

ABIDE

DISCOVERING YOUR OLD TESTAMENT



COMMAND AND CONQUER

JOSHUA

From this book, the subject of transition continues— with the exception of a major difference of course— in the book of Joshua, the transition was not simply spoken about, it was carried out:

In the book of Deuteronomy, we find that it was marked by a series of sermons given by Moses, about what the nation could accomplish. In the book of Joshua, we find that it was marked by a series of victories led by Joshua, explaining what they would accomplish.

In the book of Deuteronomy, we find truth was being explained. In the book of Joshua, we find truth was being experienced.

In the book of Deuteronomy, victory and possession of the land was a promise to be believed. In the book of Joshua, victory and possession was a goal that was achieved.

That is the progression from the book of Deuteronomy to Joshua. It was a transition scene, moving from ‘talking’ to ‘doing.’

God’s Man—

But before we can go any further, we can’t give an adequate introduction without introducing the individual this book is named after. The book of Joshua obviously gets its name from the primary earthly character in the book, Joshua, himself.

If you remember, Joshua, along with Caleb, were the only two people who were able to enter the Promised Land from the previous generation. God blessed both of these men for their faith in His promise and their strong standing among all of the people who opposed their report that the land they had spied out could actually be conquered. This means that by the time we are looking at Joshua’s leadership once Moses passes from the scene, Joshua is about 85 years old.

Also, as we watch his life progress up until this point, we see that Joshua was a great servant and a great war hero, but now, we watch him transition into the role of one of the great leaders mentioned in all of the Bible. His name actually means Jehovah Saves, and by God’s grace, Joshua was able to live up to his name. As we spoke about in the previous chapter, this name is the same name the Messiah, Jesus Christ was given. The Hebrew name for Jesus is Joshua— Jehovah Saves. And as we will see in greater detail in a moment, we learn that the physical victories the children of Israel won under Joshua’s leadership are a picture of the spiritual victories we can win under the leadership of the Lord Jesus Christ. Joshua is a type, a picture, of Jesus.

God's Mission—

Furthermore, by way of introduction, we need to look at the mission that God gave to Joshua. The job Joshua is tasked with is defeating the inhabiting nations inside this land before it could be occupied by Israel. Understanding this, the book of Joshua is a book that is given a tremendous amount of moral criticism. Questions invariably arise regarding God's command for the 'utter destruction' of the inhabiting nations of this land. That said, let's spend a brief moment addressing the seemingly 'moral dilemmas' that take place in this book; and we'll address these in ranking of importance.

- 1. God was Creating a Pure People:** God commanded that His people be pure. Remember that it was through this nation the Messiah would come. If we are rightly to understand God's providence in relation to this command, then it should become clear how easily disease could spread because of the immoral practices of these pagan cultures. Gross immorality always comes with a price. We know how devastating disease can be for a culture that has no exposure to specific strains of germs. In our own history books, there is credible documentation citing how European settlers brought new strains of diseases to the Americas which led to the deaths of thousands. Therefore, we can see God's wisdom in preserving His people in such a way that the diseases of their enemies would not be a problem.
- 2. God had given Adequate Time for Repentance:** God's commands for the removal of these nations occurred because they were given a chance to change and repent, however, there was a rejection of God's warning. In fact, God's warnings were answered with violent rebellion against His own people at times and even were given over to even greater forms of depraved practices, such as human sacrifice of both adults and children alike. So, if God the Just, in His mercy, had given both time and warning to these people in order that they repent, but they chose not to, why would anyone be surprised that God did exactly what He said He would do? Furthermore, we can look to the story of Rahab (Joshua 6:22-23) as evidence of God's forgiveness. Understand, God would have done the same for Jericho as He had done for Rahab and her family if they had only repented.
- 3. God Does not Owe a Single Person the Gift of Life:** All life belongs to God and He is no debtor to any man. If life is given, it is a gift from God. If life is taken, it is taken by God. **Romans 14:8** says, "*For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.*" Therefore, when God claims one of His lives back, or an entire nation full of lives back, there should not be any shock to realize that God is claiming back what is rightfully His. The only way this would be a problem is if we do not understand God's absolute sovereignty, absolute holiness, and absolute justice. Sure, if you compare God to our flawed standard of all of these things, then we can look at God's judgments in shock and confusion. But if we have a Biblical understanding of all of these things, then what we learn is that God created us out of His love, but sin ultimately must be dealt with because of who He is. Therefore, we either repent and allow God to take care of covering our sin, or we can reject and allow God to bring judgment against our sin.

