

JOSHUA: A NEW BEGINNING

Series: The Adventure and Victory of Faith

by Doug Goins

This fall is a significant season of transition for our family. All four of our children have been through an important passage this summer. Alayna, our youngest daughter, has started junior high school. Micah started his freshman year of high school three days ago, and the prospect of going to a big four-year high school where he's just an insignificant freshman has been a bit frightening for him. Kathryn just turned sixteen this summer and had her first full-time job. She had to work six days a week and get up at 5:00 a.m. every morning. That was an interesting rite of passage for her. Our twenty-five-year-old son Trevor has worked for the last year in San Francisco, and recently accepted a job transfer to Denver. I took him to the airport last Tuesday morning to see him off on this new adventure. He confessed to me as we were driving to the airport that in addition to the excitement and adventure of it, he felt a good bit of fear about the unknown new responsibilities, people, and place.

As parents, Candy and I love the changes in the lives of our children. We really are proud of them, watching the struggle that each of them puts forth as they grow into young adulthood. But as parents we ache for them as well. We do empathize with the pain, the difficulty, and the fear that is always part of new beginnings.

In this message we're starting a new study together of the Old Testament book of Joshua. Joshua is an exciting adventure story, and it is real history. It's an important part of holy, inspired Scripture that has great meaning for us today as the story of God calling Joshua to lead the people of Israel in holy conquest of the land of Canaan.

There are bigger issues involved in that conquest than the invasion and possession of a land. There are issues that will touch our lives and faith today. The book of Joshua is a book of new beginnings for the people of God. Many of us today have a weary sense of our spiritual need for a new beginning. After forty years of wandering in the wilderness, Israel claimed their inheritance and entered the land. They enjoyed the blessing that God had prepared for them, and God wants us to experience that same kind of life today. Jesus Christ, our Joshua, wants to lead us into victorious spiritual conquest now, and he wants to share with us all the spiritual treasures of his wonderful inheritance. The apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 1:3 that God has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing. But too often we live like victims, defeated soldiers, or spiritual paupers.

I'll briefly survey three new beginnings in this book: a new leader, a new land, and a new life that God wanted to give his people through the conquest. First let's consider the new leader.

Deuteronomy 34:7-12:

Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died; his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated. And the people of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; then the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended.

And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands upon him; so the people of Israel obeyed him, and did as the LORD had commanded Moses. And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the

mighty power and all the great and terrible deeds which Moses wrought in the sight of all Israel.

>From the third chapter of Exodus through Deuteronomy, the focus is on the ministry of Moses. He seems larger than life. He was God's chosen leader to serve the people of Israel. This text tells us that Moses died, though he would not be forgotten; his name appears more than fifty times in the book of Joshua. But then a new servant of the Lord took his place---Joshua. When we study Joshua chapter 1 we're going to see that this change in leadership carries with it tremendous spiritual lessons. For those of us who care deeply that our lives have spiritual impact in the world, who want to experience God's best for our lives, this change of leadership is very significant.

God spent many years preparing Joshua for this new responsibility of leadership. Joshua was born a slave in Egypt. His parents named him Hoshea, which means "Salvation." That was really an act of faith on their part, because they were in bondage; they had no control over their lives or their future. Yet they claimed the promise that God had made to Abraham many years before that there would be salvation from Egypt. Years later, Moses changed Hoshea's name to Joshua, which means "*Yahweh* is Salvation." Joshua is the Hebrew form of the name Jesus.

Joshua was the oldest son of a man named Nun of the tribe of Ephraim. The fact that Joshua was the first-born meant that his life was in danger on the night of Passover. But Joshua and his family had faith in the Lord and put the blood of the lamb over the doorpost, and he was protected by that blood. As a young man Joshua saw all the signs and wonders that God performed in Egypt. There was a growing awareness in him that *Yahweh* was a God of power who would care for his people. He saw God humiliate the demonic gods of Egypt, demonstrating that he alone was the true God. Joshua saw God roll back the waters of the Red Sea to save Israel, and then close those same waters to drown Pharaoh's army. Through all that, Joshua was becoming a man of faith, knowing the Lord and trusting him as the God of deliverance from slavery.

