” (v. 18). If anything, this reemphasizes the miraculous nature of the event. God provided the instructions, Joshua relayed them, and the priests obeyed.

God was completely in control. If He could stop the waters of the Jordan and restore them at will, He could make good on His promise to give Canaan to Israel. Even more impressive, however, was God’s presence. He was with His people. Thankfully, He has promised to be with His people today as well (cf. Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5).

Children’s Questions

(*Joshua 4:19-24*)

At this juncture, Joshua provides both chronological and geographical markers. He wrote, “Now the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they camped in Gilgal on the east border of Jericho” (Joshua 4:19). Far from being unimportant, the date of this occasion was very significant to the children of Israel. Dale Ralph Davis explained, “It was on the same day forty years before that Israel had begun preparing for going out of Egypt by setting apart the Passover lamb (Exodus 12:2-3). Therefore, we might say this day had marked the beginning of redemption; now it marked its completion. What Yahweh began he brought to completion. Yahweh has written his faithfulness across another date on our calendars! Israel had been a slave; now Israel was an heir” (*Joshua*, 41).

Gilgal would become an important religious location for Israel. As David M. Howard Jr. noted, “Here, the Israelites celebrated several religious rituals, including circumcision and Passover (Joshua 5), and

it was the place where a sanctuary and an altar were built for God (9:23, 27). It remained as an important place of sacrifice for many centuries later (see 1 Samuel 10:8). It was one of the cities where Samuel judged (1 Samuel 7:16) and where Saul was made king (1 Samuel 11:14-15). However, worship there eventually became apostate, and eighth-century prophets condemned it (Hosea 9:15; 12:11; Amos 4:4; 5:5)” (*Joshua*, 141-42).

Having set up the memorial with the stones taken from the riverbed, Joshua declared the purpose before the people: “When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, ‘What are these stones?’ then you shall let your children know, saying, ‘Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry land’; for the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over” (Joshua 4:21-23). Joshua’s insistence on informing them by answering their questions is reminiscent of Moses’ instruction in Deuteronomy 6:6-9 about teaching the children of an earlier generation. Without such instructions, the future will be very dark. If there was any doubt about the power of God, the memory of the Red Sea crossing—which even the pagans of Jericho had heard about (2:10)—and the memory of the Jordan River crossing—memorialized by the stones at Gilgal—would remove such. The mighty hand of the Lord worked for His people—Israel (Joshua 4:24).

Applications

- As subsequent generations of Israelites needed a reminder of what God had done for His people, so we need to be reminded of what He has done for us. When properly observed, the Lord’s Supper provides such a needed reminder today. Let us never take for granted the death of our Lord, and let us use that weekly reminder to teach our children about the wonderful love of God.
- God not only led the Israelites from Egyptian bondage but also delivered them safely to the Promised Land. That both events occurred on the tenth day of the first month (cf. Exodus 12:2-3; Joshua 4:19) simply illustrates God’s complete control of the situation. When He makes a promise to His people, He keeps His word.

Questions

1. What were the men chosen from each tribe supposed to do (Joshua 4:2-3)?
2. Why did God instruct the Israelites to build a memorial after they crossed the Jordan (Joshua 4:6-7)?

3. What did Joshua do in the midst of the riverbed (Joshua 4:9)?

4. What occurred when the priests carried the ark from the Jordan riverbed (Joshua 4:18)?

5. On what day did the Israelites cross the Jordan (Joshua 4:19)?

6. Where was the memorial built (Joshua 4:20)?

7. To what did Joshua liken the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River (Joshua 4:23)?

Discussion

1. What does this account teach us about the importance of remembering God's blessings?

2. Why do you think Joshua set up a memorial in the middle of the Jordan River?

3. What can we learn from the timing of Israel's crossing?

4. Why do you think so much of an emphasis is placed on remembering Israel's crossing of the Jordan?

Destruction of Jericho

Joshua 6:1-25

- ¹ Now Jericho was securely shut up because of the children of Israel; none went out, and none came in.
- ² And the LORD said to Joshua: “See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valor.
- ³ “You shall march around the city, all you men of war; you shall go all around the city once. This you shall do six days.
- ⁴ “And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark. But the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets.
- ⁵ “It shall come to pass, when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, that all the people shall shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat. And the people shall go up every man straight before him.”
- ⁶ Then Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, “Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark of the LORD.”
- ⁷ And he said to the people, “Proceed, and march around the city, and let him who is armed advance before the ark of the LORD.”
- ⁸ So it was, when Joshua had spoken to the people, that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams’ horns

- before the LORD advanced and blew the trumpets, and the ark of the covenant of the LORD followed them.
- ⁹ The armed men went before the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard came after the ark, while the priests continued blowing the trumpets.
- ¹⁰ Now Joshua had commanded the people, saying, “You shall not shout or make any noise with your voice, nor shall a word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I say to you, ‘Shout!’ Then you shall shout.”
- ¹¹ So he had the ark of the LORD circle the city, going around it once. Then they came into the camp and lodged in the camp.
- ¹² And Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the LORD.
- ¹³ Then seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark of the LORD went on continually and blew with the trumpets. And the armed men went before them. But the rear guard came after the ark of the LORD, while the priests continued blowing the trumpets.
- ¹⁴ And the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. So they did six days.
- ¹⁵ But it came to pass on the seventh day that they rose early, about the dawning of the day, and marched around the city seven times in the same manner. On that day only they marched around the city seven times.
- ¹⁶ And the seventh time it happened, when the priests blew the trumpets, that Joshua said to the people: “Shout, for the LORD has given you the city!
- ¹⁷ “Now the city shall be doomed by the LORD to destruction, it and all who are in it. Only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all who are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent.

¹⁸ “And you, by all means abstain from the accursed things, lest you become accursed when you take of the accursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it.

¹⁹ “But all the silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are consecrated to the LORD; they shall come into the treasury of the LORD.”

²⁰ So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets. And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.

²¹ And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword.

²² But Joshua had said to the two men who had spied out the country, “Go into the harlot’s house, and from there bring out the woman and all that she has, as you swore to her.”

²³ And the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab, her father, her mother, her brothers, and all that she had. So they brought out all her relatives and left them outside the camp of Israel.

²⁴ But they burned the city and all that was in it with fire. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD.

²⁵ And Joshua spared Rahab the harlot, her father’s household, and all that she had. So she dwells in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

Introduction

Before the Israelites crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land, Joshua spoke to the men from Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh (all of whom were settling on the east side of the river), and charged, “But you shall pass before your brethren armed, all your mighty men of valor, and help them, until the LORD has given your brethren rest, as He gave you, and they also have taken possession of the land which the LORD your God is giving them” (Joshua 1:14-15). Joshua’s statement implied the nation would have to fight to secure Canaan. Nevertheless, because the land was a gift from God, God Himself would actively “drive out” the inhabitants of the land (3:10). Although some have questioned the morality of forcibly destroying the people living in Canaan, the iniquities committed by Canaan’s inhabitants deserved punishment (Leviticus 18:24-25; Deuteronomy 18:12). God had been merciful to them for generations (cf. Genesis 15:16), but that time had passed.

Knowing the fortified city of Jericho would be the first place the Israelites would encounter in their conquest of the land, Joshua made provisions by sending two men to spy on that place. When they returned, the spies confidently reported, “Truly the LORD has delivered all the land into our hands, for indeed all the inhabitants of the country are fainthearted because of us” (Joshua 2:24; cf. 5:1). Confidence abounded. Even so, work remained. God promised to give the people the land, but they had to secure it. The people of Jericho were not simply

going to surrender, and the children of Israel were not adept at siege warfare. How should they proceed?

Instructions for the attack on Jericho came in an unexpected way. A man holding a sword confronted Joshua and identified himself as “Commander of the army of the LORD” (Joshua 5:14). Both Joshua’s immediate response of falling to the ground and worshipping (v. 14) and the Commander’s subsequent instruction for Joshua to remove his sandals (v. 15) indicate Joshua was in the presence of deity. Besides providing Joshua with specific instructions regarding how the Israelites would approach Jericho (6:2-5), the encounter reinforces Joshua’s position as Israel’s leader. Like Moses before him, Joshua had been in the very presence of God (cf. Exodus 3). Kenneth A. Mathews commented, “That the event echoes the burning bush revelation shows that whether it is Moses or Joshua in leadership, the determining factor for success is the Lord” (*Joshua*, 44). Israel would indeed conquer Jericho but not necessarily in the way they expected.

An Unusual Strategy

(*Joshua 6:1-11*)

Much of the historical material regarding the ancient city of Jericho is speculative. Carl G. Rasmussen suggested, “At most 2,000 people lived at Jericho” (*Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*, 109). And Richard S. Hess noted that Jericho was “a small settlement surrounded by mud-brick walls. ... It was

primarily a military compound designed to guard strategic passes east and west, as well as the north-south road, and to do so on behalf of towns in the hill country, such as Bethel and Jerusalem. This would be an ideal location for an inn or hostel, such as Rahab operated with her family” (*Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, 32). Regardless, Jericho’s fortifications appeared to be formidable. So Joshua 6:1 declared, “Now Jericho was securely shut up because of the children of Israel; none went out, and none came in.” Israel’s task seemed practically impossible.

Despite the daunting nature of the task, the Lord spoke with Joshua as if the battle had already been won. He declared, “See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valor” (Joshua 6:2). Ultimately, the victory would come from the Lord, but Joshua and the people had to do as God instructed. No wonder the New Testament cites the attack on Jericho as an example of faith (see Hebrews 11:30). Woudstra’s explanation is helpful: “This chapter contains an interesting interplay of word and act. The chief emphasis lies on God’s act of giving the city into Israel’s hand, but much verbal explanation precedes and surrounds the act. When Jericho falls it will be an act of faith ... as well as an act of God. Faith will lay hold on the veracity of God’s word concerning the act he is to perform” (*The Book of Joshua*, 109).

The Lord’s battle plan surely sounded different than Joshua expected. Rather than arranging the

troops into organized units and surrounding the city, God called for the nation to “march around the city ... six days. And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark. But the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets” (Joshua 6:3-4). Upon hearing the trumpets, the people were to “shout with a great shout” (v. 5). When the Lord’s instructions were followed as given, He declared, “Then the wall of the city will fall down flat. And the people shall go up every man straight before him” (v. 5). The soldiers of Israel would not employ a battering ram; neither would they use other means to destroy the wall or subdue the city. Instead, they would conquer Jericho by following the Lord’s seemingly unconventional orders.

Joshua recounted the Lord’s instructions to the people (Joshua 6:6-7), and the people obeyed (vv. 8-11). What a sight the Israelites must have been to the inhabitants of Jericho! This was no ordinary siege. The God of heaven would again demonstrate His great power to Israel. So Joseph Coleson wrote, “God himself was fighting against the city. ... Israel had only to march and observe, then shout and observe, and finally to mop up after God delivered the city into their hands. In their march, Israel would have Jericho surrounded. When the walls fell, no warrior would have to run to some other place to find an entrance into the city. Each man simply would ‘charge straight into the town’ (6:5)” (Joshua, 72).

No Spoils of Battle

(Joshua 6:12-21)

Following God’s directions, the army of Israel repeated the process of marching around the city of Jericho once each day for six days (Joshua 6:14). Importantly, the ark of the Lord was also carried around the city each day (v. 13). As it had done when the nation crossed the Jordan and entered Canaan, the ark continued to play a prominent role in the conquest of the land. Stressing this point, the chapter refers to the ark no less than ten times. God was with His people. He was powerful, and He was able to do for Israel what they could not do for themselves. Upon the seventh day, the people followed specific instructions regarding that day only. They marched around Jericho seven times, awaited the blast of the priests’ trumpets, and shouted when instructed by Joshua (vv. 15-16). As God had predicted, Jericho’s “wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city” (vv. 20-21).

In the midst of the battle narrative, our lesson text provides us with the information Joshua told the children of Israel regarding Jericho. Unlike some battles, where the spoils of the conquered enemy were for the taking, the soldiers were not to loot the city after God delivered it into their hands; nor were they to take prisoners. Instead, the residents of

Jericho were to be completely destroyed, save Rahab and her household (Joshua 6:17).

Additionally, the possessions of Jericho were to be viewed as “accursed things” (Joshua 6:18 NKJV); “things devoted to destruction” (ESV); or “things under the ban” (NASB). Joshua warned, “And you, by all means abstain from the accursed things, lest you become accursed when you take of the accursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it” (v. 18). Actually, the spoils of Jericho were “accursed things” because they had been designated as belonging to God. Hubbard explained, “Whatever is ‘devoted to destruction’ or ‘banned’ is assumed to be consecrated to Yahweh for his exclusive ownership and use. In essence, it has been transferred from the profane realm of humans to the holy realm of Yahweh (Joshua 8:26, 28; cf. Micah 4:13)” (*The NIV Application Commentary: Joshua*, 198). Items of silver, gold, bronze, and iron could be placed “into the treasury of the LORD” because it belonged to Him (Joshua 6:19), but the Israelites were to keep nothing for themselves.

