



## Joshua - Chapter One

### Summary of Chapter One

The first chapter of Joshua divides into two sections and consists largely of speeches. The first section (vv.1-9) contains the Lord's words to Joshua, charging him to assume the leadership position opened up by Moses' death. The second section (vv.10-18) recounts Joshua's initial response, charging the 'officers of the people' and the Transjordanian tribes to prepare to cross the Jordan into Canaan. It also records the people's resolve to follow Joshua just as they had followed Moses (vv. 16-18).

### I Joshua 1:1-5:15 - Crossing into the Land

The Lord speaks first in the Book of Joshua. His first initiative is to pass the mantle of leadership from Moses to Joshua, who has been groomed for this very task; refer to Deuteronomy 31:1-8. Joshua is to lead the people to their inheritance in the Promised Land, but first barriers must be crossed and relationships restored.

#### I.a Joshua 1:1-18 - Joshua's Charge

Refer to the chapter summary above.

##### I.a.i Joshua 1:1-9 - God's Commission to Joshua

Moses is dead and so God instructs Joshua to take over the leadership of the Israelites and to take them into the Promised Land. It is a task that requires him to be strong and courageous but he is reassured that God will be with him every step of the way.

<sup>1</sup> After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, <sup>2</sup> 'My servant Moses is

dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites.

### Joshua 1:1-2

After the death of Moses. While beginning a book with a death notice may strike a modern reader as odd, this notice effectively links the Book of Joshua to the preceding five books of Moses, the Pentateuch, the last of which ends with a description of Moses' death (Deuteronomy Chapter 34). In similar fashion, the Book of Joshua will end and the Book of Judges will begin with references to the death of Joshua: <<*After these things Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being one hundred and ten years old*>> (Joshua 24:29), and: <<*After the death of Joshua, the Israelites inquired of the Lord, 'Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?'*>> (Judges 1:1). These notices link the books together in a continuous chain and suggest the continuity of the Lord's dealing with his people Israel through key leaders.

The Lord spoke to Joshua. Joshua, who was not a young man at this time and had spent his entire career previously as the assistant of Moses, now finds that it is his time to lead, but only after God had prepared him.

The Greek name Jesus simply translates the Hebrew name Joshua. Their names are identical. Whatever Israel received in the Promised Land, they received through the hand of Joshua; whatever Christians receive from God they receive through Jesus Christ, their very own Joshua.

Moreover, just as Moses is called the servant of the Lord here and throughout the book, just as he was in the record of his death: <<*Then Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, at the Lord's command*>> (Deuteronomy 34:5), Joshua will receive the same title of honour at the end of his life: <<*Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of one hundred and ten years*>> (Judges 2:8).

That the son of Nun was an Ephraimite is clear from Numbers 13:8, but little else is known of Nun. Joshua himself is mentioned some thirty times in the Pentateuch, three times under his original name Hoshea, which means salvation, and the remainder under the name Joshua, meaning 'Yahweh saves,' which was given to him by Moses in Numbers 13:16.

His first appearance is as a military commander, fighting the malevolent Amalekites shortly after Israel's exodus from Egypt while Moses sat at the top of a nearby hill with his hands lifted toward heaven; refer to Exodus 17:8-13. The Amalekite battle not only tested Joshua's military mettle but also underscored a fundamental principle with respect to Israel's wars; namely, that the battle is the Lord's: <<*and that all this assembly may know that the Lord*

*does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand*>> (1 Samuel 17:47).

That the Lord should explicitly instruct Moses to record the Amalekite battle in a book and <<*recite it in the hearing of Joshua*>> (Exodus 17:14b) anticipates Joshua's future importance. As Moses' assistant, Joshua accompanied him at least partway up Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:13 and 32:17), and he also assisted Moses at the tent of meeting, where the Lord would <<*speak to Moses face to face*>> (Exodus 33:11a). Joshua was among the twelve spies sent to explore the land of Canaan (Numbers 13:8). He alone joined Caleb in exhorting the people to trust God for victory (Numbers 14:6-9), an act of faith for which only he and Caleb, among their generation, were allowed to enter the Promised Land. More than a mere assistant, Joshua was prepared by these and other experiences to become Moses' successor.