The first time we meet Joshua in the Scriptures is as a soldier, about two months into the wilderness after the deliverance from Egypt. Exodus 17:8-10a:

Then came Amalek and fought with Israel at Rephidim. And Moses said to Joshua, "Choose for us men, and go out, fight with Amalek; tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand." So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek....

Moses chose Joshua, a man who was willing to follow orders, a man of courage who was not afraid to take on enemies of God and his people. The text goes on to tell us that Joshua won the battle. Look at verses 13-14:

And Joshua mowed down Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

And the LORD said to Moses, "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven."

That suggests that God had already chosen Joshua for the ministry he would be given some forty years later. Without Joshua's even knowing what was involved in this battle, God was using it to season him, to strengthen his faith and courage. This conflict with the Amalekites was preparation for many battles that he would fight in the promised land.

The next time Joshua appears in the text, it is as a servant of Moses in Exodus 24:12-13. This time he was with Moses on Mount Sinai as God gave the Law, his revealed truth.

The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tables of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction." So Moses rose with his servant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God.

Here Joshua was a personal assistant to the leader of Israel. Joshua was intimately involved with Moses as truth was given. That was important in the process of preparing Joshua to learn revealed truth, to know both the holy God of Israel who met Moses face-to-face on the mountain, and also the holy Law that God gave his people to obey.

One of the things that has been challenging to me as I've read and reread the book of Joshua is the fact that the secret of his military victories was not his giftedness as a great general, tactician, or swordsman, but rather his willingness to serve the word of God. In God's call to Joshua in Joshua 1:8, he said, "This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success." Joshua was called to personal submission to the word of God. Later on in the book, before the very first battle - for Jericho - God confronted Joshua face-to-face and once more called him to obedience to his leadership.

Joshua served the Lord, his word, and the people of Israel with amazing personal humility. Usually the way we learn humility (at least if we are stubborn) is through humiliation. That happened in Joshua's life. There is a story of an embarrassing episode for him recorded in Numbers 11. Joshua was very loyal to Moses and very jealous for Moses' honor and authority among the people. There were two men who were filled with the Spirit and began prophesying in the camp. These men were not among the seventy elders whom Moses had appointed to leadership. It upset Joshua, and he bristled at this irregularity. Remember, he was a disciplined young military officer. So in Numbers 11:28-29 he complained to Moses:

And Joshua the son of Nun, the minister of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, "My lord Moses, forbid them." But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!"

That is mature leadership, in contrast to Joshua's misguided, youthful zeal and blind loyalty to Moses. Joshua was saying, "Let's restore ecclesiastical order around here. You're in charge. These guys are not under your leadership. There shouldn't be any prophetic freelancing!" But Moses' response was beautifully humble. He claimed no special privilege for himself, saying, "Even though I have leadership responsibility, I'm thrilled that God can do whatever he wants among his people." That response must have had an effect on Joshua, because we're going to see in chapter 19 that when the tribal inheritance was allotted after the conquest of the promised land, Joshua took his share last.

In Numbers 13-14 we meet Joshua the spy. These chapters record Israel's arrival at Kadesh-Barnea on the southern border of Canaan. God commanded Moses to appoint twelve men to spy out the promised land, and Joshua was one of them. For forty days these men traveled the length and breadth of the land investigating it. When they came back, they reported to Moses that the land really was wonderful, but they were split on what the nation ought to do. Ten of the spies discouraged the people by telling them that the enemy cities and armies were too great; Israel just wasn't strong enough to take the land. Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, had the minority view. They encouraged the people to trust God, to go ahead and move into the land. Do you know what the names of those ten faithless spies were? No, we don't remember their names, but we do remember Joshua and Caleb.

The tragedy was that the people chose to listen to the ten. The Scriptures are clear that this decision was an act of rebellion. It delayed the conquest of the land for forty more years. But the crisis did reveal some wonderful character qualities developing in Joshua. He was a realist. He wasn't blind to the realities of the situation. He did say, "Yes, there are walled cities, chariots of iron, and giants in the land." But he didn't allow the king-sized difficulties and problems to weaken his faith in God. Ten of the spies looked at God through the circumstances, and that was what controlled their view of the supernatural. Joshua and Caleb chose to interpret the circumstances through what they knew was true about God and his power and strength. Their God was big enough for the battles that lay ahead. Joshua was also a man of conviction. He knew he was right, and he was not afraid to stand against the majority opinion. The people threatened to execute Joshua and Caleb for this minority view. But God was with them and spared their lives. We're going to see over and over again in the

book of Joshua that this ability to see spiritual reality and this strong spiritual conviction were crucial to Joshua's leadership of the nation in defeating all their enemies and in claiming their inheritance.

