

# Notes on Joshua 1–12

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## Some notes about reading the book of Joshua

The book of Joshua shows God's people, Israel, possessing the inheritance God had promised to Abraham some centuries before. It also shows them entering the 'rest' he had promised to them, that is, rest from their enemies who sought to stop them worshipping God. These two actions are two aspects of one action and they have rich meaning for all the people of God, and, in fact, all the peoples of the world.

The inheritance promised to Abraham was Canaan, however he gave this promise so that the whole earth could be blessed (Gen. 12:1–4). Paul says that, in effect, God promised the whole world to Abraham (Rom. 4:13). Jesus said that the meek would inherit the earth. He also spoke of inheriting the Kingdom of God; that is, Christians can expect to receive the whole creation being reigned over by God and themselves as a dynamic part of that creation. This is their inheritance. So the book of Joshua has value in showing us how God's ancient people possessed their inheritance and can encourage us to possess what God has promised to us.

The 'rest' that God promised Israel was rest from their enemies, but there was more involved than the absence of fighting. The book of Joshua shows Israel learning to trust God for their inheritance and for dealing with their enemies. From the beginning of creation, God made a Sabbath rest that meant living in God's completed creation. He commanded them to keep a Sabbath day and Sabbath years as a confession of this principle. Coming out of Egypt where they had been slaves, and entering into this land which God cared for was like coming into a new Garden of Eden.

All of us need to cease from the labour of trying to be our own creator. Only God can establish his people in their life, and he has never ceased providing for us to live truly. Even though we deserve no inheritance at all, he is eager to lead us into it. He may have shut Adam out of Eden, but he promised Abraham a land as his inheritance. Abraham may have died without receiving what was promised but his family was now on the verge of entering the land.

Israel did not enter the land earlier because of disobedience in the wilderness (Hebrews 3–4). Even now, Joshua would not be able to lead them into God's rest, even though, through him, Israel occupied the Promised Land. Entering God's rest is not just a matter of location but of trusting the living God. Israel did not acknowledge the works of God because of the deceitfulness of sin. We are called to acknowledge the works of God in giving up his Son for our sins and raising him up from the dead. We are to turn away from false trusts and acknowledge the great works of God. This is the way of entering into rest.

No leader of Israel could fully carry out the task of being a covenant leader. The freedom begun under Moses was now to be carried through by Joshua. Later, Solomon would carry through the peace and worship launched by David. Perhaps this suggested to Israel that they should look forward to a Leader and Saviour who would fulfil all God's purpose for his people. Certainly, every victory in the Old Testament is an anticipation of the victory given in the resurrection of Christ. No victory before the coming of Christ could stand alone as though it was valid in itself. It left too much undone. It was a preparation for, and foretaste of, and testimony to all that God would do and has now done in the coming of Christ.

So, let us read and heed this book of Joshua because we have been grafted into the same hope as Israel and can profit by the things God did among them and the things he said to them (I Cor. 9:6; II Tim. 3:16–17).

## Chapter 1–2

The promises of God are also God's call for us to participate in them. Although Moses was dead, the God who was with Moses (and which made his leadership what it was) was with Joshua. There would be no lessening of God's power in giving them all that had been promised. In place of the disobedience of the past must now be the obedience to enter this land of promise. They would need to live by every word God spoke to them and not be weak like their parents. Any nation which opposed what God was about in Israel, including the Canaanites, lost all courage. Israel, on the other hand, must not act as though they had no God. Saying that they must be courageous is saying that they must happily entrust themselves to God and do what he said.

Joshua was ready for action. He made sure Israel was ready too. Those who already possessed conquered land East of the Jordan must be ready to assist with the task of occupying all that God had promised them. God's purpose was not with a view to private interests but with a view to all his people and their witness to the whole world.

In the New Testament, Paul was concerned that Jews seek the welfare of Gentiles and that Gentiles seek the welfare of Jews, all with a view to their inheriting the kingdom together. The same is true of his teaching about those who are weak and those who are strong in faith.