Rahab Spared

(Joshua 6:22-25)

Despite his focus on carrying out the Lord’s instructions and conquering Jericho, Joshua did not forget the promise his men made to Rahab (cf. Joshua 2:17-21). Because the spies were familiar with her situation and location, Joshua charged them with the

task of delivering Rahab and her family from the rubble of the city. He declared, “Go into the harlot’s house, and from there bring out the woman and all that she has, as you swore to her” (6:22). The young men did as they were tasked and brought Rahab and her family safely from the city and “left them outside the camp of Israel” (v. 23).

Besides Rahab and her household, Jericho and its residents were destroyed by fire. The only other items spared were those placed directly in the Lord’s treasury (Joshua 6:24). That Rahab was spared is indeed telling. Why would the Lord spare a pagan harlot? Why would He allow her to live in Israel? The answer is both simple and profound: “Because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho” (v. 25). Rahab’s betrayal of her own people was actually an expression of faith in God (cf. Hebrews 11:31), and she was blessed accordingly.

Applications

- The Lord’s plan to conquer Jericho was clearly unconventional. Nevertheless, it was effective. The wall of Jericho fell because the Israelites obeyed God. Rather than arguing with God about His plan, we should simply do as He bids. When we fail to make sense of God’s instructions, we must remember the words of 1 Corinthians 1:25: “Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” God’s way is always best!

- That Rahab was given a place among God’s people should fill our hearts with hope. God saved

her from Jericho's demise because of her faithful response, and He remains willing to save those who respond in faithful obedience today. Dale Ralph Davis put it well: "This pagan gentile and her family now stand within the circle of the chosen people. Why, then, should we be surprised if her God should one day take those who are far off and 'bring (them) near by the blood of the Messiah' (Ephesians 2:13)?" (*Joshua*, 56).

Questions

1. What was the status of Jericho as Israel approached (Joshua 6:1)?
2. What did the Lord instruct Israel to do in order to conquer Jericho (Joshua 6:3-5)?
3. What did the Israelites carry around the walls of Jericho (Joshua 6:6)?
4. What were the people supposed to do at Joshua's command (Joshua 6:10, 16)?

5. What were the Israelites not to take from Jericho (Joshua 6:18)?
6. Who did the Israelites save from the destruction at Jericho (Joshua 6:22-23)?
7. What eventually happened to this individual and her family (Joshua 6:25)?

Discussion

1. Why do you think the text emphasizes the fortified nature of Jericho (Joshua 6:1)?
2. What lessons can we learn about trust and obedience from this text?

3. Why did God not allow the Israelites to loot the conquered city?

4. What does Rahab's deliverance teach us about God?

The Sin of Achan

Joshua 7:1-26

- ¹ But the children of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things, for Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed things; so the anger of the LORD burned against the children of Israel.
- ² Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth Aven, on the east side of Bethel, and spoke to them, saying, "Go up and spy out the country." So the men went up and spied out Ai.
- ³ And they returned to Joshua and said to him, "Do not let all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not weary all the people there, for the people of Ai are few."
- ⁴ So about three thousand men went up there from the people, but they fled before the men of Ai.
- ⁵ And the men of Ai struck down about thirty-six men, for they chased them from before the gate as far as Shebarim, and struck them down on the descent; therefore the hearts of the people melted and became like water.
- ⁶ Then Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their heads.
- ⁷ And Joshua said, "Alas, LORD GOD, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all—to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Oh, that we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of the Jordan!

⁸ "O LORD, what shall I say when Israel turns its back before its enemies?"

⁹ "For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will You do for Your great name?"

¹⁰ So the LORD said to Joshua: "Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face?"

¹¹ "Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff.

¹² "Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you.

¹³ "Get up, sanctify the people, and say, 'Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, because thus says the LORD God of Israel: "There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you."'

¹⁴ 'In the morning therefore you shall be brought according to your tribes. And it shall be that the tribe which the LORD takes shall come according to families; and the family which the LORD takes shall come by households; and the household which the LORD takes shall come man by man.

¹⁵ 'Then it shall be that he who is taken with the accursed thing shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he has done a disgraceful thing in Israel.'"

¹⁶ So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel by their tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken.

¹⁷ He brought the clan of Judah, and he took the family of the Zarhites; and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man, and Zabdi was taken.

¹⁸ Then he brought his household man by man, and Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.

¹⁹ Now Joshua said to Achan, "My son, I beg you, give glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me."

²⁰ And Achan answered Joshua and said, "Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I have done:

²¹ "When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it."

²² So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver under it.

²³ And they took them from the midst of the tent, brought them to Joshua and to all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD.

²⁴ Then Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the garment, the wedge of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent, and all that he had, and they brought them to the Valley of Achor.

²⁵ And Joshua said, "Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day." So all Israel stoned him

with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones.

²⁶ Then they raised over him a great heap of stones, still there to this day. So the LORD turned from the fierceness of His anger. Therefore the name of that place has been called the Valley of Achor to this day.

Introduction

Before his death, Moses instructed the Israelites about the importance of obeying God. He declared, “Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth” (Deuteronomy 28:1). Conversely, he warned, “But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you” (v. 15). Israel learned the truthfulness of Moses’ words shortly after the battle of Jericho.

Before the walls of Jericho fell, Joshua charged his army to “abstain from the accursed things, lest you become accursed when you take of the accursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it” (Joshua 6:18). Despite this prohibition, a man named Achan “took of the accursed things; so the anger of the LORD burned against the children of Israel” (7:1). To understand why Achan’s actions were so awful, we must recognize exactly what he

did wrong. By disobeying Joshua’s command, he disobeyed the Lord’s representative and thus the Lord Himself (cf. 3:7). Moreover, he took things that were supposed to belong only to the Lord, for what the New King James Version calls “accursed things,” the English Standard Version calls “devoted things.” Achan’s sin was more than reckless behavior; he knowingly stole from God. Explaining the situation, David M. Howard Jr. wrote, “So, in taking the devoted things, Achan was acting in a way that broke the fundamental covenantal relationship between God and Israel, and [verses] 11 and 15 make that explicit: Israel had broken God’s covenant. The damage was not repaired until the cause of the betrayal of trust had been removed from the nation (v. 26); then God’s anger abated” (*Joshua*, 188).

As our lesson text will show, Achan’s behavior affected not only himself but also the entire nation. Mark S. Ziese observed, “This example is consistent with a larger reading of the Old Testament that demonstrates how the covenant life of the people of God is critical of any view that elevates the wants of self above the needs of the community. Israel is never called to be self-indulgent, self-protecting, self-accumulating, or self-absorbed. On the other hand, Israel is called to be relational, invested in community, and preoccupied with the lives of one’s neighbors” (*Joshua*, 161). Achan’s sin carried a steep penalty. Rather than being shocked by God’s reaction to his sin or by Israel’s punishment for it, we should relearn the truth of Paul’s declaration to

the Romans: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (6:23). It is little wonder God wants His people to disassociate themselves from those living in open rebellion (cf. 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Corinthians 6:17).

Defeated at Ai

(Joshua 7:1-11)

Fresh on the heels of its spectacular victory over Jericho, Israel turned its attention to the next phase of the conquest—the city of Ai. As he had done before the nation approached Jericho, “Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth Aven, on the east side of Bethel, and spoke to them, saying, ‘Go up and spy out the country.’ So the men went up and spied out Ai” (Joshua 7:2). When the spies returned to Joshua, they reported, “Do not let all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not weary all the people there, for the people of Ai are few” (v. 3).

Joshua took the advice of his scouts, but the Israelites “fled before the men of Ai” (Joshua 7:4). The confident army of Israel suffered a serious defeat. In fact, “the men of Ai struck down about thirty-six men, for they chased them from before the gate as far as Shebarim, and struck them down on the descent; therefore the hearts of the people melted and became like water” (v. 5; cf. 2:11; 5:1). The overconfident invaders did not expect the attack on Ai to end in defeat. Ironically, readers of the book

of Joshua know what neither Joshua nor the bulk of his people knew: Israel did not suffer at the hands of Ai because of poor military strategy; Israel was defeated because sin had entered its camp. Because Achan took what belonged to God, “the anger of the LORD burned against the children of Israel” (v. 1). “Readers know about the crime, the criminal, and God’s fury (v. 1), but Joshua and Israel remain in the dark, oblivious to the readers’ sense of foreboding. They only learn about them when—to their great surprise!—the foreboding becomes an unhappy reality in unexpected events at Ai” (Hubbard, *The NIV Application Commentary: Joshua*, 222).

In response to the tragedy, “Joshua tore his clothes, and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until evening” (Joshua 7:6). In his great sorrow, he wondered why God had allowed Israel to cross the Jordan and suffer such a defeat (v. 7). Additionally, he asked what he could say to the nation now that it was running from, rather than toward, its enemies (v. 8). Expressing his fear, he declared, “For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will You do for Your great name?” (v. 9). Lest we chastise Joshua for these words, it should be remembered that he did not know why Israel had suffered such a defeat. Dale Ralph Davis also correctly noted, “This complaint is different from Israel’s unbelieving complaints during the wilderness wanderings (Numbers 14:1-3; Deuteronomy 1:27ff.). These are words of despair,

not unbelief. Joshua complains to God in prayer; complaining to God is not the same as complaining about God” (*Joshua*, 61). Regardless, God responded by clearly identifying the problem: “Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them” (*Joshua* 7:11).

Searching the Camp

(*Joshua* 7:12-21)

Explaining why Israel was defeated, the Lord continued, “Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you” (*Joshua* 7:12). Sin had not only occurred among the people but also remained. Israel was tainted by sin, and God would not help the nation until the problem was removed. Consequently, the Lord charged Joshua, “Get up, sanctify the people, and say, ‘Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, because thus says the LORD God of Israel: “There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you”” (v. 13).

As He had done previously when identifying Moses and Aaron as His chosen representatives and rejecting Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (cf. Numbers 16:16-35), the Lord demonstrated His ability to distinguish between the guilty and the innocent. He

called for the Israelites to present themselves before Him by tribe, families, and households (v. 14). He then stated His intention to punish the troubler once he was revealed and said, “Then it shall be that he who is taken with the accursed thing shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he has done a disgraceful thing in Israel” (v. 15).

Upon hearing the Lord’s plan, Joshua did exactly as he was instructed. Among the tribes, Judah was identified. From that tribe, “the family of the Zarahites” was chosen. From that family, “Zabdi was taken.” Eventually, “Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah” was exposed as the culprit (*Joshua* 7:17-18). One can only imagine Achan’s anxiety as it became clear he would not escape God’s judgment. Nevertheless, he did not confess until Joshua confronted him (vv. 19-21). What perhaps seemed a small thing to Achan was not. Individuals had died because he disregarded God’s instructions.

Destruction

(*Joshua* 7:22-26)

Messengers dispatched by Joshua hurried to Achan’s tent and verified his confession. The goods he stole from Jericho were indeed hidden there, so the men “took them from the midst of the tent, brought them to Joshua and to all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD” (*Joshua* 7:23). The

evidence did not lie. Achan was guilty as charged. Consequently, he, his family, and his possessions were all taken to the Valley of Achor (i.e., the Valley of Trouble). According to Joseph Coleson, “The careful listing (7:24) of persons, animals, and all Achan’s possessions, including the stolen items, has the tone of a legal statement setting forth the final disposition of a case. Achan and all that pertained to him had been compromised by their contact with the stolen items that were supposed to be devoted to God” (*Joshua*, 85).

The only thing left was for Achan to be punished. Joshua oversaw his execution and declared, “Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day” (*Joshua* 7:25). At that point, “all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones” (v. 25). Then the nation “raised over him a great heap of stones” (v. 26). Like the memorial erected after Israel crossed the Jordan (4:1-8), the stones placed over Achan would remind the nation of God. The former memorial pointed to God’s faithfulness; the latter memorial pointed to God’s fierceness. Those who obey God will be blessed, but those who disobey God will be punished.

Applications

- Although it would be easy to blame Israel’s defeat at Ai on their failure to consult with God before their attack, this is not the point of *Joshua* 7. The nation was defeated and lives were lost because of God’s anger over one individual’s sin and the complicity of

others (*Joshua* 7:1). We must not forget the negative consequences the actions of one person can produce. Paul made this point when he asked the Corinthians, “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” (1 *Corinthians* 5:6).

