

### JOSHUA

#### Lesson 4 - Chapters 1 and 2

This week we open the book of Joshua. Our first three weeks have been spent on binding together the history of Israel to help us understand what God had done to lead Israel to this momentous happening: the possession of the Promised Land.

It's around 1300 B.C., and Moses has died. He climbed Mt. Nebo and was given a panoramic and apparently supernatural view of the Promised Land by the Lord before he passed away (much in the same way that the Apostle John was "carried away in Spirit" to be given a view of heaven and a peek into the future). Somewhere on that mountain Moses was buried (the last words of Deuteronomy says he was buried by God), and to this day no one knows the precise location of his grave.

Open your Bibles to Joshua chapter 1.

#### READ JOSHUA CHAPTER 1 all

Lest there be any doubt as to Joshua's position of authority over Israel and Moses' unique status before the Lord, it is stated in the first verse. There we are told that Moses was the servant of God (servant of Yehoveh, actually) and that Joshua was a minister (or official, or steward) of Moses. The term "servant of God" was a very high status reserved for only a handful of men in the Bible, and was later synonymous with the term Prophet. Moses was the supreme mediator of Israel, even higher than the High Priest, and Joshua was Moses' assistant. It would be wholly incorrect to say that Joshua replaced Moses because the position of Mediator in its highest form was not handed down to Joshua or to anyone else for 13 centuries until Yeshua, the son of God, the anointed one who would be pierced and die for the sins of all men, appeared. And although both Moses and Yeshua were Mediators, of course Yeshua was a step higher because He was and is God, and Moses was not.

Joshua indeed would perform some acts of mediation between Israel and Yehoveh, even being referred to as mediator at times (but so were the High Priests), but not in the position of Moses. Yet Joshua was the supreme human authority over Israel as of Moses' death, he was the Lord's choice, and of this the Bible leaves no doubt.

In verse 2 Joshua is told that now that Moses has died, arise and lead Israel to cross over the Jordan. This instruction would have come 30 days after Moses' death, due to the standard 30-day mourning period during which time Israel stayed put. Further we will eventually be told

that one of the first things that Israel did after crossing over into Canaan was to celebrate Pesach, Passover. Since we know that Passover takes place on the 14th day of the 1st month of the year, it follows that Moses died a little more than 30 days earlier in the 12th month of the year that had just concluded. Tradition is that Moses died on the 7th day of Adar, the 12th month of the Hebrew calendar.

It was necessary for Moses to die before Israel crossed over into the Promised Land because this arrangement was a divinely ordered punishment for Moses for breaking faith with the Lord when Moses smacked a rock with his staff (in order for water to be brought forth to fill a need for the Hebrews he was leading), but he had been instructed by God to SPEAK to the rock. That is the point of emphasizing Moses' death in these opening passages, for Israel was bound NOT to enter Canaan until Moses was gone.

It's also important for us to know that before Moses' died he officiated over a name change for his protégé. Hoshea son of Nun's name was changed to Yehoshua. In English we would say that Hosea became Joshua. In Hebrew Hoshea means "he saves", and Yehoshua means "Yah saves" (Yah or Yeh is simply a contraction for Yahweh or Yehoveh, depending on whatever your favored pronunciation of God's personal name might be). It is identical to our Messiah's name. Yeshua or Yahshua was but a later way of saying Joshua in Hebrew.

The first 5 verses of Joshua serve as a kind of prologue in which promises and definitions concerning the land that God intended for Abraham's descendants to inherit are summed up and repeated from earlier pronouncements in the Torah. There were TWO sets of land that we need to be aware of involved here; there was the actual Promised Land that was reserved for Israel alone, and it lay to the west of the Jordan River, and there was the land that the Lord **permitted** part of Israel to possess (although it was not part of the Promise) that lay to the east of the Jordan River. The land that lay to the east was now the official tribal territories for Reuben, Gad, and ½ of the people of the tribe of Manasseh; this was land that Moses had led Israel to conquer as a kind of staging ground from which to attack Canaan. This land east of the Jordan was not intended for Israel, but those 3 tribes preferred to stop and settle down there rather than move on. Moses allowed it on condition that those 3 tribes would provide a substantial number of troops for Joshua's army as it moved upon the inhabitants of Canaan.