Joshua's spies believed they could evade detection by visiting a harlot, but they got better than they planned. Rahab, whatever her past, took the opportunity afforded to her, to confess that Israel's God was the true God and that she was ready to change allegiance. She came under the protection of the God who never abandons those who confess his name. Later, we find that this woman married an Israelite. She became one of the forebears of David, and Christ (Matthew 1:5; Hebrews 11:31).

## Prayer

Father, you have raised up your Son Jesus who is our covenant Head, from the dead. You have assured us of an eternal inheritance, forgiveness of sins and freedom to worship all our days through him. Grant now that I may no longer trust in my own works but in yours, that I may no longer fear the powers of this world but be ready to walk as your child in this world. There is no God like you. Thanks be to you through Jesus Christ your Son. Amen.

## Chapter 3–4

The ark represented God going before Israel to destroy their enemies (Num. 10:33–36). It was God's throne and the sign of his covenant relation with them. As he was their Leader, so he would see to it that they were provided for as his people. After Israel's arrival at the edge of the Promised Land, there is no more mention of the pillar of cloud or fire that had led them to this moment (Deut. 1:32–33), but now, they were to follow the ark as they had followed the pillar. The God whose presence was over the ark was their leader in battle; apart from him that they would not know where to go or how to fight.

Joshua was elevated among his people, but only with a view to Israel knowing that God was among his people. Joshua knew what God would do and made sure everyone knew it was God who did it. He had become King over Israel when he led the people to himself at Sinai. It was he who had loved them, sanctified them and given them his law and made them his people (Deut. 33:1–5)

Bringing a people to live in God's freedom is a miracle. To overcome the opponents of that liberty is also a miracle. We should be amazed but not sceptical as we read of the opening up of the River Jordan. It is the completion of what was begun at the Red Sea. If there is no miracle here, neither is there any miracle to save us from this world so as to live in the deeds of God. Moses made sure Israel could remember this miracle by having actual stones taken from the Riverbed built into a cairn by its side. People could come here and say, 'This happened at this place'.

It has been traditional to see this crossing as a type or anticipation of a Christian passing over the river of death into the land of eternal rest. Negro spirituals using this terminology may come to mind.

Entering our rest in *Hebrews* is a reference to the future but with a present expectation. The chapter (4) that calls us to this begins and ends with a call to heed the word of God. The word of God is 'quick and powerful'; God has spoken to us in his Son—who is heir of all things (1:2). He upholds all things by the word of his power and, having purged us from our sins, is seated at the right hand of God. So, of course, Christ can lead us into God's rest. It would be criminal negligence and personal affront not to enter now. So, heed his word!

We should be actively entering that rest, crossing Jordan, destroying strongholds and living in peace in our new possession of all things (I Cor. 3:21)

With Israel on the other side, the priests brought the ark up from the Riverbed and the River returned to its flooding. No one but God could have done this, and God was there among them to ensure that it did happen. The work begun by crossing the Red Sea was completed in the crossing of the Jordan.

Israel had been baptised into Moses (I Cor. 10:2). We are baptised into Christ (Rom. 6:3–4). He is our 'Joshua' (his name in Hebrew and the name 'Jesus' in Greek both mean 'Jehovah saves'). Our entry into God's rest and into our inheritance is through his death and rising. We could not have planned such a victory for ourselves, and even now, we cannot sustain it. God in Christ has been among us and is among us still. He will bring us to the goal.

## Prayer

Father, there could not be anything more important than you being our God and us being your people. You have shown us this by being among us in your Son and by leading us, through his death and resurrection, into life that is new and full. Grant that we may always remember that you saved us and always live in the miracle of your gracious deed on our behalf. I pray in Jesus name. Amen.