- When the apostle Paul described God to the Romans, he wrote, “Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off” (11:22). If anything, the scene described in *Joshua* 7 supports this claim. God cared for and protected Israel as long as they obeyed Him, but when they rejected Him, He allowed them to be defeated.

Questions

1. What sin had the children of Israel committed (*Joshua* 7:1)?
2. What city did Israel attack after defeating Jericho (*Joshua* 7:3-4)?
3. How many Israelites died in the ill-fated effort (*Joshua* 7:5)?

4. How did Joshua react to the defeat (Joshua 7:6-9)?
5. What did God instruct the Israelites to do in order to identify the one guilty of sin (Joshua 7:14-15)?
6. What had the guilty individual done (Joshua 7:20-21)?
7. What eventually happened to the guilty individual (Joshua 7:25)?

Discussion

1. What does this text teach us about the impact one individual's actions can have upon others?
2. Why do you think God punished the guilty individual's family?

3. How is Joshua's complaint to God in Joshua 7:7-9 different from the complaints issued by the Israelites in the wilderness (e.g., Numbers 14:1-3)?
4. What does this text teach us about the nature of God?

Victory at Ai Now Possible

Joshua 8:3-25

³ So Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai; and Joshua chose thirty thousand mighty men of valor and sent them away by night.

⁴ And he commanded them, saying: "Behold, you shall lie in ambush against the city, behind the city. Do not go very far from the city, but all of you be ready.

⁵ "Then I and all the people who are with me will approach the city; and it will come about, when they come out against us as at the first, that we shall flee before them.

⁶ "For they will come out after us till we have drawn them from the city, for they will say, 'They are fleeing before us as at the first.' Therefore we will flee before them.

⁷ "Then you shall rise from the ambush and seize the city, for the LORD your God will deliver it into your hand.

⁸ "And it will be, when you have taken the city, that you shall set the city on fire. According to the commandment of the LORD you shall do. See, I have commanded you."

⁹ Joshua therefore sent them out; and they went to lie in ambush, and stayed between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of Ai; but Joshua lodged that night among the people.

¹⁰ Then Joshua rose up early in the morning and mustered the people, and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai.

¹¹ And all the people of war who were with him went up and drew near; and they came before the city and

camped on the north side of Ai. Now a valley lay between them and Ai.

¹² So he took about five thousand men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city.

¹³ And when they had set the people, all the army that was on the north of the city, and its rear guard on the west of the city, Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley.

¹⁴ Now it happened, when the king of Ai saw it, that the men of the city hurried and rose early and went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at an appointed place before the plain. But he did not know that there was an ambush against him behind the city.

¹⁵ And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness.

¹⁶ So all the people who were in Ai were called together to pursue them. And they pursued Joshua and were drawn away from the city.

¹⁷ There was not a man left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel. So they left the city open and pursued Israel.

¹⁸ Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Stretch out the spear that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand." And Joshua stretched out the spear that was in his hand toward the city.

¹⁹ So those in ambush arose quickly out of their place; they ran as soon as he had stretched out his hand, and they entered the city and took it, and hurried to set the city on fire.

²⁰ And when the men of Ai looked behind them, they saw, and behold, the smoke of the city ascended to heaven. So they had no power to flee this way or that way, and the

people who had fled to the wilderness turned back on the pursuers.

²¹ Now when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city and that the smoke of the city ascended, they turned back and struck down the men of Ai.

²² Then the others came out of the city against them; so they were caught in the midst of Israel, some on this side and some on that side. And they struck them down, so that they let none of them remain or escape.

²³ But the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him to Joshua.

²⁴ And it came to pass when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness where they pursued them, and when they all had fallen by the edge of the sword until they were consumed, that all the Israelites returned to Ai and struck it with the edge of the sword.

²⁵ So it was that all who fell that day, both men and women, were twelve thousand—all the people of Ai.

Introduction

After the men of Ai initially routed the Israelite army, Joshua expressed the discouragement the entire nation likely felt. He asked God, “O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back before its enemies? For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will You do for Your great name?” (Joshua 7:8-9). Joshua knew God promised to give Israel the land, and he knew God had acted mightily in delivering Jericho to His people. Nevertheless, he did not understand how the defeat at

Ai fit within the scope of God’s promise. From his perspective, it looked like God had forsaken Israel.

But God did not forsake Israel; Israel forsook God. Unbeknownst to Joshua, Achan had secretly taken forbidden items from Jericho. Aware of this, God held the entire nation accountable. Explaining, He declared, “Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived” (Joshua 7:11). He then announced what had to occur before He again defended His people: “There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you” (v. 13). Joshua did as God instructed and after properly identifying the offender, punished him for his sin (v. 25).

With the sin problem removed from Israel’s camp, the nation turned its attention back to the conquest of the land. Ai, which had seemed so vulnerable (cf. Joshua 7:3), now loomed large. This time, however, the plan to attack the city would come from the Lord. As God had given Jericho to Israel (cf. 6:2), He promised to provide Ai. Revealing this to Joshua, He stated, “Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; take all the people of war with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land” (8:1). Joshua had no reason to doubt whether Israel would defeat its enemies, for the Lord was again fighting for His people.

As He had done with Jericho, God set the battle plan for Ai. Rather than taking only a few soldiers to the city (as the spies had suggested to Joshua previously—Joshua 7:3), the Lord instructed Joshua to involve the entire army. But the attack would not be a straightforward assault with the entire force, for God also told Joshua, “Lay an ambush for the city behind it” (8:2). This detail is included lest we think Israel’s victory resulted from ingenious military strategy. The plan belonged to the Lord, and the subsequent victory would be His. Israel would conquer Ai with God’s help, not without Him.

Strategy Set

(Joshua 8:3-13)

The Lord instructed Joshua to ambush the city of Ai, and Joshua did not hesitate to set the Lord’s plan into motion. After selecting “thirty thousand mighty men of valor,” Joshua sent them by night, presumably so they would not be noticed, and commanded them, “Behold, you shall lie in ambush against the city, behind the city. Do not go very far from the city, but all of you be ready. Then I and all the people who are with me will approach the city; and it will come about, when they come out against us as at the first, that we shall flee before them. For they will come out after us till we have drawn them from the city, for they will say, ‘They are fleeing before us as at the first.’ Therefore we will flee before them. Then you shall

rise from the ambush and seize the city, for the LORD your God will deliver it into your hand” (Joshua 8:3-7).

Despite the cleverness of the plan, Joshua left no doubt God was the one at work. He was giving the city to His people. The plan God provided actually used Israel’s previously misguided attempt to take the city to their advantage. The soldiers of Ai would think Israel was attacking as it had done before. Instead, a trap was being laid. Once the soldiers of Ai left the city in pursuit of Joshua’s army, the ambush force was to enter Ai and “set the city on fire” (Joshua 8:8). Most importantly, they were to do this because it was “the commandment of the LORD” (v. 8).

Herein lies the point of the text: Israel’s success depended on submission to God’s will. Summarizing what the people learned from the events at Ai, Trent C. Butler wrote, “They learned what it meant to be the covenant people of God. Covenant meant more than simply accepting promises of God to multiply the nation and extend her power in the land. It meant more than going through the ritual of circumcision and the celebration of the yearly festivals. Being people of God meant accepting certain obligations set down by God. It meant adopting the divinely ordered life style. It meant taking each decision of life in the light of divine leadership, not in the light of personal self-confidence” (*Joshua*, 88).

Having relayed the battle plan, God prepared to enact it. Joshua sent the forces chosen for the ambush away and took the rest of the army before the city. The event is restated in Joshua 8:11-13, so the reader

will have a clear understanding of what is about to take place. One issue that has troubled scholars is the number of soldiers in the ambush party. Was it composed of thirty thousand men (Joshua 8:3) or five thousand men (v. 12)? Some think the difference is the result of a copyist's error (Howard, *Joshua*, 203). Others believe the smaller number could refer to "the lead members of the ambush party" (Mathews, *Joshua*, 70). Davis suggested another possibility: "It seems preferable ... to think of two ambush groups of 30,000 and 5,000 respectively. Perhaps Joshua intended one unit to send Ai up in smoke (v. 8) and the other to stifle any further assistance from Bethel (v. 17)" (*Joshua*, 68). Regardless, the trap was set.

The Attack

(*Joshua 8:14-21*)

The battle played out exactly as Joshua suggested. Ai's king rallied his troops and "went out against Israel to battle" (Joshua 8:14). Unaware of the "ambush against him behind the city" (v. 14), the king of Ai and his troops went out to battle Israel. But instead of meeting the opposing army, "Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness" (v. 15). Sensing the opportunity to destroy the invading army, the soldiers from Ai, joined by men from Bethel, pursued the fleeing Israelites (v. 16). In fact, "There was not a man left in Ai or Bethel who did not go out after Israel. So they left the city open and pursued Israel"

(v. 17). The last detail is the most important. In their haste to destroy Israel, the people of Ai did not take precautions to secure their city. Ai was defenseless, and its gates were open.

At this point, the Lord instructed Joshua, "Stretch out the spear that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand" (Joshua 8:18). Joshua did as he was told, and "those in ambush arose quickly out of their place; they ran as soon as he had stretched out his hand, and they entered the city and took it, and hurried to set the city on fire" (v. 19). Whether this was a prearranged sign between the groups is debated. Nevertheless, the text makes it clear the plan came from the Lord. As Woudstra noted, "At this point in the battle the Lord takes charge directly. Just as he did in [verse] 2, where specific directions were given for the laying of the ambush, so here the Lord orders Joshua to extend the javelin toward Ai. ... Just as the javelin was in Joshua's hand, so the city toward which it was extended was in Israel's hand (v. 18)" (*The Book of Joshua*, 141).

Victory

(*Joshua 8:22-25*)

The strategy worked as anticipated, and the men of Ai were trapped between the forces led by Joshua and those who had burned the city (Joshua 8:22). Both Israelite groups then focused their attention on their enemy. Joshua's forces stopped retreating and turned back to fight, and the men from the ambush also

closed in on the forces of Ai. The subsequent victory was overwhelming, and Israel completely destroyed the soldiers of Ai. Only the king of Ai was taken captive (v. 23), yet his fate was also sealed. Joshua “hanged [the king] on a tree until evening. And as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his corpse down from the tree, cast it at the entrance of the gate of the city, and raise over it a great heap of stones” (v. 29).

After the enemy army was destroyed, Ai, like Jericho, was reduced to rubble (Joshua 8:24; cf. 6:24). But unlike Jericho, God allowed the Israelites to loot the city (8:2). Thus, “the livestock and the spoil of that city Israel took as booty for themselves” (v. 27). Regarding this, Davis observed, “There had been precedent for this (Deuteronomy 2:34-35). How needless Achan’s covetousness was (7:21)! When Yahweh’s priority is recognized and satisfied (6:18-19), he then gives to his people. God never seeks to impoverish his people. It is only as his people lose sight of his generosity, his provision, his goodness, that the cancer of covetousness consumes them” (*Joshua*, 69).

Applications

- It would be easy to attribute the victory over Ai to Israel’s ability to execute a well-arranged battle plan. To do so, however, would be a mistake. Israel did not conquer Ai because they devised an ingenious scheme; Israel conquered Ai because they followed the Lord’s plan (Joshua 8:1-2). We must never get to the point where we think our success depends

more on our own planning or ability than on God’s help. We may plant and water, but God provides the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6).

- After the battle was won, two memorials were constructed. One was placed over the ruins of Ai (Joshua 8:28); the other was placed over the grave of Ai’s king (v. 29). God did not want His people to forget what had taken place. Woudstra put it nicely: “The Bible presents a reliable record of what the God of history did in space and time. For this reason the Israel of Joshua’s days and later had good reason to treasure the memories attached to the monuments of the past” (*The Book of Joshua*, 143).

Questions

1. What did God instruct His people to do (Joshua 8:2)?
2. What did Joshua intend for his troops to do when the soldiers of Ai pursued them (Joshua 8:5)?
3. What were the Israelites supposed to do to Ai (Joshua 8:8)?