That Moses led the people in conquering the land east of the Jordan is proof of itself that it could NOT have been part of the Promised Land since God had years earlier decided that Moses was prohibited to ever set foot there.

Verse 4 gives us a broad definition of the region that Yehoveh meant for Israel. It started in the south at what is usually called the desert or the wilderness, and this is referring to Kadesh at the southeast corner of Canaan. The Lebanon (yes, the same Lebanon that we know of today) was the general northern boundary of the Promised Land; that is, Lebanon was INCLUDED as part of the Promised Land. To the northeast the boundary was the Euphrates River and to the due east it was the Jordan. The western boundary was the Mediterranean coastline. Of all the boundaries given the one to the north is the least well defined and understood.

There is this reference to the "all the land of the Hittites" in verse 4 that has caused some

amount of disagreement among scholars because the Hittites were a large, powerful, wealthy, and advanced civilization that occupied what is today Turkey, which is north of Lebanon. The Hittites were for all practical purposes an Empire that dominated the region in that era. Most experts no longer think that area of Turkey is what is being referred to when it speaks of “all the land of the Hittites”; rather it is well-recorded that the Hittites had several settlements and outposts throughout the Land of Canaan and it was those scattered settlements that are being identified.

In modern terms and according to modern national boundaries this means that the Promised Land set aside for Abraham includes all of modern Israel, what is called the West Bank (this is a terrible but politically correct name for what is actually Judea and Samaria of Jesus’ day), Lebanon, and much of Syria. It also incorporates a little more of the Sinai than Israel currently possesses, but not much, because the southernmost boundary is generally agreed to be a dry river bed called Wadi el-Arish (the Brook of Egypt) that is located about 20 miles south of Gaza City. However that does mean that the formal Promised Land territory indeed includes ALL of what is today referred to as the Gaza Strip.

That the boundaries defined in verse 4 are those that God has set apart as the land for His people Israel is undeniable. That some church officials argue that the Promised Land does NOT include Gaza, or even Ashkelon and Ashdod (currently Israeli held towns); that this land should also NOT include Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) and the Golan Heights, is the epitome of ignorance of the plain wording of the Bible, apostasy from the Word of God, flat out disbelief and rebellion, or perhaps a combination of all of the above. Let me make it perfectly clear that Seed of Abraham Ministries (Torah Class, Holyland Marketplace, and whatever other ministries that the Lord may see fit for us to undertake) stands upon the Old and New Testament definitions of the Promised Land and accepts no other. It all belongs to Israel because it all belongs to God. No amount of geopolitical realities, contempt for the Jewish people by the majority of the Church, desire of much of the Arab and Muslim world that neither the land of Israel nor the Jewish people should continue to exist, or even of our governmental leaders and politicians’ propensity to compromise with, and appease, our enemies using Israel and her people as bargaining chips, changes anything. True reality is the sovereign will of God; all human plans and intentions to do anything else is but a vain effort to thwart His will, and that is a foolish and dangerous thing to attempt. It’s one thing for an unredeemed world to stake out such a position; but for those Jews who profess to be God’s chosen, and for those gentiles who profess to trust the Hebrew Messiah for eternal salvation to deny that the promise to Abraham remains intact is all the more egregious. Let us vow never to turn our backs on God’s Word or Israel regardless of what we perceive it might cost us in friendships and even in family relationships because our relationship with the Lord trumps it all.