## Chapter 5–6

Circumcision was the sign of the covenant (along with Sabbath keeping). It was required before sharing in the Passover Feast (Exod. 12:48). No one born in the wilderness had been circumcised, perhaps because they were more conscious of God's wrath on them than they were of his promise. We do not hear of any Passover Feast being celebrated during this time either. No Passover could have been kept during this time, yet this was the celebration of the foundation of their national life. However, the land flowing with milk and honey was still promised and was about to be given. God had raised up a people who loved to hear his word (cf. v. 6). The reproach, which could have come from Egypt if God did not finish what he began, was now rolled away. Their circumcision was not just a physical rite but a circumcision of their hearts (Deut. 10:16; 30:6). God could look at these people as covenant partners who were hearing and doing and seeing the fulfilment of his will for them. This is an anticipation of the last day when the people of God will come into their full inheritance, and nothing unclean will be there (Rev. 21:7–8). Already, we are circumcised in Christ (Col. 2:11) and 'worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh' (Phil. 3:3; cf. I Tim. 1:5).

God had cared for Israel in the wilderness by miraculous means, but it was no less miraculous that Israel now stood in their inheritance and tasted of the natural produce of the land. Then, as the Lord appeared to Moses in readiness for his battle with Pharaoh, so the Lord of armies appeared to Joshua to equip him too.

Joshua explained how the city would be taken: by marching, trumpet blasts and a shout. God would give them their victory. But first, there were to be six days of marching with trumpet blasts. God had spoken to the accompaniment of trumpets (Exod. 19:16); but trumpet blasts were also a proclamation of Sabbath rest (Lev. 23:24), and a year of Jubilee in which each person would be restored to their inheritance (Lev. 25:9); trumpet blasts also summoned the people to battle (Num. 10:9). So it was now. The shout that brought the walls down showed that nothing was needed from Israel but their unbounded confidence in God. Such faith was in order because the Lord was present on his throne: the Ark of the Covenant (cf. II Sam. 6:14–15). A Psalmist later sang that all who knew this shout were blessed (Ps. 89:15).

Nothing in Jericho was to be spared except reusable metals, and the Rahab family. It seemed that anything that could mar the inheritance of God's people or prevent them receiving it was destroyed that day, but the family who had turned to the Lord had been brought among the people of God. None could ignore Joshua because God was with him.

## Prayer

Our Father in heaven, we join with your people Israel in glad exultation of your favour to us. You have established our 'Joshua', Jesus Christ, as Lord over all. By him, you have proclaimed your presence with us and our rest in you. Through him we are now assured that we will inherit all things. By this same assurance, you have summoned us to battle so that no enemy of yours will prevent our entry into life. We lift up our voices to exult in you, knowing that by such faith, all the world is overcome. Thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Chapter 7–8

Israel had come across the Jordan by a miracle and taken Jericho by a miracle. Only God himself could lead such a people and he led them particularly by providing for their holiness. There would be no point in their simply inhabiting the land if they filled it with the sins of its past. Like Adam and Eve before him, the fruit of the land had appealed to Achan's eye and had ruled his action. The whole nation was tainted by his evil heart. The dramatic exposure of his sin and the drastic action to eradicate it set the nation back on its true foundation.

The very existence and name of Israel had been threatened by defeat at Ai. But Joshua went to the heart of the matter: what did this mean for the name of God, given that Yahweh was Israel's God? A future without Israel would be a future without God. 'What will you do for your great name?' was his question.

The earlier command to be strong and very courageous was now stated negatively: 'Do not fear or be dismayed!' How readily this could have occurred with such a stinging defeat, but God's people are not to be mastered by their failures. There is forgiveness with God that he may be feared (Ps. 130:4).

At Jericho, everything was set apart for destruction, as for a city in which insurrection had been discovered (Deut. 13:12–18). Now, at Ai, plunder was allowed, but no survivors. The command was obeyed meticulously. If there had been any presumption in sending a small contingent before, there was none now. The whole standing army assembled and obeyed battle instruction given by God himself, the 'Captain of the army of the Lord' (5:14).

An awe filled worship was conducted at the end of this battle, and it appears that the women and children had been moved in from where they crossed the Jordan to join the troops between the mountains Ebal and Gerizim. Uncut stones for an altar suggested that God did not want human intrusion into the worship he provided. Through the killing and presentation of the burnt offerings and peace offerings, Israel confessed that she was wholly given up to God (nothing remained of this offering) and in fellowship with God (parts of the peace offering were eaten in God's presence). The same two offerings were made at the giving of the law and this would have been a powerful reminder of that event, especially as the words of the law were inscribed again by Joshua and as the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy (ch. 28) were recited to the people from two hills, one on either side of Israel's camp. Truly, Israel lived by every word that came from God's mouth (Deut. 8:3).