4. What other city joined with Ai in the fight against Israel (Joshua 8:17)?

5. What did the Lord tell Joshua to do “toward Ai” (Joshua 8:18)?

6. Who did the Israelites bring to Joshua (Joshua 8:23)?

7. What did the people do with the spoils found in Ai (Joshua 8:27)?

Discussion

1. What can we learn about God from this text?

2. What steps can we take to keep ourselves from taking more credit for our successes than we deserve?

3. What do you think the Israelites learned from their encounters with Ai?

Gibeon's Treaty

Joshua 9:3-21

- ³ But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai,
- ⁴ they worked craftily, and went and pretended to be ambassadors. And they took old sacks on their donkeys, old wineskins torn and mended,
- ⁵ old and patched sandals on their feet, and old garments on themselves; and all the bread of their provision was dry and moldy.
- ⁶ And they went to Joshua, to the camp at Gilgal, and said to him and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us."
- ⁷ Then the men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you dwell among us; so how can we make a covenant with you?"
- ⁸ But they said to Joshua, "We are your servants." And Joshua said to them, "Who are you, and where do you come from?"
- ⁹ So they said to him: "From a very far country your servants have come, because of the name of the LORD your God; for we have heard of His fame, and all that He did in Egypt,
- ¹⁰ "and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan—to Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who was at Ashtaroth.
- ¹¹ "Therefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spoke to us, saying, 'Take provisions with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say to them,

- "We are your servants; now therefore, make a covenant with us."
- ¹² "This bread of ours we took hot for our provision from our houses on the day we departed to come to you. But now look, it is dry and moldy.
- ¹³ "And these wineskins which we filled were new, and see, they are torn; and these our garments and our sandals have become old because of the very long journey."
- ¹⁴ Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions; but they did not ask counsel of the LORD.
- ¹⁵ So Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them to let them live; and the rulers of the congregation swore to them.
- ¹⁶ And it happened at the end of three days, after they had made a covenant with them, that they heard that they were their neighbors who dwelt near them.
- ¹⁷ Then the children of Israel journeyed and came to their cities on the third day. Now their cities were Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kirjath Jearim.
- ¹⁸ But the children of Israel did not attack them, because the rulers of the congregation had sworn to them by the LORD God of Israel. And all the congregation complained against the rulers.
- ¹⁹ Then all the rulers said to all the congregation, "We have sworn to them by the LORD God of Israel; now therefore, we may not touch them.
- ²⁰ "This we will do to them: We will let them live, lest wrath be upon us because of the oath which we swore to them."
- ²¹ And the rulers said to them, "Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers for all the congregation, as the rulers had promised them."

Introduction

Before Israel crossed the Jordan and entered Canaan, God charged Joshua, "Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them" (Joshua 1:6). Strength and courage were needed because the nation would have to drive the pagan inhabitants from the land. But even this daunting task would be conducted with God's help (3:10). Israel was not alone. God's power and wisdom were at its disposal.

News of Israel's victories over Jericho and Ai spread throughout Canaan. Not surprisingly, the kings of some of the nations inhabiting the land "gathered together to fight with Joshua and Israel with one accord" (Joshua 9:2). But another group approached the invading Israelites in a different way. The Gibeonites acted as if they had traveled from a far country and tricked Joshua into making a treaty of peace with them (v. 15). They orchestrated this ruse because they learned God instructed Moses to destroy the inhabitants of the land (v. 24). How they came by this information is not revealed in the account. Nevertheless, it was accurate, for Moses charged the people, "When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, ... and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them" (Deuteronomy 7:1-2). The Gibeonites'

deception also indicates they possessed knowledge of how God allowed Israel to make peace with "all the cities which are very far from you" (20:15; cf. Joshua 9:6, 9). They had done their homework.

The real focus of Joshua 9, however, is not on the ingenuity of the Gibeonites. It is, instead, centered on the failure of the Israelite leaders to seek God's wisdom concerning the situation. Reporting this, Joshua 9:14 declares, "Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions; but they did not ask counsel of the LORD." The irony of the entire situation is that Israel had recently defeated Ai using a battle plan prescribed by the Lord that enabled them to trick and subsequently defeat their enemy (cf. 8:2). Because they followed God's counsel, they were able to trick the people of Ai; but because they refused to seek God's counsel, they were tricked by the people of Gibeon.

As we study this account, we are reminded of the need to rely upon God even in the situations where we think we have things under control. If the story of the Gibeonites teaches us anything, it teaches things are not always what they seem. Even so, God remains ready and willing to provide the wisdom we need to help us face the difficulties of life. Stressing this point, James wrote, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5).

Deceit

(Joshua 9:3-6)

Gibeon was located seven miles from Ai and approximately fifteen miles from Gilgal, where Israel was encamped. Although Gibeon was larger than Ai and inhabited by mighty men (Joshua 10:2), its residents “heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai” (9:3) and were evidently troubled. Rather than joining with the other Canaanite nations in league against Israel, the Gibeonites put forth great effort to obtain a treaty of peace. Knowing Israel was expected to fight against and destroy their people—the Hivites (v. 7; cf. Deuteronomy 7:1), “they worked craftily, and went and pretended to be ambassadors” (Joshua 9:4).

The craftiness of the Gibeonites is on display in the disguises they used to approach Joshua and the Israelites. According to Joshua 9:4-5, “they took old sacks on their donkeys, old wineskins torn and mended, old and patched sandals on their feet, and old garments on themselves; and all the bread of their provisions was dry and moldy.” What a weary-looking lot they must have been! Kenneth A. Mathews noted, “The plot is carefully thought out, centering on items typically used for a journey. Ironically, worn-out clothing and moldy bread are the opposite of God’s provisions for Israel in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 8:2-4; 29:5-6)” (*Joshua*, 82).

Upon entering Israel’s camp at Gilgal, the Gibeonites approached Joshua and advanced their

deceit: “We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us” (Joshua 9:6). The type of covenant or treaty requested was likely what is known today as a suzerain/vassal treaty. David M. Howard Jr. explained that the treaty established “a relationship between a superior party and an inferior one. ... The treaty evidently included provisions of mutual defense as well, because the Israelites came to the Gibeonites’ defense when they were attacked (10:1-8). It also appears to have included provisions for punishment of either party if it violated the terms of the treaty, because David delivered seven descendants of Saul over to the Gibeonites for punishment when it was pointed out to him that Saul had earlier tried to annihilate the Gibeonites, thereby breaking the treaty (2 Samuel 21:1-8)” (*Joshua*, 219). Regardless, readers of the narrative know immediately what the Israelite leaders did not: the Gibeonites are attempting to secure a peace treaty under false pretense. They looked like they were from a far country—which would have given them legitimate grounds to ask for peace (Deuteronomy 20:10-18), but they were not.

An Elaborate Scheme

(Joshua 9:7-13)

Despite the efforts the Gibeonites made to deceive the Israelites, the men of Israel initially questioned their truthfulness and asked, “Perhaps you dwell among us; so how can we make a covenant with you?” (Joshua 9:7). This response reveals the Israelites knew

they were not to make treaties with the inhabitants of the land. The Lord previously warned against such, "Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst" (Exodus 34:12).

Undeterred by the questioning of their veracity, the Gibeonites responded, "We are your servants" (Joshua 9:8). Through this response, they sought to defuse the tense situation. If they were truly Israel's servants, they were inferior. Israel had nothing to fear from them. Even so, Joshua pressed them for more information about their identity and background. The Gibeonites answered, "From a very far country your servants have come, because of the name of the LORD your God; for we have heard of His fame, and all that He did in Egypt, and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan—to Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who was at Ashtaroth" (vv. 9-10).

Amazingly, the Gibeonites mentioned some of the same things Rahab told the spies in Jericho (cf. Joshua 2:10). But unlike Rahab, who was sincere, their words were duplicitous. Their real concern was for their safety. Explaining, Dale Ralph Davis wrote, "What really moved Gibeon was what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai (v. 3). But, craftily (v. 4), they don't mention Jericho or Ai to Joshua. After all, they are from 'a very distant land' (v. 9) and so couldn't possibly have heard of these latest developments! In a very distant land they could be expected to know the old, old story but hardly the latest news" (*Joshua*, 79).

The elaborate scheme of the Gibeonites involved directing the attention of the Israelites to their dry and moldy bread, which they claimed was hot when they embarked on their journey (Joshua 9:12). They also drew attention to their wineskins, which were torn, and their worn-out garments and sandals (v. 13). Their appearances seemed to match their story.

Joshua Made a Covenant

(Joshua 9:14-21)

In an attempt to verify what they were being told, some of the Israelites evidently tasted the Gibeonites provisions (Joshua 9:14). Sadly, this was done instead of seeking the Lord's counsel. Hubbard remarked, "They sample the alleged provisions but (alas) do not seek Yahweh's advice (lit., 'mouth') on the matter (v. 14; cf. Isaiah 30:2). Their actions naively trust the matter to their human senses rather than to divine guidance" (*The NIV Application Commentary: Joshua*, 286). Confident the Gibeonites were telling the truth, Joshua acted with the evident approval of the leaders and granted what the visitors requested—a peace treaty (Joshua 9:15).

After the covenant was in place between the two groups, Israel learned the Gibeonites "were their neighbors who dwelt near them" (Joshua 9:16). Further investigation brought the Israelites to the cities of the Gibeonites (v. 17). Nevertheless, Israel held up the covenant that had been established and did not attack (v. 18). When "the congregation

complained against the rulers” about the matter (v. 18), they were told, “We have sworn to them by the LORD God of Israel; now therefore, we may not touch them. This we will do to them: We will let them live, lest wrath be upon us because of the oath which we swore to them” (vv. 19-20). This does not mean the Gibeonites escaped without consequence, for they were forced to serve Israel as “woodcutters and water carriers” (v. 21).

Applications

- The trickery of the Gibeonites reminds us that appearances can be deceiving. Individuals can claim to be one thing and actually be something quite different. Our task, as Christians, is to live up to our profession. Jesus urged His listeners to do this when He declared, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). And Paul stressed the importance of practicing what we preach when he wrote, “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:27).

- We must guard against the temptation to rely more on our own abilities and less on the help God offers. The Israelites did this when they investigated the Gibeonites’ claims but failed to seek God’s counsel (Joshua 9:14). Rather than seeking to handle the trials of life on our own, we should rely upon God (cf. 1 Peter 5:7).

Questions

1. Why did the Gibeonites seek to deceive Joshua and obtain a treaty of peace (Joshua 9:3)?
2. What did the Gibeonites tell Joshua when they arrived at Gilgal (Joshua 9:6)?
3. What events did the Gibeonites reference when speaking to the Israelite leaders (Joshua 9:9-10)?
4. What evidence did the Gibeonites offer when questioned about where they were from (Joshua 9:12-13)?
5. What did the men of Israel fail to do (Joshua 9:14)?
6. Why did the Israelites complain against their leaders (Joshua 9:18)?

7. What tasks would be assigned to the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:21)?

Discussion

1. Why do we sometimes fail to seek God's counsel?
2. Why do you think the Israelites kept the covenant they made with the Gibeonites?
3. What steps can we take to make sure we are genuinely seeking to live as Christians (rather than merely appearing to do so)?

The Sun Stands Still

Joshua 10:1-14

¹ Now it came to pass when Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem heard how Joshua had taken Ai and had utterly destroyed it—as he had done to Jericho and its king, so he had done to Ai and its king—and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel and were among them, ² that they feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, like one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all its men were mighty.

³ Therefore Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem sent to Hoham king of Hebron, Piram king of Jarmuth, Japhia king of Lachish, and Debir king of Eglon, saying,

⁴ “Come up to me and help me, that we may attack Gibeon, for it has made peace with Joshua and with the children of Israel.”

⁵ Therefore the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon, gathered together and went up, they and all their armies, and camped before Gibeon and made war against it.

⁶ And the men of Gibeon sent to Joshua at the camp at Gilgal, saying, “Do not forsake your servants; come up to us quickly, save us and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites who dwell in the mountains have gathered together against us.”

⁷ So Joshua ascended from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valor.

⁸ And the LORD said to Joshua, “Do not fear them, for I have delivered them into your hand; not a man of them shall stand before you.”

⁹ Joshua therefore came upon them suddenly, having marched all night from Gilgal.

¹⁰ So the LORD routed them before Israel, killed them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, chased them along the road that goes to Beth Horon, and struck them down as far as Azekah and Makkedah.

¹¹ And it happened, as they fled before Israel and were on the descent of Beth Horon, that the LORD cast down large hailstones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died. There were more who died from the hailstones than the children of Israel killed with the sword.

¹² Then Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel: “Sun, stand still over Gibeon; And Moon, in the Valley of Aijalon.”

¹³ So the sun stood still, And the moon stopped, Till the people had revenge Upon their enemies. Is this not written in the Book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day.

¹⁴ And there has been no day like that, before it or after it, that the LORD heeded the voice of a man; for the LORD fought for Israel.

Introduction

Israel’s presence in Canaan did not go unnoticed by its inhabitants. Word of what had taken place at both Jericho and Ai spread throughout the land, and the kings of the various tribes and cities decided something must be done to stop the invaders. Although

the resolve of the various nations to join together and fight against Joshua is reported in Joshua 9:1-2, the following chapter, Joshua 10, records a specific attempt by five Amorite kings to attack the city of Gibeon, with which Israel had made peace.