In verse 5 the Lord makes a promise directly to Joshua: no one will usurp him. Just as there were time after time for Moses that the people mutinied and committed rebellions, elders challenged his leadership, his own family grumbled against him, there were many battles against foreign enemies that put Moses in harm’s way, and thought they are only hinted at there were plots against his life the Lord did not allow Moses to be dethroned and cast aside. So it will be for Joshua; the Lord says that He will be with Joshua just as He was with Moses, and that Joshua will not be replaced or overthrown. And as we’ll see by the end of the book,

he was not.

With Joshua understanding that he has attained a position that cannot be defeated by any man, and will not be removed from him by the Lord, Joshua is told to have courage and he is to have this courage regarding two things: the land and the Law. First the land; it was not simply going to be handed over to Joshua; Israel would have to fight for it. Israel would have to make Holy War, instituted by Yehoveh, against the wicked tenants of God's land that needed to be physically evicted. Joshua is going to have his bad days; lots of Israelites are going to be maimed and killed in the process. However he is to always remember that the Lord is simply allowing His plan to play out and Joshua is to use a combination of his own best efforts plus God's guidance in order to ultimately achieve victory.

The second area Joshua is to be courageous in its doing is the Law, the Torah. Joshua is to observe (and see to it that Israel observes) God's Law. This, too, will take great and steady courage because just as it happened for Moses many of the people will balk and fight the truth of Torah tooth and nail. Joshua, as Moses, will grow weary from constantly exhorting and confronting his people to stay faithful to the One God and His Torah. Many of you listening and reading these words have already experienced such a thing in your lives; you are constantly being forced to explain yourselves. You are constantly accused of being legalistic, of abandoning grace and choosing law to save you, or of being in a cult. Some of you have been accused of the unforgivable crime of trying to become Jews, or even worse claiming that Jesus was actually a Jew when most of your Christian friends are quite certain he was a light-skinned European born with a Greek name. It gets tiring and at times discouraging to face these things day after day, but the Lord says to have good courage. Not to have perfectly steady emotions, nor to think that an occasional (and inevitable) defeat means that He has abandoned you. The battle is going to be long (your entire life, actually) and at times dangerous and frightening.

In fact I think that on one level the story of Joshua battling for Canaan is the model for our lifelong battle on earth as God's redeemed. Our so-called walk with God is more similar to a protracted Holy War that ends only when the Lord ends it at a place called Har-Megiddo (Armageddon). We'll have brief periods of elation and victory, followed by longer periods of hard labor and difficult battles, some ending in apparent defeat. To expect anything else is to set ourselves up for losing hope or perhaps even our faith. The Lord was readying Joshua for the rigors and harsh realities that lay ahead; but for him, as for us, ultimate victory is assured.

At verse 10 the dynamics take a strong turn; up till now the Lord has been instructing and encouraging Joshua; now it's time to act. Joshua begins by issuing his first orders to the officers of his army, who are also the leaders of the camp of Israel. First step: get organized and prepared. Israel is to make ready to break camp, and so they must gather food and supplies as in 3 days they will move towards the Jordan.

I have been asked in the past, is Jordan (Yarden) a Hebrew word and if so what does it mean? Actually it is Hebrew and it means, "descender from Dan"; in other words the river descends, flows down from, the city of Dan. Some of you have been with me on tour and we've seen the grotto of Paneas that is essentially the headwaters of the Jordan. The name was eventually shortened to the Grotto of Pan, and it is located at Caesarea Philippi. Now if you are paying

attention what I just said should prick your ears; because the river is named after the tribe of Dan, but it will be a century or more after the death of Moses before Dan ever occupies the headwaters of this river named after them. Obviously, then, the Yarden is a much later name for that river, so it has been inserted into the Bible over time in order that people know what river it is that is being identified. What was the Jordan's former name before it was called the Jordan; the name the Canaanites probably used? I've never discovered it, try as I might. This practice of substituting newer names for the ancient places and rivers and cities is usual for the Bible as it has been copied and edited over the centuries.