We follow Joshua the successor through the forty years in the wilderness, as he patiently stayed with Moses and did his job. Just imagine how tough it was on Joshua and Caleb to be patient with that process, to not to get resentful and frustrated with the disobedience of the people around them. But there was a process going on through those forty years of preparation for this ministry of succession to Moses. When he was preparing to die he asked God to give them a leader, and God told him to choose Joshua. In Deuteronomy 31:1-8, Moses' final message to Israel, he passed the mantle of leadership to Joshua:

So Moses continued to speak these words to all Israel. And he said to them, "I am a hundred and twenty years old this day; I am no longer able to go out and come in. The LORD has said to me, 'You shall not go over this Jordan.' The LORD your God himself will go over before you; he will destroy these nations before you, so that you shall dispossess them; and Joshua will go over at your head, as the LORD has spoken. And the LORD will do to them as he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land, when he destroyed them. And the LORD will give them over to you, and you shall do to them according to all the commandment which I have commanded you. Be strong and of good courage, do not fear or be in dread of them: for it is the LORD your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you."

Then Moses summoned Joshua, and said to him in the sight of all Israel, "Be strong and of good courage; for you shall go with this people into the land which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them; and you shall put them in possession of it. It is the LORD who goes before you; he will be with you, he will not fail you or forsake you; do not fear or be dismayed."

With those words this new leader was now in place, and he would follow the Lord with the same confidence that Moses had followed the Lord in all of his years of leadership.

The second new beginning in the book of Joshua is a new land. Let's consider first the promise of the land. That word "land" is found eighty-seven times in the book of Joshua, because it is the record of Israel's entering, conquering, and claiming the promised land. God had promised to give that land to Abraham many generations before. The promise was first made in Genesis 12:5b-7. God spoke to Abraham after he arrived in Canaan with all of his family in response to God's call.

When they had come to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

God reaffirmed that promise to Isaac, then to Jacob, and then to each one of their descendants. Eleven times in Exodus, seven times in Leviticus, and ten times in Numbers the promise of the land was reaffirmed. The book of Deuteronomy in its entirety is Moses' farewell speech to the nation, and in it he frequently mentioned the promise of the land and the nation's responsibility to possess it. The word "land" is found two hundred times in Deuteronomy, and the word "possess" fifty times.

Israel owned the land because of God's gracious gift based on his covenant with Abraham. But their enjoyment of the land depended on their entering into it - accepting the gift and following God in faithful obedience. And as long as the Jews obeyed the truth revealed by God in the Torah, God blessed them and prospered them in the land. But whenever they turned from God to idols, God would discipline them in the land (that is what the book of Judges is all about). But finally God took them out of the land into Babylon. Then after seventy years of chastening he brought them back to the land.

Why is that land, that little piece of territory on the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, so important? The prophet Ezekiel said of the city of Jerusalem that it was the "center" of the nations, and that the land of Israel

was the "center" of the world. The Hebrew word translated "center" means navel, suggesting the idea of the umbilical cord that connects a fetus to the mother. The land was like the spiritual lifeline between God and this world. Remember Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman at the well: "...Salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22). God chose the land of Israel to be the stage on which the great drama of redemption would be presented.

Back in Genesis 3, sin entered the world in the fall from grace, and God listed the consequences of sin. God cursed Satan, the deceiving serpent, and told him that he would be defeated. Then he made the first promise in Scripture, that he would send a Savior into the world. And the first step in fulfilling that promise was the call of Abraham. Beginning with Genesis 12, Old Testament history focuses on the Jews and the land of Israel. Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees to go to that new land, and there Isaac and Jacob were born. God announced that the redeemer was going to come from the tribe of Judah in Genesis 49. Later in 2 Samuel 7, God revealed that he would come from the family of David. Much later it was prophesied that he would be born of a virgin, in the town of Bethlehem, and that one day he would die for the sins of the world. All of these important events were predicted in the Old Testament, and they were to be played out in this drama of redemption on the stage of the land of Israel, the land that Joshua was called to conquer and to claim. That is why the promise and the gift of the land were so important.