The strategic importance of Gibeon and a likely reason for the attack lies in Gibeon’s location. Evidently the most prominent of a four-city confederation—which included Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kirjath Jearim (Joshua 9:17), Gibeon was located in the middle of Canaan. Emphasizing the significance of this point, Dale Ralph Davis noted, “Now the Gibeonite confederation in the center and west had concluded peace with Israel. Here was a rectangle of four key sites now under Joshua’s control. Along with Israel’s defeat of Jericho and Ai, this meant that Israel had control of the strategic central plateau (later to belong to the tribe of Benjamin); Joshua had cut a swath right across the midsection of Canaan. He had driven a wedge between north and south” (*Joshua*, 86).

Regardless, the proximity of Gibeon to Jerusalem (located six miles to the northwest) and his knowledge of what Israel had done to both Jericho and Ai provoked the king of Jerusalem, Adoni-Zedek, to rouse his fellow Amorite kings to attack Gibeon. Because “they feared greatly” (Joshua 10:2), they decided to attack before Israel fortified the city. Regarding this effort, Woudstra observed, “This assault, it should be recognized, is the first serious attempt at resistance on the part of Canaanite kings

to be recorded in Joshua. The ensuing battle will therefore be a crucial test of the Lord's faithfulness toward his people as promised in the words recorded in 1:3, 5" (*The Book of Joshua*, 170).

The event also demonstrates how far Joshua was willing to go to keep his promise to the Gibeonites (cf. Joshua 9:15). Despite being initially deceived by them, he responded when the Gibeonites asked for help and mustered the army of Israel. Reporting this, Joshua 10:7-9 declares, "So Joshua ascended from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valor. And the LORD said to Joshua, 'Do not fear them, for I have delivered them into your hand; not a man of them shall stand before you.' Joshua therefore came upon them suddenly, having marched all night from Gilgal."

Perhaps the most important component of this section, and certainly the most memorable, is the Lord's response to the prayer Joshua uttered during the battle—He caused the sun to stand still at Joshua's request (Joshua 10:12-13)! Afterward, the text reports, "And there has been no day like that, before it or after it, that the LORD heeded the voice of a man; for the LORD fought for Israel" (v. 14).

Conspiracy Planned

(*Joshua 10:1-5*)

Adoni-Zedek, the king of Jerusalem, not only heard about what Israel had done to both Jericho and Ai but also learned what the invaders had done

to the kings of those cities (Joshua 10:1; cf. 8:29). If anything, his reason for fighting against Gibeon, Israel's new ally, was personal. His own fate and the fate of his city were at stake. Explaining the problem, Mark S. Ziese wrote, "Such an alliance generates 'great fear' or perhaps an 'icy respect' as Gibeon is a substantial place, a significant center, like a city that has a chief. It is populated with good fighters, and controls all northern approaches to Adoni-Zedek's own chieftom" (*Joshua*, 212).

Consequently, Adoni-Zedek conspired with other Amorite kings to combine forces and attack Gibeon. He requested, "Come up to me and help me, that we may attack Gibeon, for it has made peace with Joshua and with the children of Israel" (Joshua 10:4). In response, the four kings joined their efforts with his. Noting this, Joshua 10:5 states, "Therefore the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon, gathered together and went up, they and all their armies, and camped before Gibeon and made war against it." If Israel was to be held at bay, it could not be allowed to use Gibeon as a base from which to launch military operations. Consequently, Adoni-Zedek "takes drastic measures, calling together the major city-state chieftains of the south" (Butler, *Joshua*, 115).

God Assures His Presence

(Joshua 10:6-8)

When the Amorite kings gathered to attack Gibeon, a distress signal was sent to Joshua. The Gibeonites begged, “Do not forsake your servants; come up to us quickly, save us and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites who dwell in the mountains have gathered together against us” (Joshua 10:6). Their plea for help indicates the covenant made between Israel and Gibeon involved more than Israel agreeing to spare the city from destruction. Protection was also included. The urgency of the situation is seen in the wording of the request. Howard explained, “The number of verbs found in their appeal—all imperatives—add to this sense of urgency. ... The appeal to ‘deliver’ [or save] is an emphatic imperative—perhaps best rendered as ‘you must deliver us!’—adding even more to this impression” (Joshua, 236).

Rather than ignoring the request or delaying action, “Joshua ascended from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valor” (Joshua 10:7). At this point, God broke His silence and assured Joshua of victory. He declared, “Do not fear them, for I have delivered them into your hand; not a man of them shall stand before you” (v. 8). According to Hubbard, “God invokes the common biblical formula of reassurance (‘Do not be afraid of them,’ v. 8a; cf. v. 25; 8:1; 11:6), the soothing words directly addressing Joshua’s anxiety about the battle ahead. The kings need not terrify

Joshua because their defeat is a done deal (v. 8b): Yahweh has already doomed them to disaster (‘given them into your hand’), making Joshua unstoppable just as he promised him in the beginning (cf. 1:5). One can hardly imagine a more encouraging word for a general and his troops to hear en route to the battlefield” (*The NIV Application Commentary*, 293).

Miraculous Forces

(Joshua 10:9-14)

Armed with God’s support, Joshua and the Israelites marched throughout the night from Gilgal to Gibeon and took their enemy completely by surprise (Joshua 10:9). If the Amorites thought Israel would either arrive too late to be of assistance or refrain from coming altogether, they were mistaken. The covenant Joshua made with the Gibeonites was one he intended to keep. More importantly, however, the Lord Himself fought for Israel and “routed them before Israel, killed them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, chased them along the road that goes to Beth Horon, and struck them down as far as Azekah and Makkedah” (v. 10). Even those who sought to escape the battle suffered from the Lord’s involvement, for He “cast down large hailstones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died” (v. 11).

Although the text does not provide all the information we might want about the Lord’s involvement in the battle, it is clear He empowered and protected the Israelite soldiers as they faced

their enemies. Their swords proved mighty, and the Lord's hailstones proved even mightier. Israel won a great victory over the Amorite kings, as the Lord promised.

An especially memorable component of the story is the Lord's willingness to hear Joshua's prayer and miraculously grant his request. Evidently, Joshua asked God to alter the course of nature to help Israel in its fight against the Amorites. He prayed, "Sun, stand still over Gibeon; and Moon, in the Valley of Aijalon" (Joshua 10:12). In response, "the sun stood still, and the moon stopped till the people had revenge upon their enemies" (v. 13). There is debate about what exactly took place on the occasion.

Some believe Joshua was asking God to simply prolong the day and keep the night from arriving; others argue he was asking God to keep the sun from shining and hold the moon in place, thus adding to the advantage Israel's army gained from their surprising early morning arrival at Gibeon. Whatever occurred, there was no doubt God was at work. Furthermore, His actions occurred in response to Joshua's prayer. So Joshua 10:14 declares, "And there has been no day like that, before it or after it, that the LORD heeded the voice of a man; for the LORD fought for Israel." Joseph Coleson correctly observed, "Scholars and lay students alike have proposed many other solutions, but it can be concluded that not all miracles are understandable (especially this one), whether in purpose, scope, or mechanism. What is clear is the tremendous impression this event made on Israel,

that 'the Lord answered such a prayer' (10:14). Since the sun and moon were Canaanite deities, it would have made a great impression upon the Canaanites, too. Not only was Israel's God dominant over two of Canaan's most powerful gods, but Israel's god even listened to Israel's commander-in-chief and did this great thing in response to Joshua's request" (Joshua, 102).

Applications

- The devotion Joshua and Israel showed to the covenant they made with Gibeon serves to remind us of the importance of keeping our word. Although we will not find ourselves in a situation identical to the Israelites, we do make promises to those around us. Rather than living in a way that causes others to doubt the worth of our word, let us back our words with our actions.
- We can hardly imagine the comfort God's assurance provided Joshua as the Israelites marched from Gilgal to Gibeon. His promise to deliver the Amorites into their hands certainly fueled their efforts. Thankfully, we too have been given wonderful assurances from God (cf. 2 Peter 1:2-4; Hebrews 13:5). Let us be encouraged by them as well!
- God's willingness to hear and answer Joshua's prayer reminds us that we serve a God who is living and active. Thankfully, He still hears and answers the prayers of His children (cf. James 5:16; 1 John 5:14-15).

Questions

1. What Amorite king arranged for a coalition to attack Gibeon (Joshua 10:1)?
2. How many Amorite kings joined in the attack (Joshua 10:5)?
3. To whom did the Gibeonites turn for help (Joshua 10:6)?
4. What did God promise Joshua (Joshua 10:8)?
5. When did Joshua travel from Gilgal to Gibeon (Joshua 10:9)?
6. What unusual means did the Lord use to kill many of the Amorites (Joshua 10:11)?

7. What request did Joshua ask of God (Joshua 10:12)?

Discussion

1. Why do we sometimes have difficulty keeping the promises we make to others? What can we learn about keeping our word from this text?
2. Why do you think the text stresses God's role in the battle?
3. What can we learn about prayer from this text? What steps can we take to increase our dependence on God?

Joshua's Conquests

Joshua 11:1-18

¹ And it came to pass, when Jabin king of Hazor heard these things, that he sent to Jobab king of Madon, to the king of Shimron, to the king of Achshaph,

² and to the kings who were from the north, in the mountains, in the plain south of Chinneroth, in the lowland, and in the heights of Dor on the west,

³ to the Canaanites in the east and in the west, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite in the mountains, and the Hivite below Hermon in the land of Mizpah.

⁴ So they went out, they and all their armies with them, as many people as the sand that is on the seashore in multitude, with very many horses and chariots.

⁵ And when all these kings had met together, they came and camped together at the waters of Merom to fight against Israel.

⁶ But the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid because of them, for tomorrow about this time I will deliver all of them slain before Israel. You shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots with fire."

⁷ So Joshua and all the people of war with him came against them suddenly by the waters of Merom, and they attacked them.

⁸ And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel, who defeated them and chased them to Greater Sidon, to the Brook Misrephoth, and to the Valley of Mizpah eastward; they attacked them until they left none of them remaining.

⁹ So Joshua did to them as the LORD had told him: he hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots with fire.

¹⁰ Joshua turned back at that time and took Hazor, and struck its king with the sword; for Hazor was formerly the head of all those kingdoms.

¹¹ And they struck all the people who were in it with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them. There was none left breathing. Then he burned Hazor with fire.

¹² So all the cities of those kings, and all their kings, Joshua took and struck with the edge of the sword. He utterly destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded.

¹³ But as for the cities that stood on their mounds, Israel burned none of them, except Hazor only, which Joshua burned.

¹⁴ And all the spoil of these cities and the livestock, the children of Israel took as booty for themselves; but they struck every man with the edge of the sword until they had destroyed them, and they left none breathing.

¹⁵ As the LORD had commanded Moses his servant, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did. He left nothing undone of all that the LORD had commanded Moses.

¹⁶ Thus Joshua took all this land: the mountain country, all the South, all the land of Goshen, the lowland, and the Jordan plain—the mountains of Israel and its lowlands,

¹⁷ from Mount Halak and the ascent to Seir, even as far as Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon. He captured all their kings, and struck them down and killed them.

¹⁸ Joshua made war a long time with all those kings.

Introduction

It would be difficult to overestimate Israel's fear and anxiety as they fled from the Egyptians. Although the Lord used the ten plagues to move Pharaoh to release them from bondage, the Egyptian ruler changed his mind and pursued the departing nation. Reporting this, Exodus 14:9 states, "So the Egyptians pursued them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and overtook them camping by the sea beside Pi Hahiroth, before Baal Zephon."

From the perspective of the Israelites, pinned by the six hundred chariots of the Egyptian army against the Red Sea, all hope of escape seemed lost. But God had other plans. Consequently, Moses encouraged the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever" (Exodus 14:13). He then followed the Lord's instructions and "stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided" (v. 21). God delivered Israel from what seemed to be an inescapable situation. The all-powerful Creator reduced the powerful army of Egypt to nothing.

Similar scenarios can be found throughout Scripture. When young David stood before the Philistine giant Goliath, his death seemed certain. But David understood what his fellow Israelites did

not. He was not fighting Goliath; God was. So he declared, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand" (1 Samuel 17:45-46). God did as David promised, and His name was exalted.

God's power is seen most clearly when His people are forced to rely completely upon Him for deliverance—a fact Joshua and the Israelites learned during the conquest of Canaan. When Israel obeyed God and relied upon Him, they were able to enjoy the benefits of His power and protection (cf. Joshua 6:20-21; 10:12-14); when Israel failed to obey God, even insignificant foes proved to be too fierce (cf. 7:2-5).

