

BIB104 OT2 Life & Literature of Israel

Unit 1a Joshua: Faith is the Victory

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Moses is dead. Wow. What a way to start a book. Joshua is an amazing book in the Bible. Now, Joshua is an individual who was God's ordained successor to follow Moses. Joshua didn't have any superhuman powers. In fact, he might have been overlooked by many. But Joshua ended up being a leader that not only the Israelites could follow, but there's a lot of life lessons that we can learn as we look at his life. But the Book of Joshua is not just about Joshua. In fact, Joshua, as I said, wasn't a man of much renown. His father's name was Nun, and we don't hear anything else about his father before or after the phrase that he was Joshua the son of Nun. It's interesting, though, that as we look at Joshua, we find out that it's about his life, but also the way it intertwines with the Israelites, the children of God, and the journey that they were on to now enter and to take over the Promised Land.

Now, Joshua means "Yahweh saves," an appropriate name for the man who let Israel underneath God's command to a victorious conquest of the Promised Land. Scholars believe that Joshua himself penned most of the book. Early chapters include firsthand experiences and military details that are worthy of being known and also recorded by a general. We see further proof of his authorship in Joshua 24:26, which refers to Joshua in writing a portion of this book and also not as himself, but it reflects to his authentic authorship of how he laid out the Scripture. Now, after Joshua's death, the high priest Eleazar and Phineas may have supplemented some of the material in this book because it alludes to events that were after the conquest.

Now, the genre of the Book of Joshua is a narrative history. It was authored by Joshua, as we said, the leader of the Israelites, but written between 1405 and 1383 B.C. The key personalities that we find in this book, obviously, is Joshua. There's also a Rahab, Achan, Phineas, and Eleazar. It was written to assure that the Israelites would understand that the living God will reward obedience and to record the entrance and the conquest to the Promised Land. The events of the Book of Joshua span about 25 years, starting soon after the death of Moses in Joshua 1:1 around 1406 B.C. before the conquest commenced. Now, the conquest of Canaan took about seven years, and Joshua's final address and subsequent death came almost 20 years later. The book begins with the nation of Israel poised at the banks of the Jordan River across from Jericho. They could see it but weren't there yet. It records the details of the numerous military campaigns that defeated the inhabitants of the land. And the book ends with Joshua's regathering the nation together for his final celebration and ultimate passing on of his life and the leadership to others.

The Book of Joshua was written to the descendants of those who conquered the land, as a historical account of how they had come to settle there. Remember, it was quite a journey as they traveled in the wilderness for years in order for two purposes to happen. Those that had not believed the promise of God and saw the new nation that God was leading them to as too overwhelming with the military powers and the sophistication that they saw of the people that they were going to. And secondly, so God would get a second generation to be able to truly be able to be foundational in the receiving of his promises and his blessings in entering this new land.

We see that Joshua celebrates God as their general, as their defender, and also as their king. It shows the geographical boundaries given to each tribe of Israel. The Book of Joshua serves as a connecting story between the days of Moses and the days of the judges. Moses began and endured the wilderness, and Joshua, as a result, could claim victory in the land that God had promised to them. God's promises through the ages were being fulfilled before the people's very eyes. I love this in Joshua 21:45 where it says, "Not one of the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass." And that's something we need to understand even as we live today. God never makes a promise that he doesn't fulfill. That's in his judgment to us when we're being disobedient and also the blessings that come if we're obedient to the things that he lays out. We get to observe and benefit from the promises that he makes.

Now, Joshua recounted the story of contradictions. On the one hand, God gave the land he had promised to the nation. On the other hand, the people failed to process the land completely, allowing some inhabitants to remain there. God fulfilled his side of the bargain, but the Israelites did not fulfill theirs as they were told to go in and to conquer the whole land so that it could be their land and theirs alone, knowing the difficulties that would happen as a result of allowing the nations that were there prior to their coming to stay there. It would make a difference in the gods that they worshiped. It would make a difference in the way that they function as a government. It would make a difference in the way that they could be unified as a people.

In this book, we find accounts of faithfulness, like Rahab the harlot in Joshua 2:1-21. A prostitute that's named Rahab becomes part of the line of King David, and ultimately, the line of Christ. That's an interesting story if you think of it from Rahab's perspective in particular. Now, here's a woman who was a part of this nation of Israel, living in this city of Jericho, probably actually in the wall of Jericho. Many scholars believe that because of the breadth of the walls that were there, that there were apartments in the walls or places that people lived within the walls, so when it came down, it was amazing the devastation in those areas. But it also would help us to allude to seeing the cloth that was recognized by the Israelites as the place she lived and to spare her and her family.

So the spies come in the land. Ten of them we know come back with the bad report. But Joshua and Caleb, as they're in Jericho, they're sought out by the authorities. They hide and Rahab finds them. She protects them and keeps them in hiding and helps them escape the city. And they said, "When we come back, you will be spared." It's a really cool aspect of taking someone that the world would look at as deplorable, a prostitute, a woman that sells her body, and yet God saves all. God even takes what we would consider the deplorable and is able to redeem them. What a beautiful picture there.

We also see another really cool story when we see the battle of Jericho. Later on, as I just alluded to, as the Israelites come up against this walled city, the walls themselves were thick walls that three chariots side by side could go across. And God doesn't say, "Attack them with catapults." God doesn't say, "Attack them with other military force." He doesn't say, "Dig underneath the walls. Plant explosives."