The third theme of new beginnings in this study of Joshua is that of new life - a new way of living, a life of adventure, a life of faith. It was a life of experiencing spiritual victory over the world system that confronted them - Canaanite military, political, and economic power. It was also victory over their own fleshly struggles with fear, rebellion, and all that churned inside; and over Satan himself. They would confront supernatural, demonic evil in the conquest of the land. The events recorded in the book of Joshua have to do with life for God's people, not with death. It's the kind of life that Jesus said he came to give abundantly. Yes, they would encounter failure - there would be bloody battles and humiliating defeat. But primarily, this history in Joshua is one of victorious life for God's people. Joshua will illustrate for us how we as believers today can say good-bye to sin, to the old ways of living, and enter into the richness of our life in Christ.

There are two themes of provision that we will find in Joshua which are echoed in the New Testament. One is spiritual riches that Jesus wants to give us. Joshua illustrates how we can enjoy the spiritual resources given us to enrich and enhance life so that we can meet enemies, difficulties, and horrible circumstances and defeat them. It illustrates how to claim for ourselves all that we have in Jesus Christ. I read Joshua a number of times this summer, and I kept turning to the book of Ephesians, which is a book about riches and blessing and resources which we already have, but which we have to learn to understand and claim. The book of Joshua illustrates practically how to claim our riches in Christ.

The other theme of provision has to do with claiming our spiritual rest in Christ. In the history of the nation Israel, Canaan was a place of rest. After four hundred years of slavery in Egypt and forty years of wandering in the wilderness, the Jews would finally be given rest in their promised land. That theme is mentioned seven different times in the book of Joshua. It's a strange juxtaposition of warfare and rest, of claiming an inheritance and learning to rest in the God who gave the land. That theme is explained in chapters 3 and 4 of Hebrews. Canaan is a picture of the rest that we experience as Christians as we surrender completely to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, as we learn to let go of confidence in ourselves and trust God more and more for every aspect of life.

This issue of new life has a geography to it. Let me summarize the four locations in Israel's history that illustrate the four spiritual experiences of life and death. First, Egypt is the place of death and bondage from which Israel was miraculously delivered. They were saved from death by the blood of the lamb, and they were saved from bondage by the power of God, who opened the Red Sea and took them across to safety and freedom. This is a picture of the salvation that we have through faith in Jesus Christ. John the Baptist said of him, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29.) Through his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ delivers the believing sinner from bondage and from the judgment of death. As Israel was transported from Egypt, according to Paul, we are transported from the dominion of darkness to the kingdom of the Son (see Colossians 1:13).

The second location on Israel's spiritual map is the wilderness. This experience of Israel is evidently God's

purpose for each of us at least for a time. That is where we learn to function on a different basis as new Christians. The goal is being transferred from the world's ways of doing things, but it's really tough for habit patterns to change, and most of us try to sustain our spiritual life on the same basis on which we sustained ourselves as non-Christians---doing it ourselves, trusting our own resources. So we need some time in the wilderness, as Israel did, so that we can learn to trust God and his word completely, to follow him completely, and to do things his way on an entirely different basis than that of our old life.

But it is not God's intention for us to spend forty years in the wilderness. It's possible to wander around as a Christian, resisting Jesus' full and complete control of our lives, keeping strings attached to all the old comfort zones and the old habit patterns, meandering through life without ever enjoying the fullness of what God has designed for us. There is a problem with being just Christian enough to be miserable, still living with fear and bitterness and dabbling with idolatry, rebelling in some area of life. We don't have to stay there in the wilderness.

The third place is the land of Canaan. Entering the promised land in the book of Joshua pictures how the Christian life ought to be lived - a great adventure full of intense warfare but with victory, faith, and obedience; spiritual richness and rest in God's power and provision. It's an exciting life of faith, trusting Jesus Christ, our Joshua. Hebrews 2:10 calls him the captain of our salvation. John says in 1 John 5:4 that Jesus leads us from victory to victory. That's how we can live.