Joshua continues giving orders in verse 12: just as the 9 ½ tribes are preparing to cross the Jordan so is it time for the 2 ½ tribes (who now claim the land on the eastern bank of the Jordan as their inheritance) to provide the allotment of troops that they pledged when Moses was still alive. The civilian populations of Reuben, Gad and ½ of Manasseh were not asked to come along; in fact only a portion of the available fighting men were to come. But those who came were to be the crack troops, the best. Here's where it gets dicey but it's not really apparent until you read between the lines: these troops were obligated to go, but for how long? Verse 15 says, "until the Lord has given your brethren rest..." These troops who really had nothing personal to gain (they already had their land) had to fight alongside their brethren until **all** of the other tribes had conquered the regions assigned to them. How long would this take? Who knows. Not only that, who makes the determination as to what constitutes a sufficient enough victory and state of stability for those troops to be released to go home?

Does all of this sound familiar? The problems we're facing in Iraq, trying to determine when our troops can come home is based on determining what a sufficient level of safety and security amounts to. It is also based on when the indigenous army (the Iraqi army) is able to handle the nation's security on its own. These questions and dilemma's aren't only for modern times; they have always applied to national interests and warfare. Joshua, and the various Israelite tribes with their differing priorities, has to sort this out and it is a delicate matter.

The answer is that Joshua will determine when those troops can lay down their weapons, cross back over the Jordan and go home, their pledge fulfilled; and the problem is that Joshua's authority over those 2 ½ tribes who have taken their inheritance OUTSIDE of the Promised Land, east of the Jordan River, is quite ambiguous. Is Joshua to have the same authority over them as he does over the 9 ½ tribes who are going to possess the Promised Land? Are those tribes who refused their inheritance inside the Promised Land still going to be as much a part of the Israel tribal confederacy as those who accepted it? This was a very real and critical political problem of some proportion; if those 2 ½ tribes refused to recognize Joshua's leadership there would be a real possibility of war between the 9 ½ tribes against the 2 ½ at the same time Israel was attempting to conquer dozens of Canaanite tribes and city states; the entire endeavor would have been in doubt. In fact, later in Joshua, we'll read where warfare between those two groups came within an eyelash of actually happening.

Well, thank the Lord for small favors, the 2 ½ tribes respond (in verses 16 and 17) that they will do all that they promised to Moses, and that they will submit to Joshua just as though he was Moses. By the way, as we read more of Joshua we'll find that indeed they stayed true to their

word.

Let me also comment briefly on the use of the word, “rest”; in Hebrew ***nuach*** (this was used when the leaders of the 2 ½ tribes agreed to help their brethren obtain “rest” in their allotted territories. Up to now the primary term used to speak of the redemption of Israel was “inheritance”; they would ***inherit*** the land. But now we’ll begin to see more and more Scriptural use of the term rest and, of course, we’ll see the term “rest” used as a focal point of redemption in the New Testament. The kind of rest that ***nuach*** speaks to is divine deliverance. It also speaks to a ceasing of vigorous labors. Rest is a promise made to God’s people just as much as the inheritance of land is a promise. The Sabbath that began at the beginning of the world was all about rest, and it was about the Lord resting. The Sabbath given to Moses was about rest, and it was about mankind resting. Isaiah spoke of rest (***nuach***) as applying to the good life that an obedient people of God could reasonably expect. Rest even became a term applied to God’s prophets obtaining the Holy Spirit so that they could speak God’s message to God’s people, and of course we read of the Holy Spirit resting upon various men and kings so that the Lord could use them for Kingdom purposes. Who could ever forget the vivid scene of Jesus being baptized by John the Immerser when the Holy Spirit came down as a dove and “rested” upon Jesus, or when at Shavuot, Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came as tongues of fire and “rested” upon the heads of those ordinary Jews who believed on the Lord Yeshua for salvation?

Rest was now front and center as both a means and a goal of redemption.