Near the time of his death, when Moses requested that a successor be appointed, the Lord instructed him to commission Joshua the son of Nun, <<*a man in whom is the Spirit*>>, before <<*all the congregation*>> (Numbers 27:18-19). Joshua was to be the one to lead Israel into the Promised Land: <<*Joshua son of Nun, your assistant, shall enter there; encourage him, for he is the one who will secure Israel's possession of it*>> (Deuteronomy 1:38), and to apportion it among the tribes: <<*These are the names of the men who shall apportion the land to you for inheritance: the priest Eleazar and Joshua son of Nun*>> (Numbers 34:17). As the Book of Joshua opens, Moses has died and the time has finally come for Joshua: <<*full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him*>> (Deuteronomy 34:9a), to take the lead.

The land that I am giving to them. The patriarchal promise, first uttered to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, entailed three key elements: progeny (Abraham's descendants would become a great nation), blessing (Abraham's descendants would enjoy the blessings of living in covenant relationship with Yahweh, and were in turn to be a blessing to the nations), and land: <<*On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates*>> (Genesis 15:18).

The Pentateuch ends with the first two elements beginning to be realised, but with Abraham's descendants still on the plains of Moab, east of the Jordan River, outside the Promised Land (Numbers 22:1 and Deuteronomy 34:8). The dominant theme of the Book of Joshua is the Lord's faithfulness in fulfilling all his <<*good promises*>> in Joshua 21:45, especially the third element, the promise of land, which <<*he swore to their ancestors that he would give them*>> (Joshua 21:43b). Scores of references to the Lord giving the land appear throughout the book, eight in Chapter One alone.

Entrance into the land of Canaan was entrusted to a representative. Joshua was the trustee of the land for the people. In the same way, the Christian

representative Jesus goes before them and what they have in God they possess in him. The whole land was given, but they could only possess that which they claimed. What they took must be fought for against a determined opposition. God certainly could have simply eliminated all their enemies with a mere thought; but he calls Israel into partnership with himself to see his will done. Because taking the land took effort, the challenge ahead was not for those content with Egypt, but for those who would press ahead for what God had called them to. The same applies to Christians throughout all generations.

<sup>3</sup> Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses.

### Joshua 1:3

Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you. The fact that the Lord is sovereignly giving Israel the land does not negate their responsibility to step out in faith and take what is given. The statement here is a repeat of: <<Every place on which you set foot shall be yours; your territory shall extend from the wilderness to the Lebanon and from the River, the river Euphrates, to the Western Sea>> (Deuteronomy 11:24).

<sup>4</sup> From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory.

### Joshua 1:4

The Promised Land is to stretch from the wilderness in the south to Lebanon in the north, and from the river Euphrates in the north eastwards to the Great Sea, i.e. the Mediterranean in the west. This broad-brush description recalls Numbers 34:1-12, where the Lord provides Moses a more detailed delineation of the boundaries of Israel's inheritance in the land of Canaan. Details can also be gleaned from: <<*And the territory of the Canaanites extended from Sidon, in the direction of Gerar, as far as Gaza, and in the direction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha*>> (Genesis 10:19), <<*So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob, near Lebo-hamath. They went up into the Negeb, and came to Hebron; and Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi, the Anakites, were there. (Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt)*>> (Numbers 13:21-22), and: <<*Resume your journey, and go into the hill country of the Amorites as well as into the neighbouring regions – the Arabah, the hill country, the Shephelah, the Negeb, and the sea coast – the land of the Canaanites and the Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates*>> (Deuteronomy 1:7). Refer to the map below.



The Boundaries of the Promised Land

The original boundaries of the Promised Land as defined in Numbers Chapter 34 are somewhat different from the boundaries of the land that the Israelites eventually occupied. The original boundaries included the mountainous area north of Sidon and Damascus, but the Israelites never occupied this area during

the settlement period. Conversely, the original boundaries did not include land east of the Jordan River, but the Israelites occupied this land after capturing it from King Og and King Sihon.

<sup>5</sup> No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you.

<sup>6</sup> Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. <sup>7</sup> Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. <sup>8</sup> This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. <sup>9</sup> I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.'

### Joshua 1:5-9

Three times the Lord charges Joshua to **be strong and (very) courageous**, words reminiscent of Joshua's earlier commissioning under Moses: <<*Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because 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 bold, for you are the one who will go with this people into the land that the Lord has sworn to their ancestors to give them; and you will 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'>> (Deuteronomy 31:6-8).