Victorious Christian living isn't a once-for-all triumph that ends all our problems. Joshua is going to teach us that it is a series of conflicts and victories. We're going to defeat one enemy after another, claiming more of our inheritance little by little to the glory of God. The Scottish preacher Alexander White says, "Victorious Christian living is a series of new beginnings." In Joshua 11:23, after the land had been conquered and the major campaigns were accomplished, it says, "...Joshua took the whole land...." But in Joshua 13:1 it says, "...There remains yet very much land to be possessed." Is that a contradiction? No, it's a basic spiritual principle. In Christ, we have all that we need for victorious Christian living, but we have to learn how to possess our inheritance by faith, a day at a time, a decision at a time, a choice at a time, a step at a time. In Joshua 1:3, God says to Joshua, "Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon [every step you take in conquest---future tense], I have given to you, as I promised to Moses [it's yours---past tense]." But you have to keep walking into it to understand it, experience it, and enjoy it.

The last location on Israel's spiritual map is Babylon. That's where they spent seventy years in captivity because they disobeyed God and worshipped the idols of the pagan nations around them. And whenever we as God's children are willfully rebellious, our loving heavenly Father must discipline us until we learn once again to be submissive, trusting, and malleable in his hands. But when we confess our sins and forsake them, God forgives us, forgets it ever happened, and restores us as his children to full fellowship with him and to fruitfulness in life.

A final aspect to this new life that we'll find in Joshua, and the most important aspect, is the Giver of life himself. The most important character in this exciting history is not the man, Joshua. It's *Yahweh*, the God of Joshua and the God of Israel. In everything Joshua did by faith, his heart's desire was to glorify God. We're going to see that when the Jews crossed the Jordan River, Joshua reminded them that the living God was among them, and he would overcome their enemies. Joshua also called the people to obedience so that all the nations around them would believe in God. Their obedience to God would have a saving effect on all the people who observed the conquest. In his farewell address to the leaders of the nation at the end of the book, Joshua gave God the glory for all that Israel had accomplished under his leadership. At least fourteen times in the book God is called "the LORD God of Israel." Everything that Israel did in this book either glorified God, or it disgraced his reputation. When Israel obeyed by faith, God's promises were fulfilled and he was their strong ally. But when they disobeyed in unbelief, God basically let them have their way. He abandoned them to self-determination, and defeat was the result. The same spiritual principle applies to us today.

Our studies in Joshua are going to allow us to look at the spiritual map of our Christian lives. Today as we look at our lives, do we see ourselves wandering in the wilderness or conquering in the promised land? In the wilderness the Jews were complainers. In Canaan they were a conquering people. In the wilderness they kept looking back, yearning for what they had left behind in Egypt. But in the promised land they looked forward

to conquering their enemies, claiming the rest and riches. The wilderness march was an experience of delay, defeat, and death for the nation. Their experience in Canaan was one of life, power, and victory. A great way to begin the study of this book is to ask ourselves, where am I living? Am I in need of a new beginning?

Hebrews 13:5 quotes the opening section of Joshua and echoes the words of Moses in Deuteronomy before Joshua assumed leadership: "[God] has said, 'I will never fail you nor forsake you.'" The context for that promise is a number of areas of practical Christian living: relationships in the church, hospitality to strangers, serving the needs of prisoners, learning to value the marriage relationship, avoiding the dangers of immorality, struggles with money and learning to live life with contentment, trusting spiritual leadership in the church, and not being seduced by false teachers. These are very practical areas of struggle for most of us, if we're honest. These may be some of the experiences in which we need a new beginning spiritually. But we really can start with confidence. After quoting the opening section of Joshua, "...I will never fail you nor forsake you," Hebrews 13 continues in verses 6-9: "...Hence we can confidently say,

**'The Lord is my helper,
I will not be afraid;
what can man do to me?'**

...Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever...it is well that the heart be strengthened by grace...." New Testament Christians were struggling with the same need for new beginnings as we are.

I told you I took my son to the airport Tuesday morning to see him off on what was really a new life. I'm proud of him and thrilled for the adventure, but it's hard to let him go. I asked him how he was doing with it, and he said, "Not very well. It's kind of frightening." I sort of preached this sermon to him first, which he graciously allowed me to do, and then I prayed with him and commended him to this powerful God of new beginnings. God is just as alive and powerful in Denver as he is here.

It's my prayer for us that this series will begin wonderful new things in our lives individually and in our church, that our hearts will be strengthened by grace.

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