

CONTROL GIVEN TO JOSHUA

Summary and Historical Background

Moses led Israel out of Egypt through the Red Sea to Mt. Sinai where they received the Law of God. Then Moses attempted to bring Israel into the Promised Land, but Israel rebelled and refused to believe God would enable them to possess the land that God promised them. As a result of their unbelief at Kadesh-barnea, He refused to let that generation enter the Promised Land and made them wander in the wilderness for 38 years.

During this time Joshua was his assistant. For forty years Joshua ministered unto Moses and learned much from his example and exhortation and much from personal experience. During the first two years, Joshua fought and defeated the Amalekites while Moses prayed for him and his army (Ex 17:8ff). He also accompanied Moses up Mt. Sinai to receive the stone tablets of the Law (Ex 24:13; 32:17). He was sent by Moses as one of the twelve spies into Canaan and later gave a minority report to Moses that was very unpopular with the people (Num 13-14). Finally, after forty years, Joshua was chosen by God to succeed Moses as the leader of Israel. Now it was Joshua's responsibility to lead Israel into Canaan and possess the land that God had promised them. The book of Joshua records the change of leadership and the way God continued His work through a new leader.

Joshua is the first of the history books in the Old Testament. The Jews called these books "The Former Prophets." These books discuss Israel's life in the Promised Land: the blessings from God for their obedience and His chastening for their disobedience. These books portray Israel's life under the Mosaic Covenant.

The book of Joshua can be divided into three parts: entering the land (chapters 1-5), conquering the land (chapters 6-12), and living in the land (chapters 13-24). Valuable spiritual lessons can be learned through Israel's victories and defeats.

The preparations for entering the land begin when God commissions Joshua to be strong and courageous as a leader of Israel (1:1-9). Joshua immediately takes command by uniting the children of Israel around the possession of Canaan (1:10-18). Then he sends two spies to Jericho to check out the situation (2:1-24). From this chapter it is seen that personal effort and providential care work together to get the job done.

I. Commission of Joshua (1:1-9)

1:1 — The thirty days of mourning for Moses had passed. It was time for Israel to cross over the Jordan River and begin to possess the land God had promised them. God appears to Joshua and speaks to him as Moses' successor.

"Minister" — Joshua had been Moses' minister for forty years. The word "minister" describes a personal servant, an assistant. It does not have the menial connotation of a "slave" (Hebrew: *ebed*), but refers to a higher category of service (note in 2 Chron 9:4 the contrast between servants and ministers).

1:2 — God speaks to Joshua of Moses' death. Joshua is God's new leader of Israel. He is to lead the people of Israel over the Jordan River at flood stage to the land which God had promised them.

"I do give to them" — expresses imminent action: God is about to give Canaan to His people.

1:3, 4 — God gives the boundaries of the land. Every place they will march, God has given to them. The verb describes the action as complete. God sees the conquest "as good as done." Israel's boundaries would be from the wilderness in the south to the Lebanon mountains, the Euphrates River and the land of the Hittites (Syria) in the north. At this time the Hittites were one of the super-powers of the ancient world. The Mediterranean Sea would be the western boundary.

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1:5 — "To stand before" - In this context the verb means to oppose (compare Deut 7:24; Jer 46:4). This verb is very intensive. God promised Joshua of His continual presence to assure Joshua of victory. No one would be able to successfully oppose Joshua all the days of his life. As He was with Moses, so He will be with him in like manner.

"I will not fail" — The verb "fail" means to be feeble, to be weak (Job 12:21), or to be faint (Isa 13:7). God promised He will not become weak and disappoint him in his upcoming battles.

"Forsake" — God also promised He will not abandon Joshua and thus expose him to his enemies.

1:6, 7 — God gives Joshua three means for victory in Canaan. First, Joshua needed to be strong and courageous.

"Be strong" — The verb refers to be physically strong. It is derived from the idea of taking a firm grip on something (Gen 19:16).

"Be of good courage" — The verb points to the strength of the knees to maintain one's position (Isa 35:3). Joshua was to begin a vigorous battle with no thought of retreat.

1:8 — Second, Joshua needed to adhere to the Law, God's Word. This referred to the first five books of the Bible, recently completed by Moses. This word was a written word (8:32-35) which Joshua was to know and obey. There are three things Joshua had to do regarding the Law. It had reference to his mouth, his meditation (heart) and observance (hands and feet).

"Mouth" — One, the Word of God was not to depart out of Joshua's mouth. His mouth had to be consecrated to speak God's Word. His mouth was to lead Israel just as the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night led Israel in the wilderness (Ex 13:22). These pillars would no longer lead Israel. Now the Word of God would take its place.

"Meditate" — Two, in order to have God's Word on his lips, Joshua had to meditate on God's Word day and night. Meditation involves the activity of the heart. Isaiah 59:13 speaks of evil men "conceiving and uttering from the heart (meditating) words of falsehood." So Joshua was to think from his heart (meditate) words of truth from God.

"Observe" — Three, the proof that Joshua's meditation on God's Word was from his heart, his hands and feet needed to show it by complete obedience to it. Observance of God's Word is not a theoretical or token obedience. It had to be a heart-felt, practical obedience to all of God's Word. Anything omitted was sin (Jam 2:10).

Two results were promised Joshua, if his mouth spoke words based on continual meditation and complete obedience to God's Word. One, his way would be prosperous, and two, he would have good success in conquering the wicked people in the land of Canaan.