God gives them a very unique command in order to conquer the very first city they come to in the Promised Land. What does he tell them to do? March around it. Now, not just march around it, but march around it in silence. Now, that alone is miraculous, isn't it? To have a whole nation walk around in silence. Can you imagine being a guard on the Wall of Jericho, looking down, prepared with your bow and arrow, prepared with your spear, expecting an attack and instead seeing a nation just outside of arrow range walking around in silence?

The first day, the Bible says, they walked around the whole city of Jericho in silence. The second day, the same thing. The third day, fourth, fifth, and sixth, the same thing. They walked around the whole city of Jericho. And then God said on the seventh day, "I want you to do it seven times." A very long day not only for their feet, but again, no talking. At the end of the last circuit around the city, they were instructed by God to blow their trumpets. Now, again, a miraculous event not owing to anything that the Israelites did, but completely to the power and promises of God. When the trumpet sounded, the walls came down. Can you imagine being the Israelites watching that? Probably stunned, even though they had heard that God was going to give them the city. But also one of the Canaanites, to be able to see that this mighty city that they had fortified for years and had been recognized as a military power even in their own land had been devastated because the walls, the one thing that protected them from the outside world, was now gone. The human life lost in the falling of the wall. But then the Israelites commanded by God to go in and to take control of the city, to wipe out the peoples there, except again, remember, for Rahab and her family.

Now, there's a lot more amazing stories that we see, like Caleb being the warrior even in an old age. But I'll let you look that one up. You'll find it in Joshua 14:6-14. But if you want to look up the story of Jericho, that's in Joshua 6:1-27. And the story of Rahab, we already gave you the passages there. We also witness some bad things, like the disobedience that's seen and the consequences of Achan stealing from the city and his sin. That starts in Joshua 7:1. And as a result of that, they see the loss of Ai in Joshua 7:5. We also see the failure of some of the tribes, as we mentioned, to annihilate the enemies of God. And that command affected the whole nation in a negative way. In fact, Joshua even, the leader who knew better, rather than going to God first, made a treaty with the Gibeonites who had fooled them. And the account of that is in Joshua 9:1-27.

Now, the last few verses of Joshua share three burials that take place too. Joshua's own in Joshua 24:29-30, which lets us know why Eleazar and Phineas probably finished writing the Book of Joshua. The bones of Joseph, remember, they were taken from the land of Egypt to the Promised Land. It was something Joseph had asked. And that's in Joshua 24:32. And then we also see the burial of Eleazar the high priest in Joshua 24:33. Strange as it may seem, these burials proclaim God's character. All three men were so shaded with Israel's days in captivity: Joseph long ago when Jacob's family first settled in Egypt, and Joshua and Eleazar as young men on the long journey through the wilderness. And now all three were laid to rest in the land of promise, witnesses to God's faithfulness and their impact on the people of God. God is the ultimate promise keeper.

As faithful and present as he was with Israel, so he is with us. Joshua 1:9, “Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

Now, let's break down this story, that we've given you a little broader perspective of, into the breakdowns of the chapters, so you can understand it in a little more detail. In chapters 1 through 4, we see Joshua and the Israelites, they enter into the Promised Land, and in so doing, we read of their amazing entry which we just shared with you. As they arrive on the Jordan River, we find the details of the incredible and miraculous crossing that takes place there, which again, I encourage you to check out, as God literally split the Jordan River just like he had done the Red Sea. Then we find in chapters 5 through 12 that Joshua follows God's orders and first conquers the center of the Promised Land. This included the non-military and yet spectacular way in which they conquered the foreboding fortress of Jericho. God alone could have moved and conquered in this remarkable way.

Now, Ai was the next town. And although it took two tries, the first due to sin in the camp, on the second attempt, God again moved and dominated. Next, the Israelites occupied the southern land and then the northern land to complete the occupancy. But remember, however, that although they controlled the region, they never completely eradicated the enemy that was there. I find that to be a personal application as I was reading and researching, thinking, “How often in my own life do I know the presence and power of God?” And yet I fail to completely deal with the sin in my life, asking God not only to point it out, but to then give me the discernment and the direction and the power to be able to eradicate the sin in my life by confessing it to God and then asking God for his strength and power to have victory over that sin in my own life.

And finally, we find in chapters 13 to 24 that the land is divided up and distributed among the tribes of Israel. Now, some of the larger cities are placed aside for the Levitical priests who didn't receive a portion of the land due to their duties that they had. And lastly, Joshua dies. Before he passes, he gives one of the greatest challenges that lasts for all generations, even including our own today. And that's taken from Joshua 24:15. He says this: “Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve; as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” What an incredible challenge for us all to consider. As Joshua walked the Israelites through the challenges of entering the Promised Land, with remembrances still of the way God provided by his own hand not only the manna, but also he provided the birds. He also provided water. He took care of their needs. Their clothes didn't wear out. Their sandals didn't wear out. But he brings them to the Promised Land. He conquers Jericho and many other victories that he gives to them.

God is faithful, but he asks us to choose to obey him. Are we willing to do that? Are we willing to see that theme that's listed here in Joshua and embrace it and adopt it for our own lives as we live in a way that would be in accordance to not only his will and his purposes, but his commands that he gives to us? So I encourage you, as you look at this book and research it yourself that you'll also understand the rich promises that are listed here in this Book of Joshua.