## Prayer

Father, you have called us to holiness and to live by every word that comes from your mouth. We cannot live by this world's powers and so ask that you will glorify your Name among us. Bring us, your church, to true holiness and power that the world may know your Name and fear you and your Son Jesus Christ. We bring to you the worship you have chosen, worship that arises from the offering up of the body of your Son and ascends in true self-giving and love. Amen.

## Chapter 9–10

The Gibeonites were as surely defeated as Jericho and Ai, but preserved their lives by craftiness. Israel's leaders, including Joshua, were remiss in not seeking the will of God about the Gibeonites but made the best of their situation by gaining some slaves for menial tasks. So Israel's life thereafter included elements that were the result of their failures, as always happens, but these were made to serve the worship of God and the welfare of his people.

The new necessity laid on Israel because of their covenant with the Gibeonites now became part of the program of God for the defeat of other surrounding cities in the South of the promised land. It must have been comforting to Israel to hear the Lord say: 'Do not fear for I have given them into your hand'. They did not have any less of God or his gracious reign because of the alien element in their borders. In fact, God assisted the warriors with hail, and Joshua was bold to ask God for extra time in which to defeat their enemies, and all this, at Gibeon. The five kings were trapped for later treatment while Israel pursued their prey, and they returned with not even the bay of a dog against them (as in Exod. 11:7).

The rest of the conquest of Southern Canaan is recorded without further variation in the story. Everything happened as at Jericho, and according to the command of God. The chastisements of Ai and Gibeon had served Israel well and now, they simply carried out what God had given them to do. The wickedness of the Amorites was full (Gen. 15:16) and their end had come. This was no mere conquest but a judgment. Because God has promised an inheritance to all who turn to him, he will destroy every power that resists his preparing that inheritance for them. This is made clear in the book of Revelation. In the mean time, as Paul demonstrated, the church is to take every thought captive to Christ (II Cor. 10:3–6).

## Prayer

Father, you have appointed Christ as our leader in battle and appointed to him a kingdom that he is to share with us, a creation in which you are ruler over everything. I thank you that this remains wonderfully true in the midst of our present stumbling. Lord, as this day of victory will surely come, grant diligence to your church that we may not suffer any rival to go unattended but may boldly affirm that Christ is Lord, while you confirm the word with signs and wonders. We ask this in the strong name of Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Chapter 11–12

With the South conquered, the North was galvanised into intense preparations for an awesome contest. No particular strategy was given to Israel, but Joshua was told not to be afraid, and told that Israel would succeed. Then, Israel attacked their enemies

and defeated them. They returned and dealt with the leading city and its king and then with the numerous cities of the North and their kings. All this took some time, but then, with minor exceptions, the land was subdued and there was no viable hindrance to the land being apportioned and settled by the people of Israel. God had told them that the land would be subdued little by little lest wild beasts take over the land (Deut. 7:22). Their victories had to be measured against their ability to manage what had been gained. Clearly, God is not interested in victory for its own sake but that the world may know his Fatherly care and find him who has never ceased bringing the world to its goal (Acts 17:24–28).

The kings who were defeated are listed, starting with the opening victories over Jericho and Ai and then over the coalition of five kings in the South. This is followed by the kings of the North, some of whom were not mentioned in the brief overview of the subduing of the North. With the death of these kings, Israel was ready to possess her inheritance.

### **Prayer**

Father, as Joshua was trained in trusting you for the fulfilment of all your purpose, train our hearts also to be careful to do all your will and to be very courageous. This world loves its own power and its god is vicious, but we trust in you for an earth in which there are only love, joy and peace. We know that nothing will fail of all your promise to give us an inheritance, therefore, grant that we may reign in life now through your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.