1:9 — The third need of Joshua for victory in the land was to depend on the presence of God. The presence of God would give him assurance. The verb "be not afraid" is used in Job 13:25 of a leaf "driven to and fro" by the wind. So it would be with Joshua, if he were afraid of his enemies. If we fear God, we need not fear others (Ps 89:7).

"Dismayed" — It refers to demoralization and terror. 2 Kings uses it to describe the shattered and terror-filled condition of the nations regarding Assyria. These conditions of volitional distress and emotional breakdown are not to come upon Joshua. God would be with him in everything he did to keep him strong and courageous.

II. Command of Joshua (1:10-18)

1:10-11 — Joshua commands the people to prepare to cross the Jordan River in three days.

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"Prepare you victuals" — This refers to meat, food. Though the manna had not yet ceased entirely (5:12), the Israelites probably had gotten some other food from the various cities they had captured in Trans-Jordan.

1:12-15 — Joshua now reminds the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh of the promise they had made Moses (Numbers 32:16-19). These tribes received their inheritance in Trans-Jordan, but they were to send their best men (mighty men of valor) armed and ready to aid their brethren in possessing their inheritance in Canaan.

1:16-18 — The two and one-half tribes responded to Joshua without any qualification of their promise. They would be obedient to every command Joshua made (1:16). They recognized Joshua's right to be obeyed (1:17). As Moses was the theocratic head of the government, and deserved implicit obedience, so Joshua deserved the same respect. Anyone who would not hear and obey would be executed (1:18).

III. Competence of Joshua (2:1-24)

2:1 — Joshua sends two men to spy out Jericho. The time of this mission was probably before Joshua's command to prepare to cross Jordan (1:11). It does not appear to make sense that the Israelites would prepare to march until Joshua, got the information from these two spies.

Joshua was not acting without faith by sending spies. It is not acting without faith to use prudence in secular affairs. For example, God can heal sickness, but Paul advised Timothy to use wine (grape juice) for bodily infirmities (1 Tim 5:23). Joshua's prudence is seen not only in the sending of the spies, but in the manner that he sent the spies. He sent them "secretly" so that if there was any unbelief in them when they returned, they would not corrupt the congregation. He had learned from his spy mission the disastrous results on the nation of Israel by the unbelief in ten spies (Num 13-14).

The city of Jericho was a city of about nine acres at this time. Its mud-brick walls and probably glacis (steep slope leading to the wall) made its conquest difficult. Jericho commanded an important road leading to the highlands, making its conquest imperative. When the spies arrived in Jericho, they lodged in the house (not an inn) of a harlot named Rahab.

2:2-6 — The spies were recognized as men from Israel and their presence was reported to the king. Rahab's action can only be called deceptive here. The king demanded that Rahab bring out the spies, but she said they had already left. Her statement in v. 4 might be true, but what she says in v. 5 is clearly a lie. How can this lie be reconciled with God's truthfulness when Rahab is clearly honored in Heb 11:31 and James 2:25?

(1) God hates lies (Rev 21:8, 22:15) and cannot lie (Num 23:19), so He certainly did not approve of the lie. The Scripture only approves of her reception of the spies (Heb 11:31) and of her help in the spies' departure (James 2:25), but in no way approves of her lying.

(2) Rahab was an immature believer. Her countrymen, the Canaanites, probably were habitual liars (as is still common in the Middle East). Influenced by her past manner of life, she unwittingly chose a sinful means to gain a legitimate end. God honored her faith, but did not commend her lie. A mature believer should not lie to accomplish a good end. He should always tell the truth.

2:7 — Various companies of men were sent by the king to the fords on the Jordan River to try to capture the spies.

2:8-13 — Rahab reveals to the spies the ground of her faith and the reason she protected the spies:

(1) She believed that God had given Israel the land of Canaan. She was a believer in the truths expressed in the Abrahamic covenant even though she had never heard of such a covenant. The Abrahamic Covenant promised Israel the land of Canaan and those who opposed Israel would be

cursed. This curse produced terror in the inhabitants of Canaan and faintness (the verb means "to melt," Ps 46:6, or "to dissolve," Nah 2:6).

(2) She believed God's power, seen in Israel's exodus from Egypt and in the destruction of Trans-Jordan nations.

(3) She believed the LORD (Yahweh) as the omnipresent God. She said, "The LORD your God, He is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath" (v. 11).

(4) She asked for an oath to be made in the name of Yahweh - she wanted to enter into covenant with those who had a covenant with Yahweh.

2:14-22 — Rahab's faith was not a vain faith; it produced good fruit (Jam 1:26; Tit 3:9). Three actions show that she was casting herself wholly in faith on the God of Israel (2:14-21).

(1) She helped the spies escape, letting them down outside the city wall by a scarlet cord. She also gave them good advice on how to elude their pursuers (2:15-16, 22).

(2) She agreed not to discuss the mission of the spies. She would be loyal to Israel and keep quiet. Her fate was tied to Israel's, win or lose (2:20-21).

(3) She tied the scarlet cord in her window by which she let the spies down outside the city wall so they could escape (2:21). The scarlet line would identify her house. Then she had to gather her family inside her house and stay there until they were rescued. If anyone left her house, they would be killed in the streets (2:18-19). Rahab's faith was proved by her faithfulness to the oath she made with the spies.

2:23-34 — The spies reported back to Joshua. Their enthusiasm is obvious. God had already been preparing for their conquest of Canaan by discouraging and frightening the people in the land.