

Chapter Six **The Way to Victory: Joshua**

The time had come for the people of Israel to enter into the land of promise. All those who left Egypt some 40 years before had perished in the wilderness, except for Caleb and Joshua. A new generation had grown up in the wilderness journey. Moses had fully instructed them in the laws and the sacrifices before he died, and Joshua had assumed the task of leading the people into the land.

Moses, the great lawgiver, was not permitted to take the people into the fulfillment of promise; rather Joshua (whose Hebrew name is the equivalent of the Greek name, Jesus) is given that privilege. This is surely an anticipation of the New Testament truth that the law cannot fulfill the promises of God, but they are all available to us through our heavenly Commander, Jesus.

Nevertheless, Joshua was instructed in the use of the law as necessary for meditation and a guideline to obedience. But the strength by which it shall be fulfilled lies in the great word, "Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Josh. 1:9).

VICTORY IS POSSIBLE

After reminding the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh of their promise to assist their brethren in the conquest of the land, Joshua sent out his spies to view the situation. These go out as he himself went out, 38 years before, in confidence and faith that God intended to give them the land. They were simply attempting to see how that deliverance will be brought about. With boldness they entered into the city of Jericho and were hidden in the house of Rahab, the harlot, who informed them that the people had for 40 years been afraid of the Israelites, having heard of their miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea and their conquest of the two Amorite kings, Sihon and Og. The giants which Israel feared at Kadesh-Barnea had themselves been afraid of the people of Israel for the whole 40 years' wandering!

Rahab's personal confidence that the God of Israel was the Lord of all the earth led her to hide the two spies and aid in their subsequent escape from the city, after having them promise that when the city fell she and her household would be spared.

Forsake Unbelief

After the spies returned, Joshua ordered the people to assemble for the crossing of the Jordan. The Ark of the Covenant leading the way would show the people that a living God was among them as He opened a way through the Jordan, just as He had once opened a way through the Red Sea.

Twelve men were chosen, one from each tribe, to memorialize the occasion. As the feet of the priests touched the edge of the Jordan, the waters began to recede, having been cut off far upstream near the little city of Adam.

The priests bearing the Ark of the Covenant remained in the middle of the river until all the people passed through. Then a monument of 12 stones was erected in the middle of the river and another similar monument at the river's edge. These were to be a memorial for the children to see, that they might ask and receive an explanation from their parents.

As we seek the significance of this event in the Christian life, we must remember that just as the crossing of the

Red Sea meant the willingness to forsake the world typified by Egypt, so the crossing of the Jordan indicates a willingness to enter into all the promises which God has given the believer in Jesus Christ. It acknowledges the choice to forsake the unbelief of the wilderness and to fully lay hold of all that God has made available.

Some have seen in the two memorial monuments the Christian ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and surely these are designed as memorials to remind us of the basis upon which all of God's mighty promises rest. They too need to be explained to children so that they understand their full import.

Depend on God

Four significant events are recorded in chapter 5. First, all the males of Israel were circumcised at Gilgal. The name means "rolling away," for here the Lord said Israel had "rolled away the reproach of Egypt" (Josh. 5:9). Evidently the nation had forsaken this ritual during the wilderness wanderings; thus the mark of difference between them and the pagan nations around them had disappeared. Before the land is conquered they must again be seen as the distinct people of God. The New Testament speaks of a "circumcision of the heart" (see Rom. 2:29 which is the counterpart to this Old Testament ritual, and indicates a heart that is ready to forsake all dependence on the natural life and rely upon the strength of God alone).

The second event in Gilgal was the celebration of the Passover for only the second time since leaving Egypt. Then the day after the Passover the provision of manna ceased entirely, the third event of this chapter, and the people began to subsist upon the natural produce of the land of Canaan. This corresponds to our spiritual feeding upon the full potential of the resources we have in Christ.

The fourth event of chapter 5 was Joshua's encounter with the commander of the hosts of the Lord. Clearly it was not up to Joshua to plan the strategy of this campaign of conquest, but God Himself would do so, just as today it is not the church's task to develop the strategy by which it can overcome the world, but it is to obey the Word of the Lord and to obey the pattern of the church's function as given in the New Testament.

Release Worldliness

Both the foolishness of the Jericho strategy, in the eyes of the watching world, and its mighty power to conquer are revealed in the subsequent actions of Israel. Upon reaching the city of Jericho with its massive walls, the people were instructed to march once around the city in silence while the priests sounded trumpets. Each day for six days this was Joshua's command. Then on the seventh day the people were told to encompass the city seven times and, when the priests blew a mighty blast of the trumpets, the people were to shout and the walls would fall down.