It is good for us to see that what has been established by the writer of Joshua is that Israel, all 12 tribes, are unified in purpose at this point in history. Even though some Israelites will live outside of the Promised Land, and therefore have different circumstances to deal with in their daily lives than their brethren who live on the west side of the Jordan, a unity has been affirmed; a unity that centers on Yehoveh their God, and on their single leader, Joshua. We also see how godly leadership is intended to operate when the leaders and the people are looking as one towards their supreme commander, the Lord God. A paradigm is established that has at its heart an organization whereby one man commands several officers, who themselves each command more, who then go out among the people and bring one message in one spirit to a people prepared to accept it so that all will march in an orderly fashion towards a God-ordained goal.

This paradigm is a wonderful model for the church. We live dispersed throughout the world, in many lands with varying circumstances and daily realities. We are Jews and we are gentiles. We have varying agendas and live under a wide range of political and economic systems. Hundreds of cultural and societal traditions have been developed, revolving around their particular languages and centuries of national history. We are different colors, shapes, and sizes. Joshua wondered how he could keep a group of 12 tribes, each with their own tribal interests reigning supreme, soon to be geographically separated, together in spirit and with a common purpose to establish a kingdom of God on earth. The key for Joshua was the same as it is for the church, to maintain a common identity; and that identity is of a people set-apart from the world who trust the God of Israel and who work to follow and achieve His will. But it also meant that a common understanding of what the God of Israel’s will amounted to was

necessary and, as has been the emphasis since Mt. Sinai, the primary source of knowing and establishing God's will for all of His people was the Torah.

Let's move on to chapter 2.

### **READ JOSHUA CHAPTER 2 all**

This chapter incorporates some of the greatest drama and most memorable characters in the Bible; the battle of Jericho and the ironic female hero, a Canaanite prostitute, Rahab, who professed faith in Israel's God.

Jericho is even today an amazing place; it is a little dicey to venture there currently (and for a Westerner in particular) because it is Palestinian Arab controlled territory even though many of the local Arabs remain friendly and grateful for your business at this run down village where only 8 or 9 years ago it was a thriving tourist site. Fortunately the Tell of the ancient city of Jericho is a few hundred yards away from the modern day village of Jericho thus extensive excavation could be accomplished. With a bit of bravery a visitor can look down upon the walls of that ancient city, most of them collapsed some largely intact, and I'm sure at least some of you have done so. I had the privilege back in the early 90's and I really didn't want to leave the place. For me it was second only to the Old City of Jerusalem on the list of awe-inspiring places to be in Israel.

It is generally agreed that Jericho first existed before the Great Flood, and as is common among such ancient sites it has been destroyed and rebuilt on numerous occasions. Modern archeology confirms the location of Jericho so there is no doubt that what we see today is authentic. It is the lowest city in the world, nearly 800 feet below sea level (so you can imagine what happened when God destroyed the world with that 40 day deluge). It is about 6 miles north of the Dead Sea, and about a 2-hour walk from the Jordan River. Some of the walls that one can see today are about 3500 years old, although under that are walls that date to 5000 years old. Below them are large stone structures that date to 10,000 years ago. In fact it also appears that from the time of the destruction that we'll read about in Joshua, the city was abandoned until around the 7th or 8th century B.C. and then rebuilt only to abandoned again for several centuries, inhabited again, and the cycle repeated to modern times.

Joshua instructed two spies, advanced scouts, to go look over the situation at the first enemy stronghold Israel would encounter upon crossing the Jordan River. By now Israel had moved a short distance to a place called Shittim, which means "Acacia Trees". Shittim was located on the east bank of the Jordan and is today known as Tell el-Hammam in the nation of Jordan. Like Jericho it too is located about 6 miles north of the Dead Sea, and is only about 7 miles from the Jordan River so it was the perfect staging ground for Israel to launch it's assault of Canaan.

