

Joshua Chapter 1

The name Joshua is an interesting one. He was originally called Oshea, but in Numbers 13:16, he was renamed Jehoshua, or Joshua. Oshea, we understand, means "salvation". The addition of the prefix "Je" changed his name to "Salvation of Jehovah", or more simply "Jehovah saves". This should immediately ring a bell with the reader of the New Testament. We remember how that the angel of the Lord says to Joseph, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins". Jesus saves His people from their sins whereas Joshua saved his people physically from their enemies, as he led them into Canaan. In reality then, the Lord Jesus was known in His lifetime as "Joshua of Nazareth". The name Jesus is just the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Joshua. The two names are used interchangeably in Hebrews 4:8, "For if Jesus had given them rest..." Jesus here is obviously Joshua.

We are introduced to Joshua right away in verse 1 of our study. It is definitely not the first time that we have met Joshua in the Bible. We read of him first of all in Numbers 13 as one of the 12 spies who were sent into Canaan to spy out the land. One spy was chosen from each tribe, and this young man Joshua is chosen to represent the tribe of Ephraim. That in itself was an honour for this young man as thus early he has the confidence of his brethren.

We know of course the outcome of that spying mission. All 12 spies agreed that the land was a good land, flowing with milk and honey. They bring back as proof the grapes of Eshcol to support their view. But 10 of the spies had a negative view of their ability to conquer the land. They claimed that the Canaanites were giants and that the spies seemed like grasshoppers against them. Only Caleb and Joshua disagreed and stated that they could possess it with the Lord's help. In Numbers 14:8 & 9 they said, "The Lord will bring us into this land, and will give it us". . The Lord is with us". As a result of this incident, God brought a plague against the 10 and they all died soon afterwards. Not only did Caleb and Joshua survive this but they were also the only men of their generation to come into the land. It was said of all those of 20 years of age and upwards that "their carcasses fell in the wilderness". The whole nation as a result had to wander for 40 years in the wilderness.

But the excursion to spy out the land was not Joshua's only experience that equipped him to lead. We also read how that Moses chose him to lead the army of Israel in their fight against the Amalakites. Joshua learned to fight against the Lord's enemy in the wilderness, before he was able to fight the Lord's battles in the land. The Amalakites of course are often seen as a picture of the flesh, over which the saint must triumph before he can go on to claim victories in the fight of faith.

In verse 1, Joshua is called "Moses' servant". Joshua "learned his trade" during those 40 years by staying close to Moses. It proves again that those who serve God best are first taught in the school of God before taking places of responsibility. Even Moses himself had to spend 40 years in the backside of the desert before being called of God to lead the people out of Egypt. So also with the disciples of the Lord Jesus. When He called them at first, He said, "Follow Me and I will make you to become fishers of men". They were to spend three and a half years in the Lord's company before they were sent out to preach the gospel. Then Paul also after his conversion retreated into Arabia for three years before he took on a public role.

In verse 2, the Lord now speaks to Joshua, and gives some promises to Joshua and the people. "Arise, go over this Joshua unto the land which I do give them". The promise of verse 3 is even more positive. "Every place that the sole of your foot shall stand upon, that have I given unto you". They only had to stand on the land to possess it. The people could not fail, for they had a God who would not fail them. If we think of a New Testament comparison, the book of Joshua is often compared to the book of Ephesians, In Eph 1, the

blessings are ours and they are unconditional, but we have to take advantage of them and grasp the reality of them.

In verse 4, the borders of the land are defined – from the wilderness in the south to Lebanon in the north, and from the Euphrates in what is now Iraq to the Mediterranean Sea. The boundaries of the land were first given to Abraham in Genesis 15:18 - "From the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates". Moses repeated this promise to the nation in Deut 11:24. The extent of the land as promised is vast, and Israel never possessed more than a fraction of it. The days of Solomon saw them possess the largest portion, but of course when the Lord returns in glory, the land will be fully occupied in the millennial kingdom.

Here in Joshua 1:4, there is an interesting addition – "All the land of the Hittites". The Hittites ruled over one of the great empires of the ancient world. Based on what is now Turkey, the empire stretched down into the land of Canaan. But who were even the Hittites to withstand the people of the Lord? This fact is emphasised in verse 5 – "There shall not be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life".

The final phrase of verse 5 is a very significant one in the Bible. Apart from here in Joshua, it is quoted in 3 other places.

1. Deut 31:6

"For the Lord thy God, He it is that doth go with thee. He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee".