Our lesson text—Joshua 11:1-18—finds Joshua and Israel facing what appears to be an impossible task. Having defeated their enemies in the southern part of Canaan and having made a covenant with inhabitants in the central portion of the land, they were threatened by a confederation of nations from the north. Importantly, this was not merely an army composed of one group (the Amorites), such as they had faced when they defended the Gibeonites (cf. 10:5). It was instead a massive army of allied nations: the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, and the Hivites (11:3). To make matters worse, the enemies of Israel, who were as numerous "as the sand that is on the seashore," were equipped with "many horses and chariots"

(v. 4). Israel was both outnumbered and lacking the most potent armaments of war. Nevertheless, God was on their side.

A Band of Kings

(Joshua 11:1-5)

The details of Joshua 11:1-5 intend to impress the reader with the dire circumstances Israel faced. Upon hearing Israel had conquered the land in the southern part of Canaan (cf. Joshua 10:40-42), Jabin, the king of Hazor, sent word to the various pagan kings in the northern half of the Promised Land and arranged for them to unite in an effort to defeat Israel (11:1-3). That Jabin was the leader of the coalition seems obvious from both his actions and the prominence of his city. Hazor, which is called “the head of all those kingdoms” (v. 10), “was an important center in the north of Palestine, situated on the ‘way of the sea,’ which ran from Egypt across Megiddo to Qatana in the north. . . . [It] was located to the south and west of Lake Huleh in northern Palestine. Its size was much larger than that of other prominent cities in Canaan” (Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, 187).

The nations joining Jabin’s confederacy came from all across the northern portion of Canaan. Noting the areas from which Jabin’s contacts came, Coleson wrote, “From the Mediterranean in the west to the desert in the east, from the borders of Phoenicia in the north to Beth-shan and northern Mount Ephraim, virtually all the kings and their armies in the north

of Canaan responded to Jabin’s summons, as they were bound to do, whether they were his vassals or his allies” (*Joshua*, 109). The assembled armies were an imposing force. In fact, the kings came with “all their armies with them, as many people as the sand that is on the seashore in multitude, with very many horses and chariots” (Joshua 11:4). Regarding the Canaanites’ possession of chariots, Kenneth A. Mathews observed, “This is the first time the Hebrews face chariots. Their mobility and platform make them adept for battle in the plains” (*Joshua*, 104). Israel seemed to be at a clear disadvantage. Their enemy was larger and better equipped. Additionally, they also appeared organized, for they gathered “at the waters of Merom to fight against Israel” (v. 5). All of this leads the reader to wonder: How could an army proceeding on foot possibly conquer a much more powerful foe?

God’s Intervention

(Joshua 11:6-9)

As He had done previously, God reassured Joshua of His involvement in the matter. He said, “Do not be afraid because of them, for tomorrow about this time I will deliver all of them slain before Israel” (Joshua 11:6). In addition to this assurance, the Lord also instructed Joshua regarding Israel’s strategy, “You shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots with fire” (v. 6). Whether Joshua was aware of the armaments the Canaanites possessed

before this point, he knew what he had to do to be victorious. God was going to conquer Israel's enemy, but the army had to do their part. They were not to acquire the weapons of war used by their enemies; they were to destroy them. Davis concluded, "Yahweh's intention is to teach Israel not to depend on such modes of assistance but to repose in God's help alone" (*Joshua*, 98). This certainly seems to be the point expressed by the psalmist: "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the LORD our God" (Psalm 20:7).

Confident God was behind their efforts, Joshua and the Israelites approached the mustered armies of Canaan and "came against them suddenly by the waters of Merom, and they attacked them" (*Joshua* 11:7). The implication of this statement is that Israel caught their foe by surprise (cf. 10:9). The larger force might have been better armed and was perhaps in the process of organizing itself to move to a location where its strengths could be utilized, but it was not given the liberty to pick the place or time for the battle. This, too, is significant. According to Woudstra, "The area of combat, the district of the waters of Merom, is about 4000 feet above sea level, therefore an area in which chariots would find no room for maneuvering" (*The Book of Joshua*, 191).

The main point of the section, however, is not to praise Israel's sudden attack. That occurred because of the Lord's direction. The battle belonged to the Lord. So the text reports, "And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel, who defeated them

and chased them to Greater Sidon, to the Brook Misrephoth, and the Valley of Mizpah eastward; they attacked them until they left none of them remaining" (*Joshua* 11:8). God was at work, and Israel served as His hands and feet (v. 9).

"None Left Breathing"

(*Joshua* 11:10-18)

Israel's victory over the northern confederation was total. They not only defeated the armies that had gathered but also destroyed the city of Hazor and its inhabitants. As they had done to both Jericho and Ai, they burned the city to the ground. So *Joshua* 11:11 notes, "And they struck all the people who were in it with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them. There was none left breathing. Then he burned Hazor with fire." Total devastation was necessary because the Canaanites, if left alone, would turn the hearts of Israel away from God (*Deuteronomy* 7:4). Consequently, Israel was warned, "When the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son" (vv. 2-3). Rather than acting in an unjust and overly harsh manner, Joshua did what God instructed Moses to do (*Joshua* 11:12, 15).

With the victory over the kings of the north, Joshua essentially gained control of the land of Canaan. The

text provides a summary of the conquest: "Thus Joshua took all this land: the mountain country, all the South, all the land of Goshen, the lowland, and the Jordan plain—the mountains of Israel and its lowlands" (Joshua 11:16). Israel's primary enemies were defeated, even if the Philistines and other local tribes remained (v. 17; cf. 13:1-6). The long period of war was over (11:18), and the land God promised to give Abraham's descendants was back in their possession (v. 23).

Applications

- The deliverance God provided His people in Joshua 11 reminds us of His great power. Although God has not promised us we will never face difficulty or experience defeat, He has promised to provide a way of escape from our temptations. When the pull of sin seems more than you can resist, remember God is even more powerful. Paul put it best: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

- Joshua's willingness to leave "nothing undone of all that the LORD had commanded Moses" stands as an excellent example of faithfulness (Joshua 11:15). A faithful individual does not do part of the Lord's will; he or she willingly surrenders all. Obedience is required of all who would please God, for Jesus is

"the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him" (Hebrews 5:9).

Questions

1. Who was king of Hazor (Joshua 11:1)?
2. What did he do (Joshua 11:1-3)?
3. How was the force that gathered against Israel described (Joshua 11:4)?
4. What did God tell Joshua to do to his enemies' horses and chariots (Joshua 11:6)?
5. What did Joshua and the Israelites do to Hazor (Joshua 11:11)?
6. What compliment does the text pay to Joshua (Joshua 11:15)?

Discussion

1. Why do you think the text describes Israel's enemy as it does (Joshua 11:4)?
2. What does this passage teach us about God's sovereignty and man's freedom?
3. Why were the Israelites justified in destroying the Canaanite nations?
4. What can we learn about obedience from Joshua's example?

Dividing the Land

Joshua 14:1-15

- ¹ These are the areas which the children of Israel inherited in the land of Canaan, which Eleazar the priest, Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel distributed as an inheritance to them.
- ² Their inheritance was by lot, as the LORD had commanded by the hand of Moses, for the nine tribes and the half-tribe.
- ³ For Moses had given the inheritance of the two tribes and the half-tribe on the other side of the Jordan; but to the Levites he had given no inheritance among them.
- ⁴ For the children of Joseph were two tribes: Manasseh and Ephraim. And they gave no part to the Levites in the land, except cities to dwell in, with their common-lands for their livestock and their property.
- ⁵ As the LORD had commanded Moses, so the children of Israel did; and they divided the land.
- ⁶ Then the children of Judah came to Joshua in Gilgal. And Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him: "You know the word which the LORD said to Moses the man of God concerning you and me in Kadesh Barnea.
- ⁷ "I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh Barnea to spy out the land, and I brought back word to him as it was in my heart.
- ⁸ "Nevertheless my brethren who went up with me made the heart of the people melt, but I wholly followed the LORD my God.
- ⁹ "So Moses swore on that day, saying, 'Surely the land where your foot has trodden shall be your inheritance and

your children's forever, because you have wholly followed the LORD my God.'

¹⁰ "And now, behold, the LORD has kept me alive, as He said, these forty-five years, ever since the LORD spoke this word to Moses while Israel wandered in the wilderness; and now, here I am this day, eighty-five years old.

¹¹ "As yet I am as strong this day as on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength was then, so now is my strength for war, both for going out and for coming in.

¹² "Now therefore, give me this mountain of which the LORD spoke in that day; for you heard in that day how the Anakim were there, and that the cities were great and fortified. It may be that the LORD will be with me, and I shall be able to drive them out as the LORD said."

¹³ And Joshua blessed him, and gave Hebron to Caleb the son of Jephunneh as an inheritance.

¹⁴ Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite to this day, because he wholly followed the LORD God of Israel.

¹⁵ And the name of Hebron formerly was Kirjath Arba (Arba was the greatest man among the Anakim). Then the land had rest from war.

Introduction

Forty years passed between the exodus from Egypt and Israel's entrance into the Promised Land. Although the journey could have taken much less time, God caused the nation to wander in the wilderness until an entire generation died. The author of Hebrews explained the punishment, "For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom

was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:16-19).

The primary act of rebellion causing Israel's long period of wandering took place at Kadesh (Numbers 13:26). From there, Moses sent twelve spies into Canaan to scout the land (v. 3). After they completed their forty-day survey (v. 25), the men returned to the Israelite camp and gave a report of what they saw. Ten of the spies discouraged the people and said, "The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the giants ... and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight" (vv. 32-33). Caleb, however, courageously encouraged the people and exhorted, "Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it" (v. 30).

Along with Joshua, Caleb expressed great faith in God's ability to give the land to His people. In contrast to the message of the unfaithful spies, the two men declared, "If the LORD delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, 'a land which flows with milk and honey.' Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the LORD is with us. Do not fear them"

(Numbers 14:8-9). Sadly, the Israelites sided with the ten spies and would have stoned Joshua and Caleb if not for the Lord's intervention (v. 10).

Rather than allowing the unbelieving generation to enter the Promised Land, God sentenced them to wander in the wilderness forty years—one year for each day the spies spent in the land (Numbers 14:34). Only Caleb and Joshua would be allowed entry (v. 30). Regarding Caleb, the Lord declared, "But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it" (v. 24). What a wonderful compliment and promise! Caleb, who trusted the Lord, would be allowed to enter the land, and He would be rewarded for His faithfulness.

Inheritance by Lot

(Joshua 14:1-5)

Having conquered the cities of Jericho and Ai, along with enemy forces in both the southern and northern sections of Canaan, Israel found itself in military control of the Promised Land. Reporting this, Joshua 11:23 declares, "So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD had said to Moses; and Joshua gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. Then the land rested from war." This summary passage previews what begins to take place in our lesson text. Joshua and Eleazar the priest divided the land

among the people and provided each tribe with its inheritance (14:1).

The process whereby each tribe was given a designated portion of the land was placed in the hands of the Lord and determined "by lot" (Joshua 14:2). Howard explained, "The casting of lots to determine Israel's inheritance had been commanded by God (Numbers 26:52-56; 33:54); thus, far from being a matter of chance, God himself was in control of the lot (cf. 18:6, 8, 10; Proverbs 16:33)" (*Joshua*, 325). Moses began the process before his death by providing land on the eastern side of the Jordan to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh (Joshua 14:3; cf. 13:15-33). Consequently, the other half of Manasseh and the remaining nine tribes awaited their inheritance on the western side of the river.

Unlike the other tribes, the descendants of Joseph—the families of Ephraim and Manasseh—received two shares of the land—a double portion (Joshua 14:4). Coleson explained this blessing, "Joseph was the elder son of Rachel, Jacob's favorite (and chosen) wife; he also saved Jacob's family by bringing them to Egypt to escape the famine (Genesis 47:11-12). Perhaps for both of these reasons, Jacob gave both of Joseph's sons an inheritance with their uncles" (*Joshua*, 124). Not included in the number of tribes receiving a territorial inheritance was the tribe of Levi. Rather than being given land, the tribe was given cities scattered throughout Canaan, "with their common-lands for their livestock and their property"

(Joshua 14:4; cf. 13:33; 21:1-42). The dispersion of the Levites to cities throughout the various tribal allotments allowed them to perform their assigned duties for the benefit of the entire nation. Importantly, the land was divided “as the LORD had commanded Moses” (14:5).

Caleb’s Review

(Joshua 14:6-9)

With the division of the land reported in general terms, our lesson text focuses its attention on Caleb’s inheritance. A member of the tribe of Judah, Caleb approached Joshua and reminded him of the promise Moses made after Caleb’s faithful report at Kadesh Barnea (Joshua 14:6). He recalled, “I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh Barnea to spy out the land, and I brought back word to him as it was in my heart. Nevertheless my brethren who went up with me made the heart of the people melt, but I wholly followed the LORD my God” (vv. 7-8). As he noted, Caleb’s statement before the nation stood in stark contrast to the cowardly report provided by ten of the spies sent to scout the land of Canaan. Their testimony discouraged the Israelites; his report encouraged the people to take the land with God’s help (cf. Numbers 13:30; 14:7-9).