How to Think About Joshua

A good way to think about the book of Joshua is to understand the difference between inheritance and possession. An inheritance is something that is given to you, but a possession is what must be claimed in order to become yours to possess. And that is where the nation of Israel is at this point. They had inherited the land, but in order for it to be literally in their possession, they were going to have to literally possess it. It was potentially theirs to possess, but they needed to actually possess what was theirs. Keep this in mind because we'll have to address this truth later in this chapter.

Aside from this, you can also think about Joshua in terms of the major divisions. There are many exciting events that occur in Joshua that make reading this book very interesting:

Gathering at the River (Joshua 1-5): In these chapters, we see Joshua, along with this new generation, begin their campaign of victory with a miracle. If you remember, this is exactly how the previous generation began. Moses, along with the old generation stood before the Red Sea and God miraculously parted the waters and sent them across on dry land. In these chapters we see the same thing, but for different purposes as God's people approach the Jordan River. At the Red Sea, God provided this passage as a means of escape. At the Jordan River, God provided this passage as a means of conquest.

The Covenant with Rahab (Joshua 2): Joshua sends two spies to scope out the land of Jericho, and during this mission, they would have been caught had it not been for Rahab. Once she throws those in pursuit of these spies off their trail, they make a covenant with her to save her and her house once the invasion happened.

The Crossing of the Jordan (Joshua 3:9- 4:1-14): God gave instruction to have the priests step into the water with the ark, and once this happened, "... *the waters which came down from above stood and rose upon upon an heap...*" (Joshua 3:16)

The Setting of the Memorial Stones (Joshua 4:1-9): God called for 12 stones to be set up on the other side of Jordan as a continual public memorial to the nation about what God had done that day. Also, Joshua took 12 stones himself and placed them in the middle of the river. This signified a secret covenant. What we need to know is that what is hidden from man is revealed before God.

The Circumcision of the Men (Joshua 5): After years of disobedience in regard to the law of circumcision, Joshua will not lead the people any further until this sign of the covenant is complete. Also here you find the Passover observed at Gilgal and Joshua confronted by "Captain of the Host of the LORD".

Getting A Victory (Joshua 6): In this chapter, there is the exciting story of the Battle of Jericho and it's a battle tactic unlike any other, and there is a reason for that. The reason it was unlike any plan that could have possibly worked is that it was a plan solely devoted to highlighting the power and glory of God.

Growing from Defeat (Joshua 7-8): Obviously, the people felt extremely excited at the tremendous victory of the heavily fortified city of Jericho. However, along with that victory, God gave specific instruction in explaining to the people what were to be done with the spoils. He told them that everything was to go into the treasury of the LORD. Further, they were not to take any of the idols. But unknown to the rest of the people, a man named Achan violated this command, took spoils for himself, and hid them in his tent. This sin cost the entire nation dearly. In their excitement, Joshua set his sights on the lesser battle-ready people of Ai. The thought was, "God is with us, these people will be no problem compared to Jericho, and so we'll take it. However, because there was sin in the camp, Israel suffered a humiliating loss and sent Joshua straight to his knees before God, and in complete confusion. The narrative in chapter 7 ends with a confession made before God and Achan, along with his family, received capital punishment for this offense. Once you reach chapter 8, though, God gives Joshua a new battle plan and Ai is finally defeated.

Guarding Against Deception (Joshua 9-11): This is the story of the deceitful Gibeonites. These were the people who pretended like they were travelers from afar and requested a treaty from Israel. They pretended like they had heard and watched what God was doing in the nation of Israel and they wanted to join them. Their deception was eventually discovered, and the treaty was kept, but you can be sure that Joshua was more guarded in the future after he had been tricked by these people. Further, we find several confederacies created as the surrounding kings attempted to join forces in order to defeat the Israelites. However, God's people proved to be unstoppable and defeated everyone they met no matter the numbers.

Gaining Their Inheritance (Joshua 12-22): These chapters are a bit of a hard read as Joshua changes roles from a Military General to a Real Estate Administrator. The land had been subdued to a manageable degree and so now was the time when Joshua could establish the borders and send each tribe to their territories. And that is what makes this section a little difficult. There is very little in this section other than land divisions.