To this apparently foolish behavior the people had faith enough to consent. And on the seventh day, exactly as predicted, the mighty walls tumbled down at the shout, of faith. Rahab and her family were spared according to the prearranged provision, but the city was sacked and the rest of the inhabitants were put to the sword. A curse, involving the death of the firstborn and youngest son of any who would rebuild the city, was pronounced by Joshua. The fulfillment of this curse some two hundred years later is recorded in I Kings 16:34.

This curse indicates the symbolic meaning of Jericho in the life of the present-day believer. The death of the firstborn son links it with the final judgment of God that brought the Israelites out of Egypt. Jericho, therefore, like Egypt, is a type of the world. Christians are not to covet or to claim as their own the things of the world, but are to hold them loosely and use them for the Lord's purposes. They are likewise not to fight the world directly, but by faith to maintain an attitude of heart separation from the world, and thus it will lose its allurements for the believer " who will find it open to conquest through the testimony of faith.

Battle the Flesh

Chapters 7 and 8 give us the bittersweet story of Ai, the next city in the line of conquest. It was such a small city and looked so easy to overcome that only a few thousand were sent to capture it. They suffered, however, a serious defeat, and about 36 Israelites were killed. As Joshua inquired before the Lord the reason for this,

God told him that the defeat resulted from an incomplete obedience within the camp of Israel: one man, Achan, of the tribe of Judah, had disobeyed the instructions concerning Jericho and had hidden in his tent some silver, a wedge of gold and a garment from Babylon.

This helps us understand the symbolic significance of Ai in our own lives. It is a picture of the flesh, the natural humanity within us, inherited from Adam, which also loves the things of the world, and yet it appears to us to be of lime consequence and easily overcome.

When the sin of Achan was discovered, apparently by the casting of lots, the seemingly harsh but faithful judging of the people by stoning Achan to death made possible a renewed attack upon the city of Ai, this time by the strategy of ambush. The city fell and all the inhabitants were put to the sword. Thus it is evident that the conquest of our enemy, the flesh within, is accomplished by our willingness to accept the judgment of death upon it, to take up battle against it by the power of the Spirit, for "the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh" (Gal. 5:16).

Since Ai was the gateway to the west, its defeat left the entire central portion of the land of promise open to the Israelites. Joshua's first act was to fulfill the command of Moses and to build an altar upon Mount Ebal. There, as the law had carefully provided, the blessings were read from Mount Gerizim and the cursing from Mount Ebal, that Israel (and us) should forever remember the blessings that will follow the putting aside of the flesh and the cursings which will inevitably appear if we fail to accept the judgment of the cross upon our natural life.

Resist the Devil

The cities of the west along the coastal plain from Gaza in the south to Lebanon in the north met together to form a league to stop the Israelites' conquest (Josh. 9:1). One of the cities that lay in the immediate path of Joshua and his armies was the city of Gibeon, near present-day Jerusalem. Afraid for their lives, the Gibeonites resorted to a ruse to trick the Israelites into making a treaty of peace with them, which Jehovah had strictly forbidden should be done with any of the inhabitants of the land.

When later, upon attacking Gibeon, Joshua learned of their deceit, the worst he could do to them was to make them hewers of wood and carriers of water.

The kings of the Canaanite cities to the south now determined to combine their armies for a united attack on Gibeon. This large city, thus attacked by their own allies, immediately called upon Joshua for defense, in line with the treaty of peace he had made with them. By a forced march from Gilgal, Joshua and his armies traveled by night and took the enemy armies by surprise, throwing them into a panic. It was on this great occasion that Joshua prayed and asked for the lengthening of the day that they might have needed time to accomplish the routing of the enemy. It is recorded that the sun stood still over Gibeon and the moon over the valley of Aijalon for almost the length of a day. Accompanying this, huge hailstones fell from the heavens, killing more of the allied armies than even the Israelites themselves killed with the sword.

This event has been ridiculed by the critics for centuries, but impressive evidence now has been discovered that the earth has in times past shifted on its axis, and such a shift would account for the phenomenon recorded in Joshua.

Symbolically, the account pictures the ability of Satan to use circumstances in such a way as to harass and frighten the Christian, but when such circumstances are met by the unyielding heart of faith, the very circumstances are turned to the benefit of the believer.

Obey the Living God

After the battle of Gibeon the conquest of the south was soon accomplished. The cities were taken one by one and the inhabitants slaughtered in obedience to the command of God to eliminate the cities of the Canaanites in their entirety. Then the kings in the northern part of Canaan banded together under the leadership of King Jabin of the fortified city of Hazor. Joshua met them in battle at the waters of Merom and another great victory was

accomplished, including the taking of Hazor.

