

## "WALK THRU THE BIBLE: JOSHUA."

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**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA**

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**Text for Sermon: Joshua 1:5-9; 11:23**

The five books of Moses, the Torah, all anticipate the fulfillment of God's promise made to Abraham 500 years before in Genesis 15.

Joshua is the story of God's faithfulness to His covenant promise as He leads His people into the Promised Land. We can take God at His Word and trust His unchanging character.

**Joshua** is about that nation receiving the Promised Land, about taking possession of the promise, about victory and glory.

After the first five books of Moses, called the Pentateuch, we transition to the historical books of the OT and the book of Joshua. Joshua is a continuation and culmination of the story of Genesis and the covenant promises of God.

As Acts is the bridge linking the Gospels and the Epistles, so Joshua is the bridge linking the Pentateuch with the rest of the histories, a link between promise and fulfillment. This is a hinge book, a pivotal book between the first 5 and the next 33. It closes one chapter and opens another chapter.

The book begins by mentioning the death of Moses and Joshua stepping in to fill the shoes of Moses.

We mainly remember the book of Joshua for the Rahab story and the great story of the fall of the wall of Jericho. And there is the great quotable quote used in graduation speeches, "be strong and courageous," or the quote on the walls of many Christian homes, "as for me and my house we will serve the Lord."

But between those two verses are 24 chapters that are a challenge to the modern Christian.

The author of the book is Joshua, whose name means Yahweh saves. Its Greek equivalent is Jesus, which means He will save his people from their sins.

The book spans the events from the death of Moses to the final conquest of the land, about 25 years starting around 1400 BC (to 1370 BC). The actual conquest took about seven years, and Joshua dies almost 20 years later.

We should keep asking who is the central character in this book and in each of the books. Is the central character Joshua, or is it the Israelites? The central character is God. God gives the land, God gives the victories, God overcomes the obstacles, God reveals Himself.

The book divides easily into four sections.

The first has to do with crossing into the land (Josh. 1-5). The second has to do with conquest of the land (Josh. 6-12). The third section deals with how they allocated the land they had conquered (Josh. 13-21). The last concerns learning how to worship God as a united people in accordance with His covenant (Josh. 22-24). Let's consider each of these in turn.

### **Crossing into Promised Land (Joshua 1-5).**

After 500 years since Abraham, after 400 years in Egypt, after 40 years of senseless, faithless, promise-disbelieving wilderness wandering, they are standing on the brink of the promised land.

The great dramatic crossing of the Jordan is a reenactment of the Red Sea crossing. This reminds the people of God's absolute sovereignty, and of God's anointing of Joshua to replace Moses. The covenant is renewed, the first Passover is celebrated since leaving Egypt.

### ***The Land.***

Why this obsession over a 150 mile by 75 mile piece of real estate in the middle east? 8,600 square miles, just a little small than New Hampshire.

The importance of the land is hard to underestimate. In a real sense this is when the people of God become a real nation in all the senses of the term. They now had a permanent home, a place of identity. It was their inheritance, a physical manifestation of their relationship with God.

The second verse of the book calls the people to cross "into the land that I am giving you." The land belonged to God, not to the Canaanites and not to Israel. It was the gift

of God to the Israelites. Israelites could look at the land and see God kept his word; they could trust God to be faithful, generous and graciousness.

### **Conquest of Promised Land (Joshua 6-12).**

This is the smiting of the -ites: the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. One of the words that is foolishly thrown around by critics of the Bible is the word genocide or ethnic cleansing. Is that what this is, is God guilty? Was this just, was it fair of God to take the land from one people and give it to another people?

Think about why God does this. God's judgments are always moral and ethical, not ethnic or racial. God had told Abraham he could not yet possess the promised land because the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full (Gen. 15:16). If God waited centuries so His judgment of Canaan would be just, who are we to challenge Him and charge Him with injustice?

God is patient, longsuffering until every opportunity is exhausted and the iniquity is full and then judgment comes.

The iniquity of the Canaanites was particularly wicked, called abominations by God in Leviticus 18. They practiced all kinds of wicked immorality that were an abomination to God, including sexual immorality, homosexuality and bestiality, and also child sacrifice.

God's people did not kill their enemies out of a sense of racial or ethnic superiority. The soldiers of Israel wielded their swords as instruments of judgment in the hand of the one true God.

Furthermore, as evidence this is not racial or ethnic injustice, the family of Rahab, a Canaanite harlot is invited to join the family of Israel, and another family in Israel is removed from Israel for disobedience (Achan).

Jericho and Ai were the only two reported battles in which Israel took the initiative. After those battles the kings of the south mount a war with Israel and are defeated. That is followed by the kings of the north doing the same and falling to the same fate. So God's strategy was to divide and conquer, first the south and then the north.

In this section we are told the unexplainable miracle of the sun standing still in Joshua 10.

The text is really about the miracle power of prayer. Joshua prayed and the day was unique not because the sun stood still, but because Yahweh listened to a man's prayer, and his direct request of the sun and moon.

**Joshua 10:14** There has been no day like it before or since, when the Lord heeded the voice of a man, for the Lord fought for Israel.

Joshua was a man of prayer, something he learned from being Moses' assistant and service with him in the tent of prayer in the wilderness.

Once again we are reminded of God's control over the gods of the Canaanites. They worshiped and prayed to the sun and moon. They were their main deities, but they obeyed Joshua and Israel's God.