Similar words were used by David to the people of Jabesh-gilead: <<*Therefore let your hands be strong, and be valiant; for Saul your lord is dead, and the house of Judah has anointed me king over them*>> (2 Samuel 2:7), and to his son Solomon: <<*I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, be courageous, and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his ordinances, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn*>> (1 King 2:2-3). And the prophet calls for courage in war: <<*Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare war, stir up the warriors. Let all the soldiers draw near, let them come up. Beat your ploughshares into swords, and your pruning-hooks into spears; let the weakling say, 'I am a warrior'*>> (Joel 3:9-10).

Joshua will need strength and courage to accept his task: for you shall put this people in possession of the land; to obey the Torah: This book of the Law, most likely this would have included at least the Book of Deuteronomy or portions thereof: <<*Take this book of the law and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God; let it remain there as a witness against you*>> (Deuteronomy 31:26); and to resist being terrified: do not be frightened or dismayed. Most difficult of all will be the middle responsibility, namely, to make the Lord's instructions, Hebrew *Torah*, integral to who he is and what he does, meditating on them constantly so as to do them. Joshua must take great care to observe the law. God's Word and Joshua's commitment to it would be the pillars supporting his success. Thus the middle exhortation is made emphatic by the addition of two small words: only be strong and very courageous.

Joshua did not only need to read God's Word. It had to be on his lips: shall not depart from your mouth, in his mind: meditate in it day and night) and he had to do it: act in accordance with all that is written. This is also what is commanded of those who profess to follow Jesus.

Given Joshua's leadership responsibilities, this charge to be strong and courageous would be daunting were it not for the framing promises: I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you; and the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. Joshua is called to boldness in God. This exposes Joshua's weakness; there was a need for such a command, because even a great leader like Joshua needed such encouragement. Fortified by these assurances of the Lord's abiding presence, Joshua is empowered to receive his commission with courage.

For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. The Hebrew terminology used in these assurances has nothing to do with worldly wealth or worldly success, but has everything to do with accomplishing one's mission and acting with keen insight in any circumstance that presents itself: <<*Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers*>> (Psalm 1:1-3 NIV). Only when one fails to <<*ask direction from the Lord*>> (Joshua 9:14b) is such insight lacking.

God's Word so lived is a guarantee of Christian success. Not that it promises a life without problems, but it does ensure a life able to deal with anything, because it takes full advantage of God's presence and promises. And Christian success is not measured by the same standards as the world's success. Even if the world accounts them as sheep for the slaughter, they are actually more than conquerors through him who loved them (Romans 8:36-37).

Victory is assured not because Joshua is a great leader, or because Israel is a great nation, but because God is a great God, and he says to Joshua, “I will be with you.” This is enough for any man seeking to do God’s will. This bold courage would not be in Joshua himself, but in God. People can be full of self-confidence that will take them to ruin, but they should instead be full of a genuine God-confidence.

#### I.a.ii Joshua 1:10-18 - Preparations for the Invasion

Having received his instructions from God to lead the people into the land of Canaan, Joshua now takes command and gives instructions to his other leaders to prepare the people to depart in three days time. This instruction is to be passed also to the two and a half tribes that had received their land inheritance east of the Jordan, for they too must fight for the rest of the land. The people agree to follow the leadership of Joshua just as they had done with Moses.

<sup>10</sup> Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, <sup>11</sup> ‘Pass through the camp, and command the people: “Prepare your provisions; for in three days you are to cross over the Jordan, to go in to take possession of the land that the Lord your God gives you to possess.”’

#### Joshua 1:10-11

Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people. Under God’s command, Moses had already established a system of tribal and clan leadership. This made governance, organisation and warfare easier by using this established chain of command: <<*These were the ones chosen from the congregation, the leaders of their ancestral tribes, the heads of the divisions of Israel*>> (Numbers 1:16). This system has been adopted by all successful cultures throughout history and remains in use today.

Prepare your provisions; for in three days you are to cross over the Jordan. The waiting for God is often the most difficult part for people, but days of waiting are always days of preparation in God’s work. There is no wasted time with God.

The period of three days features frequently throughout Scripture from Genesis to Revelation but the most important instance is the period of three days from the Cross to Resurrection: <<*Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up’*>> (John 2:19).