Because of his courage and faithfulness, Caleb was promised an inheritance in Canaan. He reminded Joshua, “So Moses swore on that day, saying, ‘Surely the land where your foot has trodden shall be your

inheritance and your children’s forever, because you have wholly followed the LORD my God” (Joshua 14:9). According to Woudstra, Caleb’s account “supplements what is reported in Numbers 14:24; Deuteronomy 1:36, where no such oath is recorded. . . . That Caleb was completely loyal to God is the reason for Moses’ assurance to him. The book of Joshua stresses the gratuitous giving of the land to Israel by God (e.g., 1:3), but this giving is closely connected with Israel’s faith” (*The Book of Joshua*, 228-29). Caleb was faithful to God, and He approached Joshua knowing God would be faithful in return.

Caleb’s Request

(Joshua 14:10-15)

Now that Israel’s main enemies had been subdued, Caleb expected to claim his inheritance—one promised many years earlier. So he said to Joshua, “And now, behold, the LORD has kept me alive, as He said, these forty-five years, ever since the LORD spoke this word to Moses while Israel wandered in the wilderness; and now, here I am this day, eighty-five years old” (Joshua 14:10). It is difficult to read Caleb’s words without being impressed by his faith in God. He attributed his life to God’s care, and he had no doubt God would do what He had promised long before.

Despite his age, Caleb assured Joshua he was “as strong this day as on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength was then, so now is my strength for

war, both for going out and for coming in” (Joshua 14:11). Even more impressively, however, was his faith in God’s continued provisions. Consequently, he requested, “Now therefore, give me this mountain of which the LORD spoke in that day; for you heard in that day how the Anakim were there, and that the cities were great and fortified. It may be that the LORD will be with me, and I shall be able to drive them out as the LORD said” (v. 12). Caleb’s strength was great, but his faith was even greater. As a servant of God, he was not afraid of the giants in the land when he first observed them at age forty, and he remained unafraid at age eighty-five. What a wonderful example! Dale Ralph Davis observed, “In Caleb’s speech (14:6-12) we hear repeated reference to what Yahweh or Moses has promised (vv. 6, 9, 10, 12), remember how Caleb completely followed Yahweh even when it was unpopular (vv. 8, 9, 14), and feel the energy that relishes facing formidable obstacles simply because he anticipates Yahweh’s help (vv. 11-12). What a contrast this forms to the complaints of the Joseph tribes (17:14-18)! Here is a numerous people (v. 14) but one that lacks zeal (v. 15). By contrast Caleb is old (14:10-11) but eager for conflict” (*Joshua*, 125).

Joshua granted Caleb’s request and gave the city of Hebron to him (Joshua 14:13). Hebron was an important city in the Old Testament record (cf. Genesis 13:18; 23:19; Joshua 20:7; 2 Samuel 2:1-3); it had formerly been named Kirjath Arba, after “the greatest man among the Anakim” (Joshua

14:15; cf. Numbers 13:33). Caleb did not shrink from the challenge. So Butler commented, “This seeks to show the power of God in granting Israel control over a city with such a proud and powerful history” (*Joshua*, 174).

Applications

- Caleb’s story stands as a vivid declaration of the importance of placing faith in God. He did not shy away from the challenge of entering Canaan because he believed God would do as He promised, and he did not fear facing the enemies around Hebron because his trust in God never waned. Importantly, Caleb was rewarded because he obeyed God (Joshua 14:14).
- The lesson reminds us that God keeps the promises He makes. Although forty-five years passed after the time God made His initial promise to Caleb, He eventually did just as He said. Stressing the significance of the promises God made to us, the apostle Peter wrote, “By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:4).

Questions

1. Which individuals were involved in the distribution of the land (Joshua 14:1)?

Discussion

2. What method was used to select each tribe's inheritance (Joshua 14:2)?
3. How many tribes received an inheritance on the eastern side of the Jordan (Joshua 14:3)?
4. How old was Caleb when he served as a spy for Israel (Joshua 14:7)?
5. What did Moses promise Caleb at that time (Joshua 14:9)?
6. How old was Caleb when he requested his inheritance (Joshua 14:10)?
7. What city was Caleb given (Joshua 14:13)?

1. What lesson(s) can we learn from Caleb?
2. What can we do to increase our faith?
3. What does this passage teach us about God?

Joshua's Farewell

Joshua 23:1-16

¹ Now it came to pass, a long time after the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua was old, advanced in age.

² And Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers, and said to them: "I am old, advanced in age.

³ "You have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations because of you, for the LORD your God is He who has fought for you.

⁴ "See, I have divided to you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from the Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, as far as the Great Sea westward.

⁵ "And the LORD your God will expel them from before you and drive them out of your sight. So you shall possess their land, as the LORD your God promised you.

⁶ "Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left,

⁷ "and lest you go among these nations, these who remain among you. You shall not make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause anyone to swear by them; you shall not serve them nor bow down to them,

⁸ "but you shall hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day.

⁹ "For the LORD has driven out from before you great and strong nations; but as for you, no one has been able to stand against you to this day.

¹⁰ "One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the LORD your God is He who fights for you, as He promised you.

¹¹ "Therefore take careful heed to yourselves, that you love the LORD your God.

¹² "Or else, if indeed you do go back, and cling to the remnant of these nations—these that remain among you—and make marriages with them, and go in to them and they to you,

¹³ "know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations from before you. But they shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the LORD your God has given you.

¹⁴ "Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed.

¹⁵ "Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all the good things have come upon you which the LORD your God promised you, so the LORD will bring upon you all harmful things, until He has destroyed you from this good land which the LORD your God has given you.

¹⁶ "When you have transgressed the covenant of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed down to them, then the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land which He has given you."

Introduction

Joshua had done as God instructed. With strength and courage, he faced and subdued the enemies of Israel (Joshua 1:6). In approximately five years (see

14:10), the Israelites conquered the land of Canaan. In fact, "Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD had said to Moses; and Joshua gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. Then the land rested from war" (11:23). This does not mean the people would be free from local conflicts, for even after the major Canaanite nations were defeated, pockets of resistance remained (cf. 14:12). Neither does it mean Israel perfectly followed God's instructions and completely removed their enemies from the land, for they did not (cf. Judges 1). Nevertheless, they gained possession of the land because God fulfilled His promise. Reporting this, Joshua 21:43-45 states, "So the LORD gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. The LORD gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. Not a word failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass."

Those who were the immediate beneficiaries of God's help likely would never forget how He enabled Israel to defeat her enemies. Those who crossed the Jordan on dry land would never cease to be amazed at God's power. Those who witnessed the walls of Jericho crash to the ground would not have to be convinced of God's involvement in His people's lives. Those who were part of the ambush party at Ai would not need to be taught that God is all-knowing.

They had experienced God's help and benefited from it. But what about the following generations? After all, it is one thing to witness something firsthand; it is quite another to simply hear a story or report. This, no doubt, is why faithful men are to make every effort to teach subsequent generations. It is why Luke wrote to Theophilus and declared, "It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed" (Luke 1:3-4). Truth must be passed down in a reliable manner. That is also why Paul charged Timothy, "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). Truth must be entrusted to reliable men.

As Joshua neared the end of his time as Israel's leader, he sought to impress upon the people the importance of maintaining faithfulness to God. Calling the nation together, he reminded them of what they had seen God do and of the blessings they received from the Lord (Joshua 23:3-4). He then exhorted them to faithfully "keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left" (v. 6). God had graciously provided for His people, but He would also punish them if they rejected His covenant (vv. 15-16). Joshua's farewell message was true for the people of His day and for the generations following.

“Hold Fast to the Lord Your God”

(Joshua 23:1-8)

Although the text does not specify exactly when Joshua delivered his farewell address to Israel, it affirms, “Joshua was old, advanced in age” (Joshua 23:1; cf. 13:1). Perhaps it was given shortly before his death at “one hundred and ten years old” (24:29). Regardless, God had done what He promised and “had given rest to Israel from all their enemies round about” (23:1). The land had been secured, but challenges remained. Thus, “Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers” in order to exhort them to obey the Lord faithfully (v. 2).

Joshua began his speech by admonishing the people to remember what they witnessed God do for them. He reminded them, “You have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations because of you, for the LORD your God is He who has fought for you” (Joshua 23:3). Rather than sending the nation into enemy territory without any assistance, God provided both strategy and support. He gave them victory over heavily fortified cities (cf. chap. 6) and over heavily armed opponents (like the nations they fought in the northern part of Canaan—11:4-8). He fought for them by not only directing their steps but also by involving Himself in their battles (as He did when He cast down hailstones on the armies of the Amorite kings—10:10-11). No soldier involved in the conquest of the land could plead ignorance of God’s support.

Because God helped the nation conquer their enemies in a gradual manner (cf. Exodus 23:29-30), Joshua was able to distribute land to Israel’s tribes (Joshua 23:4). Nevertheless, work remained. Butler explained, “This represents the other side of the picture from that emphasized in 21:43-45. Israel has the land. She must no longer fight for it. But she still has nagging enemies. Judges 1:1–3:6 takes up the same problem from various perspectives” (*Joshua*, 254). The people could not become complacent. They needed to continue to rely upon God. If they would do so, they would be blessed. Joshua promised, “And the LORD your God will expel them from before you and drive them out of your sight. So shall you possess their land, as the LORD your God promised you” (Joshua 23:5).

At this point in his exhortation, Joshua issued a challenge that sounds remarkably similar to what the Lord charged him to do at the beginning of the conquest (cf. Joshua 1:7): “Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left” (23:6). By following the Law, the people would avoid developing allegiances with the pagan nations surrounding them. They would also avoid being corrupted by their influences or yielding to the temptation of worshipping their deities (v. 7). Instead of allowing themselves to be corrupted by the very things God’s law warned them to avoid (cf. Deuteronomy 7:1-5), the people were to “hold fast to the LORD your God”

(Joshua 23:8). Other translations use the word “cling” (ESV, NASB). According to Hubbard, “To cling firmly to Yahweh is to embrace him so tightly—to observe such exclusive loyalty to him—as to leave not even the smallest crack for other gods between the two of you. In short, to avoid association with non-Israelites means not to take the final step toward loosening Israel’s embrace of Yahweh” (*The NIV Application Commentary: Joshua*, 519-20).

“The Lord Fights for You”

(Joshua 23:9-13)

Having encouraged the people to rededicate themselves to covenantal obedience, Joshua urged the nation to prepare for the future by reminding them of God’s care in the past. He stated, “For the LORD has driven out from before you great and strong nations; but as for you, no one has been able to stand against you to this day. One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the LORD your God is He who fights for you, as He promised you” (Joshua 23:9-10). In other words, the children of Israel should rely upon God because He has proven Himself to be faithful. God helped them conquer their initial enemies in Canaan, and He would continue to do so if they would simply serve Him. Marten H. Woudstra observed, “The language of [verse] 10 is reminiscent of Deuteronomy 32:30, and also reflects promises made in Leviticus 26:7-8; Deuteronomy 28:7. Formulas of blessings and curses such as those just cited were part of the treaty patterns

of the ancient Near East. In Samson’s case (Judges 15:15-16), the chasing of a thousand by one man was fulfilled literally” (*The Book of Joshua*, 337).

Israel’s task, according to Joshua, was to “love the LORD your God” (Joshua 23:11). They had to make a decision. Would they serve God? Or would they make alliances with the Canaanite nations? Joshua wanted them to know there would be consequences if they chose the wrong path. At the very least, God would stop fighting for those who rejected Him, and He would allow the pagan nations to “be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the LORD your God has given you” (vv. 12-13). Israel’s actions would ultimately bring either blessings or curses (cf. Deuteronomy 28).

“I Am Going the Way of All the Earth”

(Joshua 23:14-16)

Joshua understood his time on earth was drawing to a close. As Moses had done before him, he would pass from the scene. Death is not unfamiliar to humanity, for it is “the way of all the earth” (Joshua 23:14). Perhaps this is why it does not seem to weigh as heavily on Joshua’s mind as his concern for Israel’s faithfulness after he is gone. Consequently, he reminded them that what God said concerning Israel had come to pass. He declared, “And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the LORD

your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed" (v. 14). Ziese ably highlighted the contrast found in Joshua's statement: "Humans eventually grow frail and fail, but God's word does not" (*Joshua*, 376).

Because God's word does not fail to come true, Israel was encouraged to prepare itself to submit to Him. If they did, they would continue to receive the good things God promised. If they did not, they would be the objects of God's wrath (*Joshua* 23:15). Joshua left little doubt about the point he was making: "When you have transgressed the covenant of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed down to them, then the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land which He has given you" (v. 16).