Good-bye from Joshua (Joshua 23-24): Just as Moses had done before him, Joshua gave a final address to the people before he would pass from this life to the next. Once again there is an emotional scene from a strong leader who begged his people that no matter what, to serve the Lord.

What to Look for in Joshua

If we are going to really understand the book of Joshua, then we need to determine the represented meaning behind the major events in the book. This means that we need to once again revisit the subject of typology. If you remember from previous chapters, a “type” is a “picture” of spiritual truth. The book of Joshua is full of pictures of spiritual truth that become immediately relevant for our lives today.

Joshua: As has been mentioned before, Joshua is a type of Jesus Christ. Moses, once again, represented the law, and the law could never lead us into victory. However, Joshua was able to lead God’s people from victory to victory, just as Christ can do for us.

Canaan: The Promised Land Israel entered into is a picture of the saved life of the believer. Now, some people believe that Canaan represents heaven, but I am glad that it doesn’t. These people had to fight in battle to possess Canaan, and I’m glad we don’t have to fight in battle to get into heaven. There was sin in Canaan, but I’m happy to report that there is no sin, nor will there ever be sin found in heaven. These people were eventually kicked out of Canaan, and that is what I am most glad of all about. Once God takes us to heaven, we are there to stay for eternity. No, Canaan is not a picture of heaven, it’s a picture of the believer’s life in Christ. There is struggle, confusion, pain, and sorrow, but in trusting Christ, He can move us along, causing us to defeat every opposition that would come against us.

Jericho: There is more to Jericho than just a victory won on a few pages that we read. The Battle of Jericho is a spiritual picture of the world. It is heavily fortified. It is arrogant. It is resilient in its opposition to the campaign of God. However, it is no match before the power of God, Himself.

Ai: The narrative is a picture of pride and the flesh. In reading this story, Joshua never consults God, nor do any of the people. They simply assumed that God was going to be with them as they engage this next foe just as He had before. It was the inflated pride of the people that caused them simply to act on their own, expecting the same result as before. If Joshua had gone before God prior to this battle, the outcome would have been completely different in terms of losing soldiers. We should never assume that just because God worked a certain way at a certain time in our life that God owes it to us to do the same as before. Before any decision, and before any action for anything, God always must be put first.

Gibeonites: This is a picture of the subtle devices of the Devil’s tactics. Satan uses all kinds of ways to deceive and undermine our credibility. Satan’s deception will look legitimate. It will sound reasonable. It will even flatter us and seem to be in accord with our cause. But in the end, if a decision is made without the wisdom of God, we set ourselves up perfectly for attack from within.

What to Gain from Joshua

Christ is to us, what Joshua was to the nation of Israel. You’ve heard this many times during the course of this one chapter, but it is vital and real, it cannot be overstated.

We spoke at the beginning of this chapter about the difference between an inheritance and a possession, and that an inheritance is something that you have, but a possession must be taken into possession.

Well, if we turn our attention to **Ephesians 1:3**, we’ll read these words, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.”*

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This verse is really a spiritual counterpart to the entire book of Joshua. Spiritual blessings is the possession of each believer in Christ, but those possessions must be possessed. In other words, you have to claim what has been given.

This means that you can be the owner of Christ's blessings, but if you don't claim them, you do not possess them. For instance, as one being in Christ, you have the blessing of the Holy Spirit literally becoming your guide to understanding Scripture (1 John 2:27), but if you're not in Scripture, you're not possessing what God has given you as your inheritance. In Christ, you have inherited and have been blessed with the privilege of coming directly before God in prayer when we need help (Hebrews 4:16), but if we never take the time to pray, then our inheritance is really worthless because we have not claimed this possession. Or, we know that because of Christ's blessing, in dealing with matters like anxiety, God, with His peace will keep our hearts and minds (Philippians 4:7), but if we have no idea that this can be taken hold of, then God's peace will never be truly possessed as it could be. And there are many more resources that could be explored, just like those mentioned.

The point is, just as Israel had to possess their physical inheritance in the land, we must possess our spiritual inheritance in the Lord.

Much of this nation's problems came because they failed to drive out all of the inhabitants of the land they were to claim. And much of our problems come because we fail to drive out all of the sin in our lives and then claim all of the spiritual blessings we have in Christ.



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