On the defeat of the northern kings, the entire land lay under the control of Israel. Jehovah's promise to Joshua had been fulfilled that "no man will be able to stand before him." Thus we see the three great enemies of the believer--the world, the flesh and the devil--are overcome by the simple means of faith and obedience to the Word of the living God.

This first section of the book of Joshua is clearly designed to encourage us to understand that a complete victory is possible over these three fearsome foes--the world, the flesh and the devil. And though there are temporary failures (as at Ai) and partial compromises (as with the Gibeonites), God will give us victory just as He conquered the great giants who frightened the Israelites at Kadesh-Barnea.

THE CONQUESTS

The second section of the book covers chapters 12 through 21, and primarily consists of a listing of the enemies who were subdued under Joshua's first attack, in the first seven years after Israel had entered the land. Then we learn how the land was apportioned bit by bit to the various tribes according to the casting of lots. This device permitted the decision to be according to the divine mind and not according to man's wisdom. Thus each tribe would know that the portion of land given to them was given by God's own choice. We are reminded today that the circumstances in which we find ourselves are not of our own choosing necessarily, but the hand of the Lord has brought us to the place where, for the present at least, we are to be.

Though the major portion of the land promised to Abraham was now under Israel's control, still along the fringes there were unoccupied territories and within the land itself pockets of resistance remained. When Joshua allotted each tribe its own territory by casting lots, he reminded them that they were individually responsible to claim the territory which rightly belonged to them. There would be battles involved, but they were to be assured that the ultimate victory would be secure, for God had given His word.

Scattered within this section largely devoted to the distribution of the land are isolated stories which constitute beautiful illustrations of personal faith. One is the story of Caleb, who at 85 years of age was still willing to claim the inheritance promised to him when he was yet in the wilderness with Moses. In accordance with his request, Caleb was allotted the city of Hebron and its provinces as a permanent inheritance. But in order to conquer it he must drive out the giants who dwelt there.

The names of three of these giants, sons of Anak, are given: *Sheshai*, "who I am," *Ahiman*, "what I am," *Talmi*, "what I can do." These are clearly indicative of the believer's struggle to subdue the giants of self which oppose his progress. This section also gives the account of the setting up of the Tabernacle at the city of Shiloh, the allotment of an inheritance to the daughters of Zelophehad, as Moses had promised them, and the designation of cities of refuge as the law had provided. The Levites, of course, were given no inheritance within the land except for certain cities to dwell in, and they were reminded again that the Lord was their portion. As previously seen, the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh were given their part on the east of the Jordan, but the rest of the land was divided between the nine and one-half tribes.

THE CONSECRATION

The last portion of the book of Joshua, from chapters 22 through 24, include the account of the misunderstanding which arose between the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh east of Jordan, and closes with two addresses by Joshua to the people shortly before his death. When the major portion of the land had been conquered Joshua permitted the two and one-half tribes to return to their homes east of the Jordan, but to the dismay of the other nine and one-half tribes, the eastern Israelites immediately erected an altar on the west side of the river. Remembering the sin of Achan and how God had punished the whole nation for the sin of one man, the western tribes gathered armies at Shiloh, under the leadership of Phinehas. They came to Gilead and demanded an explanation, reminding the eastern tribes that burnt offerings and meal offerings and other sacrifices were to be offered only at the Tabernacle in Shiloh.

The two and one-half tribes then explained that they had no intention of using the great altar for any such

sacrifices, but had erected it as a memorial to teach their children that they too shared the inheritance of the Lord with the rest of Israel. These two tribes seem, therefore, to typify the Christians who still remain at heart committed believers, but who in their daily lives experience incomplete enjoyment of the full inheritance.

Aware of his advanced age, and knowing he will soon die, Joshua summoned Israel to Shechem and there he delivered two magnificent addresses which close the book. The first is a warning against turning to the idolatry of the surrounding nations and a solemn promise that if they do so, God will permit them to fall again under the power of their enemies. The second address is a marvelous review of the way the Lord has led them, from the plagues of Egypt to the conquest of the Promised Land.

Joshua ended his message with a magnificent summons to the people to make personal choice among themselves as to whom they will serve; but he warned again that such service must be from the heart and not from lips only.

Shortly after having recorded the promise of the people to serve the Lord, Joshua died at the age of 110. The close of this book looks back to the close of Genesis and records how the bones of Joseph were at last buried in the city of Shechem in the ground which Jacob had bought from the Hittites. Thus in the words appearing on the memorial to John Wesley in Westminster Abbey " God buries his workmen but carries on his work."

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