Applications

- It is not surprising Joshua addressed the Israelites before his death. Having served as their leader during a significant period in their history, he could not help passing along some parting exhortations. In his case, however, Joshua provided no new instruction. He simply called the nation to recommit to covenant fidelity. They knew what God had done for them, and they should serve Him accordingly. God had proven Himself to be powerful and just. He kept His promises to the nation.

- Although Joshua's death was drawing near, his concern was for Israel to be continually faithful to

God. True leaders must likewise focus their attention on the well-being of those they lead.

Questions

1. How is Joshua described (*Joshua* 23:1)?
2. What did Joshua say the Israelites had seen (*Joshua* 23:3)?
3. What did Joshua charge the Israelites to do (*Joshua* 23:6)?
4. What did he warn them about doing (*Joshua* 23:7)?
5. What did God do for His people (*Joshua* 23:10)?
6. What would happen if the Israelites embraced the pagans of the land (*Joshua* 23:12-13)?

- 7. What did Joshua indicate was going to happen to him (Joshua 23:14)?

Discussion

- 1. Why do you think Joshua emphasized what the Israelites had seen God do?
- 2. What steps can we take to ensure we are doing all God's Word directs and not turning either to the right or to the left?
- 3. What can we learn from the way Joshua mentioned but did not dwell on his impending death?
- 4. What can churches do to prepare future generations to remain faithful?

Joshua and the Covenant

Joshua 24:14-33

- ¹⁴ "Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD!"
- ¹⁵ "And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."
- ¹⁶ So the people answered and said: "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods;
- ¹⁷ "for the LORD our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, who did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way that we went and among all the people through whom we passed.
- ¹⁸ "And the LORD drove out from before us all the people, including the Amorites who dwelt in the land. We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God."
- ¹⁹ But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.

²⁰ “If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good.”

²¹ And the people said to Joshua, “No, but we will serve the LORD!”

²² So Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD for yourselves, to serve Him.” And they said, “We are witnesses!”

²³ “Now therefore,” he said, “put away the foreign gods which are among you, and incline your heart to the LORD God of Israel.”

²⁴ And the people said to Joshua, “The LORD our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey!”

²⁵ So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.

²⁶ Then Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone, and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the LORD.

²⁷ And Joshua said to all the people, “Behold, this stone shall be a witness to us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD which He spoke to us. It shall therefore be a witness to you, lest you deny your God.”

²⁸ So Joshua let the people depart, each to his own inheritance.

²⁹ Now it came to pass after these things that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being one hundred and ten years old.

³⁰ And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Serah, which is in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash.

³¹ Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had known all the works of the LORD which He had done for Israel.

³² The bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel had brought up out of Egypt, they buried at Shechem, in the plot of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of silver, and which had become an inheritance of the children of Joseph.

³³ And Eleazar the son of Aaron died. They buried him in a hill belonging to Phinehas his son, which was given to him in the mountains of Ephraim.

Introduction

Freedom to choose one’s actions is a fundamental characteristic of humanity. Rather than simply responding in an involuntary manner to stimuli, men and women can react as they see fit (or even refrain from reacting at all) to the circumstances they face. Because we have this ability, we are accountable for our actions. If we choose to do what is right, we will be blessed; if we choose to do what is wrong, we will be punished. Nevertheless, we must choose.

Jesus acknowledged man’s ability to choose his own actions when He declared, “If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority” (John 7:17). The apostle John also made a similar point when he invited his readers to respond to the Lord. He wrote, “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take of the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17). The former statement indicates we have the ability

to discern the truthfulness of Jesus' message if we will make an effort to do so. The latter statement indicates we have the freedom to yield ourselves to God if we desire.

Arguably, the most notable passage of Scripture discussing man's freedom to choose his own actions is found in the last recorded speech Joshua made to Israel. Having called the nation to meet with him at Shechem—the same place where God promised to give Abraham's descendants the land (cf. Genesis 12:7), Joshua recounted the various ways the Lord provided for His people and then called upon them to make a decision. He said, "And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15).

Not surprisingly, the people responded to Joshua's challenge, "We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God" (Joshua 24:18). Instead of being thrilled by their declaration, Joshua reminded them of their weaknesses and stated, "You cannot serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins" (v. 19). By this statement, Joshua did not mean the people could never be forgiven. He did, however, mean commitment to God demands more than a statement of allegiance made in a fleeting moment. Those who declare their intention to serve the Lord must dedicate

themselves to Him completely. Such a vow must be taken seriously. Thus, "Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem" (v. 25).

"Choose Whom You Will Serve"

(Joshua 24:14-18)

In the first part of Joshua's address at Shechem (Joshua 24:1-13), he described how the Lord brought Israel to the Promised Land. After calling Abraham from his former home and leading him to Canaan, the Lord provided for and protected his descendants. In fact, God fought for the nation and delivered their enemies to them. He gave them the land and kept His promise. Joshua emphasized the Lord's words, "I have given you a land for which you did not labor, and cities which you did not build, and you dwell in them; you eat of the vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant" (Joshua 24:13). There was no denying God had been gracious and merciful to His people.

Because of God's wonderful provisions, Joshua called upon the nation to react appropriately. He said, "Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD!" (Joshua 24:14). Regarding this statement, Dale Ralph Davis observed, "The 'and now' places the response demanded in light of the grace displayed (vv. 2-13). Fidelity to Yahweh is but

the natural contemporary response to his abundant historical goodness. What else could one do toward a God who calls, delivers, protects, and supplies? ... It is the only reasonable response to overwhelming waves of Yahweh's mercies" (*Joshua*, 204).

Obviously, a choice had to be made. The people could dedicate themselves to following and obeying God, or they could pledge their allegiance to the gods of the pagans surrounding them. Coleson noted the irony in the choices Joshua offered the people: "These 'gods' had not been able to save the Amorites from the judgment of Israel's God. Why would Israel ever be interested in serving them? Yet, once a person or a people take their eyes off the only one who truly is God, even ridiculous choices can seem plausible, because we will worship something or somebody. Fearing and serving God with integrity and faithfulness is the only antidote to such folly" (*Joshua*, 171).

Joshua had already made his decision. So he declared, "But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (*Joshua* 24:15). There was no question about where Joshua stood.

In response to Joshua, the people openly affirmed allegiance to God (*Joshua* 24:16). They recognized what God had done for them in bringing the nation from Egypt to Canaan (v. 17). Thus, they pledged to join Joshua: "We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God" (v. 18). Unlike the impotent gods of the pagans, Israel's God was alive. His presence was constant; His care was real.

"You Are Witnesses"

(*Joshua* 24:19-25)

Joshua's response to the people is somewhat surprising. He did not compliment them on their declared intent to serve the Lord. Instead, he warned, "You cannot serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins" (*Joshua* 24:19). Hubbard explained, "Probably Joshua senses in Israel's response (vv. 16-18) a mistakenly narrow preoccupation with Yahweh's ability to protect. The danger is that they fail to reckon fully with Yahweh's unique character compared to the gods they have known. ... Joshua's reply underscores that two unique character traits of Yahweh—his holiness and his jealousy—make serving him all-demanding. Those traits also make the present moment a deadly serious transaction, not a simple, causal formality to be endured and then ignored" (*The NIV Application Commentary: Joshua*, 557-58). God is not merely Israel's benefactor. He is their Lord and thus demands complete submission—something Israel should not promise without serious reflection.

Consequently, Joshua revealed how God would respond to the people if they deserted Him for pagan deities. He noted, "If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good" (*Joshua* 24:20). In response, the people immediately affirmed their dedication to God (v. 21). Joshua then declared,

“You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD for yourselves, to serve Him.” Without hesitation, they agreed, “We are witnesses!” (v. 22). According to Woudstra, “This means that they thereby will take upon themselves the curses of which he has been speaking, should they become unfaithful to the Lord. Again, the readiness of the people to enter into this solemn compact should be duly noted (cf. also Exodus 19:8)” (*The Book of Joshua*, 354). Upon hearing their agreement, “Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem” (Joshua 24:25).

“This Stone Will Be a Witness”

(Joshua 24:26-28)

The covenant Joshua made with the people was written “in the Book of the Law of God” (Joshua 24:26). Joshua also “took a large stone, and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the LORD” (v. 26). Both the recording of the covenant in written form and the placement of a memorial accompanied the formalization of Israel’s covenant. Israel’s aged leader then declared, “Behold, this stone shall be a witness to us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD which He spoke to us. It shall therefore be a witness to you, lest you deny your God” (v. 27). Regarding the stone, Howard wrote, “So its presence would serve as a testimony to God’s faithfulness to his people, just as the twelve stones that Joshua

erected on the bank of the Jordan were to serve as testimonies to what he had done at the Jordan (4:9, 20-24)” (*Joshua*, 441).

After formalizing the covenant by both recording it and memorializing it, Joshua dismissed the people, who returned to their allotted inheritances (Joshua 24:28). How fitting that this event took place at Shechem—the place where God first promised the land to Abraham’s descendants (Genesis 12:7)!

Final Details

(Joshua 24:29-33)

Fittingly, the book of Joshua ends by providing an account of what happened to its namesake. Joshua died and was buried in his inheritance within the allotment given to the tribe of Ephraim (Joshua 24:29-30). His life stands as an excellent example of faithfulness to God. Throughout his time as Israel’s leader, Joshua served the Lord. He accomplished the task the Lord assigned to him (cf. 1:1-9). Under Joshua’s leadership, Israel gained control of Canaan, and the people reaffirmed their dedication to the Lord.

Joshua’s far-reaching influence is stated clearly in our text: “Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had known all the works of the LORD which He had done for Israel” (Joshua 24:31). What a wonderful legacy! Interestingly, the text also notes how the Israelites transported the bones of Joseph, Joshua’s direct ancestor, and buried them

in Shechem (v. 32). If Joshua is remembered for his faithfulness, Joseph should be remembered for his faith. Although he died in Egypt, he believed God would keep His promise and restore His people to Canaan (cf. Genesis 50:22-26).

Applications

- As Joshua noted, individuals have the ability to choose whether they will serve God. It was obvious the Israelites should choose to serve the God who protected them rather than the impotent gods of the pagans. Nevertheless, God did not force Himself upon them. Importantly, He does not force Himself upon us either. Despite the wonderful blessings He provides (cf. James 1:17), He allows us the freedom to either accept or reject Him.

- Like Israel, we must take seriously the commitment we make to God. It is one thing to say, "We will serve the Lord." It is quite another to serve Him. Let us commit to God not only in word but also in deed. We demonstrate our allegiance by our obedience (cf. Luke 6:46).

Questions

1. Why did Joshua conclude Israel should fear the Lord and serve Him (Joshua 24:14)?

2. What did Joshua tell the people they had the ability to do (Joshua 24:15)?
3. What were the Israelites warned about doing (Joshua 24:20)?
4. What did Joshua make with the Israelites (Joshua 24:25)?
5. Where were the people gathered (Joshua 24:25)?
6. What commemorated the promise the people made to Joshua (Joshua 24:26)?
7. Whose bones did the Israelites transport from Egypt to Canaan (Joshua 24:32)?

Discussion

1. What can we learn about human freedom from this text? What other passages establish men and women as free moral agents?

2. What can be done to help us realize the seriousness of our commitment to God?

3. Why do you think Joshua's influence was so powerful? What can Christians today do to influence those around them for good?

4. What lessons can we learn from Joshua 24:32?

Works Cited

- Butler, Trent C. *Joshua (Word Biblical Commentary)*. Vol. 7. Edited by David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker. Waco: Word, 1983.
- Coleson, Joseph. *Joshua (Cornerstone Biblical Commentary)*. Edited by Philip W. Comfort. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2012.
- Davis, Dale Ralph. *Joshua: No Falling Words*. Scotland: Christian Focus, 2000.
- Hess, Richard S. *Joshua (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary)*. Vol. 2. Edited by John H. Walton. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.
- Howard, David M., Jr. *Joshua (New American Commentary)*. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen. Nashville: B&H, 1998.
- Hubbard, Robert L., Jr. *The NIV Application Commentary: Joshua*. Edited by Terry Muck. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009.
- Mathews, Kenneth A. *Joshua (Teach the Text Commentary Series)*. Edited by Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016.
- Rasmussen, Carl G. *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible. Revised Edition*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.
- Woudstra, Marten H. *The Book of Joshua (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament)*. Edited by Robert L. Hubbard Jr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981.
- Ziese, Mark S. *Joshua (The College Press NIV Commentary)*. Edited by Terry Briley and Paul J. Kissling. Joplin: College Press, 2008.