Joshua, being an experienced general, knows that he must have a good idea of what they're up against so that he can formulate a proper battle plan. Now some theologians have accused Joshua of lacking faith due to his sending out of these two spies; this comes from applying to

this event the tone of the story when the leaders of Israel, so many years earlier, told Moses that before they would go in to Canaan they needed some scouts to go out and see what sort of opposition they faced; and it is an error to see this as the same situation. Recall that 12 spies were sent by Moses (one from each tribe) because each tribal leader wanted to be properly represented and was not willing to accept the report from someone of another tribe. Therefore each tribal prince sent his own hand-selected man loyal only to him. In a nutshell we saw that those 12 spies were NOT going to Canaan in order that battle plans could be drawn up, they were going because of fear and trepidation on the part of the leaders of Israel. This was NOT something Moses wanted to do or that God ordered, rather this was an act of skepticism. This was an act that demonstrated that they did not trust the Lord; the leaders of Israel preferred to make their OWN decisions as to whether or not they would even go into the Promised Land. The results were that 10 spies said to attack Canaan would be suicide, but 2 had a different opinion. All of the 12 agreed that the enemy was numerous and well fortified; but the 10 said that this reality meant they should forgo their attempt to enter. The 2 said that God had promised the land to them so it made no difference how well-prepared the Canaanites were or how many there were of them, and that Israel should go forward to claim God's promise to Abraham. We all know the results of that foray and the final decision that ended in that generation dying off without ever being allowed to enter the Promised Land.

That's not what was happening here at Jericho. This sending out of 2 spies was not about deciding whether to attack, but was meant to add information on how to attack. Notice that the identification of the 2 spies and the tribes they represented were not important enough to record; rather they were going on this mission on behalf of all Israel and Joshua, not the individual tribal leadership. This was about Joshua's concern to be diligent in his duty and careful with the precious lives of the people whom the Lord had entrusted to him.

Joshua's instruction was to view both Jericho AND the land; this only meant the area between Shittim and Jericho. The idea was for them to scout a good route and to determine the strength and readiness of Jericho's defenses. It is emphasized that the spies were sent out secretly, meaning that only Joshua, the spies, and perhaps a couple of his closest officers knew about the foray. This is in contrast to the story of the 12 spies sent by committee 38 years earlier, and the people anxiously awaiting their return and report.

The 2 spies arrived at the city of Jericho and immediately went to the house of a Canaanite prostitute named Rahab. Some prominent Jewish scholars such as Rashi say that she may not have been a prostitute, because the Hebrew word **zonah** didn't necessarily indicate a Harlot although it was the most common usage of the term. Some Bible translations follow Rashi (and Josephus, by the way) and say that Rahab was NOT a prostitute but rather an innkeeper. Actually as more understanding of the ancient Middle Eastern cultures come into light it could very well have been that she was both a prostitute and an innkeeper. The narrative implies that the house where she lived and the spies entered was her property; something that would have been unusual for a simple harlot. The earliest inns whereby weary travelers could stop for a day or two were always inside city walls. They were little more than a place of shelter, with some kind of bed or mat available that afforded them protection from bandits and wild animals and of course provided the opportunity for the company of women.



Prostitution was not at all seen as a bad or immoral thing in most of the world; it was as common as most any other trade or craft. It was so common that pagan priesthods even opened their own brothels as a means to earn money to run the enormous number of Temples dedicated to their equally enormous number of gods. Thus like so many of the laws and regulations we'll see in Torah, the outlawing of common and religious prostitution among the Israelites by Yehoveh was yet another means of separating Israel from all other peoples. Unfortunately as we'll see all throughout the Bible, Old and New Testaments, prostitution remained embedded Hebrew society even though it was looked down upon.

That the house inside the walls of Jericho that the spies visited was a known place for travelers is evident by its logical and convenient location to the city wall and the city gate. When the king sent his soldiers to inquire about the two strangers they immediately went to Rahab because her establishment was the town inn where any traveler was most likely to stay.

Let's stop here and we'll take up the story of Jericho, Rahab and the spies next week.