### **Conquered land allocated by tribe (Joshua 13-21).**

Joshua 13–21 may seem like one of those boring parts of the Bible. For the modern reader who is working through the allocation of the land, chapter after chapter, it can be quite daunting and tedious. But try to put yourself in the sandals of God's people and imagine the sense of wonder and joy among God's people as each tribe was given a huge amount of territory in the Promised Land.

The joy of the Israelite in his land inheritance is reflected throughout the Old Testament ; it simply resounds in passage after passage.

**Psalm 16:3, 5-6** I say of the holy people who are in the land, "They are the noble ones in whom is all my delight ... LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure ... The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance."

If you are named in the will of an exceedingly wealthy person, you won't be bored sitting in a long meeting with a lawyer who reads the will and allocates the assets.

The allotment of territories to tribes in the land of Canaan gives us a preview of what it will be like when our greater Joshua, Jesus, leads us into the eternal Promised Land where we will inherit all that God has promised.

The Levites are left out of the land assignments, for "the Lord God of Israel is their inheritance" (Josh. 13:33). They are to be devoted to service God in the tabernacle and to be provided for by the people of God, free from the distractions of worldly cares and concerns.

This is the foundation of the practice of providing pastors with a parsonage.

***This is the fulfillment of God's Promise.***

**Genesis 15:18-21** On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, 19 the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, 20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, 21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."

**Joshua 21:43-45** Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. 44 And the Lord gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands. 45 Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.

This is a grand theme of Joshua, God's complete faithfulness in the midst of Israel's complete unfaithfulness. In fact, the people's sinfulness magnified God's faithfulness.

The language is give and gave, it is God's land and He is the one who gives it. God promised victory and He gave it. God brought the walls down; God made the sun stand still. None of this is earned or deserved, it is given by the hand of God. We are utterly dependent on God for our salvation and inheritance.

The continuity of the covenant and the nature of our covenant making God.

**Serving the Lord in the land, covenant worship (Joshua 22-24).**

Then comes rest and worship. The last section concerns learning how to worship God as a united people in accordance with His covenant (Josh. 22-24).

Joshua makes a solemn covenant with the people, that they should serve the Lord their God, and never forsake Him (Josh. 24:26-27). Read Hebrews 4 to get some NT perspective on this part of Joshua. This is a picture of the Sabbath rest we will enter into in heaven.

After Joshua retells the story of all that God had done, he calls Israel to decide what they will do. Joshua as a good leader declares what he will do. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (24:15).

## **Jesus.**

The Gospel in Joshua is seen in God's continuing story of redemption and fulfilling His promises and bringing the people into the land of their promised inheritance. All of this anticipated Jesus, His redemption, His defeat of our enemies and His bringing us into our promised rest.

Despite the unfaithfulness of God's people, He is always faithful, He never fails or forsakes us. Christ secures and gives us our inheritance. Ephesians 1:14 refers to the Holy Spirit as "the guarantee of our inheritance."

Our divine-human Savior takes the curses we deserve for our disobedience, and He gives us the blessing He earns by His. The book foreshadows a better Joshua, Jesus.

Rahab is important in the Bible. She is mentioned in the great hall of fame of faith in Hebrews 11 and she is part of the genealogy of King David and Jesus.

Rahab's scarlet thread points to Jesus, like the blood on the door posts in Egypt, and the death angel passing over. God's provision, God's rescuing and redeeming. Jesus brings His people of God into a promised rest (Heb. 4:8-9); intercedes for His own continually (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25); and enables them to defeat their enemies (Rom. 8:37; Heb. 2:14-15). Christ is victorious over Satan, his demons, and sin and death.

In the NT one greater than Joshua, has come to rescue and redeem the righteous from the just judgment of God, and to be the one who executes God's judgment on the unrighteous.

**1 Peter 2:9-11** You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God's own possession so that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 11 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

## **Implications and application.**

### *Theme of rest:*

**Hebrews 4:1-3** Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. 2 For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united

by faith with those who listened. 3 For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said,

“As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’”  
although his works were finished from the foundation of the world.

Don’t let unbelief keep you from entering God’s rest.

Possessing what God has given is the continuing goal of the Christian. Appropriating all that has already been given in Christ is God’s will for his people.

Ephesians 3:18-19. See also Romans 8:17; Phillipians 3:12-14; 1 Timothy 6:12

We can only enter into rest by faith, and we can only have faith in the work that was accomplished by the greater Joshua, our Lord Jesus. We can only have faith in that work in this sense after it has been accomplished. When we enter into rest by faith, we are entering into Him. DW

***Theme of not forgetting:***

**Joshua 1:8** Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.

After crossing the Jordan River into Canaan, the people were instructed to take twelve stones from the Jordan and construct a monument “so that all peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, and so that you may fear the Lord your God forever” (Joshua 4:24).

What is one of the great enemies of our faith, one of the great dangers to a healthy spiritual life?

Forgetfulness, slothfulness, laziness, neglect, ignorance, inattentiveness.

What is one of the great enemies of our marriages? Forgetfulness, inattentiveness, neglect, lack of appreciation.

Fading memories lead to hard hearts. How do we fight spiritual amnesia?

What means have you or can you set up in your home to remember the power and presence of God in your lives?

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

**II Timothy 4:7** I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. **8** Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.