<sup>12</sup> To the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh Joshua said, <sup>13</sup> ‘Remember the word that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, saying, “The Lord your God is providing you a place of rest, and will give you this land.”’

### Joshua 1:12-13

To the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. These tribes which decided to settle on the east side of the Jordan river, land that Israel had already conquered, had promised to cross over and help the rest of the nation take the land on the west side of the Jordan river; refer to Numbers 32:16-32. Moses had instructed them that they must also fight for the land west of Jordan that was to be given to the remaining tribes: <<*At that time, I charged you as follows: ‘Although the Lord your God has given you this land to occupy, all your troops shall cross over armed as the vanguard of your Israelite kin. Only your wives, your children, and your livestock – I know that you have much livestock – shall stay behind in the towns that I have given to you. When the Lord gives rest to your kindred, as to you, and they too have occupied the land that the Lord your God is giving them beyond the Jordan, then each of you may return to the property that I have given to you’*>> (Deuteronomy 3:18-20). All Israel was to be involved in the conquest.

Like the OT notion of *shalom*, i.e. peace and well-being, rest, Hebrew *nuakh*, suggests freedom from threat, the enjoyment of one’s inheritance, security within the borders of the land, and a state of all-around well-being. Rest is typically preceded by work, as in the creation account: <<*And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation*>> (Genesis 2:2-3), or in the celebration of the Sabbath: <<*For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it*>> (Exodus 20:11), or even by warfare: <<*And the Lord gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their ancestors; not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands*>> (Joshua 21:44). The author of Hebrews weaves these OT threads together in expectation of a present spiritual and future rest in Hebrews Chapter 4 and urges his readers to strive to enter that rest: <<*Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs*>> (Hebrews 4:11).

**True peace is the peace of salvation that God gives through his Son. The expression peace, the Hebrew word *shalom*, has a much richer connotation than the English word does, since it conveys, not merely the absence of conflict and turmoil, but also the notion of positive blessing, especially in terms of a right relationship with God, and, as a result, the idea that ‘all is well’ in one’s life. This may be manifested most clearly amid persecution and tribulation.**

<sup>14</sup> Your wives, your little ones, and your livestock shall remain in the land that Moses gave you beyond the Jordan. But all the warriors among you shall cross over armed before your kindred and shall help them, <sup>15</sup> until the Lord gives rest to your kindred as well as to you, and they too take possession of the land that the Lord your God is giving them. Then you shall return to your own land and take possession of it, the land that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you beyond the Jordan to the east.'

### Joshua 1:14-15

Your wives shall remain in the land. Only the men were expected to participate in combat.

But all the warriors among you shall cross over armed before your kindred and shall help them. This same principle operates in the body of Christ. When one member has a need, it is the common need of the body: <<*But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it*>> (1 Corinthians 12:24b-26). Christians should never refuse to help a brother or sister in need because their own state is settled.

<sup>16</sup> They answered Joshua: 'All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. <sup>17</sup> Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you. Only may the Lord your God be with you, as he was with Moses! <sup>18</sup> Whoever rebels against your orders and disobeys your words, whatever you command, shall be put to death. Only be strong and courageous.'

### Joshua 1:16-18

All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Here, Israel is seen in the kind of unity as a nation that was essential to fulfil God's calling and promise for them. They overcame the temptation to see the eastern tribes as separate from the rest of Israel.

**There is perhaps a lesson here for the Christian Church. Jesus only ever established one church, his church. Yet man has split the church into thousands of denominations. This is fine as long as they seek unity between each group but far too often they seem to want to compete!**

**Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you.** The willingness of the people to receive Joshua as their leader, replacing Moses, was a confirmation of the Lord's words to Joshua previously in the chapter. In the ancient Near East, a change of leadership would typically involve a pledge of loyalty to the new leader.

**Whoever rebels against your orders and disobeys your words, whatever you command, shall be put to death.** These are strong words. The men from the tribes that already had their land east of Jordan are committing themselves to following Joshua and fighting for the land west of Jordan on pain of death.

**Only be strong and courageous.** The representatives from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh say the same thing to Joshua that he heard from the Lord. This must have been a confirmation of God's Word to Joshua when they said it. God loves to confirm his Word to his people.