These were comforting words for the people, especially at this point in time. The journey through the wilderness was over. Moses who had led them all the way on this journey was soon going to pass away. How were they going to manage? There would be new horizons to reach, new problems to face, new dangers to overcome. Moses says to them, "He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee".

The Lord now repeats these words to Joshua, their new leader. He also needed reassurance and the Lord promises him His continual presence

{:start="2"}

2. I Chron 28:20

David is now speaking to Solomon his son. David's reign will soon be over and Solomon will have to take over the reigns of government. How will he manage? He has not been here before. As power is about to be transferred from father to son, David says, "The Lord God, He will not fail thee, nor forsake".

{:start="3"}

3. Hebrews 13:5

The verse in Hebrews reads, "Let your manner of life be without the love of money, and be content with such things as ye have, for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee". These Hebrew Christians might well have had much reason to fear. They had left behind them what seemed to be the comfort and the certainties of Judaism for what might appear to be an uncertain future. They were being persecuted by their fellows; they had taken joyfully the spoiling of their goods. How would they manage? But the writer assures them, "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"

Thus in times of uncertainty, be it Moses or Joshua or Solomon or ourselves, the Lord is always with us.

In verse 6, the people were to be strong and of a good courage. In verse 7, they were to be strong and very courageous. Wherein lay their strength? They were to do all that Moses commanded them ie to keep the Law. The promises to Israel were not only earthly, they were also conditional. God entered into a covenant with them which more or less said, "If thou wilt, then I will". Israel's future success depended on the spiritual state of the nation in any given generation. When they finally failed completely in the days of

Jeremiah and Daniel, the Lord allowed them to go into captivity, first the 10 tribes into Assyria, then the two southern tribes into Babylon.

The blessings of the Christian, however, are quite different. Our blessings are not earthly but spiritual and heavenly. They are also unconditional. In Eph 1:4 Paul writes, "According as He hath chosen us in Him, before the foundation of the world". This is God working in His own sovereign electing grace over which we had no influence and no control. His choice of us depended neither on our faithfulness nor our unfaithfulness. So are our blessings today.

Now from verses 11 to 15, Joshua speaks to the people. There is a definite order here that is worth mentioning. God first spoke to Joshua, then Joshua spoke to the people. If God is not speaking to us in His word, then we have nothing to say to the people. Verse 11 is a general word to them all. They were to prepare food, for within three days, they were to pass over Jordan. But from verses 12 to 15, Joshua has a special word for the two and a half tribes who were to remain on the east bank of the Jordan. In Numbers 32, the tribes of Reuben and Gad approached Moses to ask that they might remain on this side Jordan as this area was more suitable for the cattle which they reared. Moses at first is angry with them. Were they to take their rest while their brethren had to cross the Jordan and fight to gain their portions? In response, the two tribes, now joined by half of the tribe of Mannaseh, promise Moses that their men of war would indeed cross the Jordan and fight with their brethren until they also came to possess their possessions. Only when that fight was done would they return to possess their own land.

We can see applications for us as Christians. Although our blessings are unconditional, we are still to make use of them by our own efforts. Although we have the Spirit of truth within us, we are to meditate upon these things, to be "wholly in them", as Paul writes to Timothy. We are to put in an effort to grasp the truths of God's word. We all have eternal life, but Paul again says to Timothy, "Lay hold on eternal life". We have a great salvation, but Paul says to the Philippians, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling". We cannot work for it, but we must work it out ie to let our salvation be seen by our efforts in a public way. In Ephesians 1, we have a heavenly calling, but in chapter 4, Paul advises the saints, "Walk worthy of the calling wherewith ye are called".

We might add a little aside regarding this desire of some to remain on this side Jordan. If Canaan were to be taken as a picture of heaven, then do we have some people here who do not want to enter into heaven?

From verses 16 to 18, the two and a half tribes respond to Joshua – "All that thou commandest us, we will do". In verse 17, they add, "As we hearkened unto Moses, so will we hearken unto thee". Bearing in mind the history of the nation during those previous forty years when the people not only murmured but even rebelled against Moses and Aaron, this indeed seemed a hollow promise. When Moses first gave them the law, the promise was, "All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do". Before long though, that law was broken and the promise was not kept.

For the fourth time in this chapter, we have the expression, "Be strong and of a good courage". This strength and courage was exactly what they needed as they stood on the banks of the Jordan facing the land.