

Joshua

Lesson 1

Preface

We open to chapter 1 of the book of Joshua to begin a new study in our journey through the Scriptures together.

Who was Joshua? We find the first mention of this man called Joshua in Exodus 17:9-16 when Amalek attacked stragglers of the fleeing Nation of Israel at Rephidim where Moses struck the rock for water. Not only is it the first time we hear the name Joshua, but we hear Moses call Joshua to action as a leader and says to him, “Choose men for us and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.”¹⁰ Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.¹¹ So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed.¹² But Moses’ hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set.¹³ So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword”. (Ex 17:9–13). And therefore, we will see Joshua fighting the physical battles in the valley while Moses fights the spiritual battles on the mountain.

Immediately after Joshua’s victory, the LORD says to Moses, “Write this in a book as a memorial and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.” (Ex 17:14). For whatever reason there might be, Moses and the LORD trusted Joshua of the tribe of Ephraim to be Moses’ general in their battles to come. For that reason, the LORD wanted Moses to tell Joshua the prophecy we read concerning the fate and future of Amalek and his descendants. It was then time for Moses to return to the mountain of the LORD, and Joshua followed, at least halfway up the mountain, and waited for Moses to return at the end of forty days (Exodus 17:13-18).

Moses had a tent that he called the Tent of Meeting, which he set up outside the camp at a reasonable distance. It is where the people would go to seek the LORD before the Tabernacle complex was built. When Moses was at the Tent of Meeting, Joshua was there. When Moses left the Tent of Meeting, Joshua stayed there (Exodus 33:4). As a side note, at the end of the first year out of Egypt, the LORD will instruct Moses to have the Tabernacle complex built, and a new and larger Tent of Meeting will be built which will house the Tabernacle within.

In Numbers 11:28, we learn that Joshua had been “...the attendant of Moses from his youth....” (Nu 11:28). At that point in the Scripture, the nation of Israel had only been out of Egypt for a little more than a year; therefore, Joshua had only known Moses for a little more than a year. The Scripture says Joshua was “...the attendant of Moses from his youth...;” therefore, Joshua was still a youth when we see him chosen by Moses for his next task.

Moses chose Joshua to be among the twelve spies that would leave Kadesh-barnea to search out and bring back a report concerning the Promised Land a little over a year after leaving Egypt. Joshua was still in his youth when that important trip was made. Not only did a young Joshua get to see the Promised Land, but he also could prove himself to the LORD. He and Caleb voted to take the Promised Land; the rest voted no. The no votes sent the entire camp back to Mount Sinai until forty years were complete. But the journey was more than just an outing for the spies; it was a training time for Joshua. He will use the same technique of sending spies with his campaigns when he is in charge of the nation, as we will learn in the first chapter of this study.

Joshua's name in Hebrew means *Jehovah is Savior*. If he had lived in the Greek days of the New Testament, his name would have been translated, *Jesus*. Joshua was not our Jesus, Who died on the cross for the salvation of our souls; we are just pointing out that the Hebrew name for Joshua is the same as the Greek name for Jesus.

At the end of Deuteronomy, Joshua was commissioned by the LORD to take Moses' place. When Moses was dead, Joshua was in charge. He is forty years older now. Being a youth when he joined the spies means that he was not yet twenty years of age. Now he is somewhere under sixty years of age. He is no longer a youth in the nation of Israel. He is one of the oldest, behind Caleb, who is eighty at this time (14:7). All the stalwarts of the nation were gone – Moses, Aaron. Surely, the whole weight of leading the vast Nation of Israel laid squarely on Joshua's shoulders, or did it? We will soon see!

Dr. Jim Hastings

Chapter 1

I. The Beginning of Joshua's Command (1:1-2:24)

A. The Great Calling to Joshua (1:1-9)

1. Joshua's Guidance to the Promised Land (1:1-2)

The book of Joshua picks up in the exact location where the book of Deuteronomy ended – the Plain of Moab. At the end of Deuteronomy, we saw Joshua's Commission as the new leader of the Nation of Israel. In the first words of this book, we see the beginning of Joshua's command with the LORD's great calling to Joshua as the new leader of Israel. The record speaks of Joshua's guidance to the Promised Land by the LORD here in chapter 1, verse 1. *"Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant, saying,* ² *"Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel."* (1:1-2)

The LORD did not call to Eleazar, the High Priest. Neither did He call to the elders of the tribes. He called to Joshua, and it was a great calling. He told Joshua to get the people ready and cross over into the Promised Land. But we must ask the question, "How long had they waited since the death of Moses?" At the end of Deuteronomy, we learned that the nation mourned the death of Moses for thirty days. In Joshua 3:1-2, we will learn that upon this order to Joshua in verse 1:2, the camp will move from near the mountains in the Plain of Moab at a place called Shittim down by the bank of the Jordan River. It was not far. There on the bank, they will wait until the third day. According to Joshua 4:19, the third day will be the tenth of Nisan. That means the order given in this great calling to Joshua occurred on the seventh of Nisan. When we back that date thirty days, we will know the day of Moses' death. If that be the case, Moses died on Adar 6th. If all was interpreted correctly in Deuteronomy 31 – 34, Moses died on his birthday at a hundred and twenty years old. That means Moses was born in Egypt on Adar 6th.

The guidance of the LORD is found in His words, *"...now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people...."* It is not a suggestion; it is a command. Arise! Cross this Jordan!

2. Joshua's Boundaries in the Promised Land (1:3-4)

The LORD defines Joshua's boundaries in the Promised Land with a promise. Verse 3. *"Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses. ⁴ From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun will be your territory."* (1:3-4)

The Promised Land on the east side of the Jordan River was already in the nation's hands; the passage states the boundaries of the Promised Land on the west side of the



Figure 2: Map of the Negev Desert

Jordan River. The "wilderness" means the furthest southern boundary, which included the Negev Desert. The Negev held several areas including *the wilderness of Zin and the wilderness of Paran.*

The northern boundary would be the southern border of Lebanon. It was to be *"... even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates..."* The nation of Israel never made it that far. It fell short of taking the land all the way to the Euphrates by several hundred miles. The passage says it will include *"all the land of the Hittite..."* The Hittite territory was in the middle of Israel as we know it today, but it was also just north of

the sea of Galilee. The western boundary was *"the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun..."* We know that sea today as the Mediterranean Sea. All the boundaries were reached by Joshua except for reaching the Euphrates River.

3. Joshua's Protection in the Promised Land (1:5-7)

In the great calling, the LORD proclaimed Joshua's protection in the Promised Land. Verse 5. *"No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. ⁶ Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. ⁷ Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go."* (1:5-7)

Note the encouragement in the LORD's words. *"Be strong and courageous...."* This is not the first time Joshua heard these words spoken to him. Moses spoke to Joshua in Deuteronomy 31:7 and said, *"Be strong and courageous...."* At Joshua's commissioning service as the new leader, it was said to him in Deuteronomy 31:23, *"Be strong and courageous...."* Twice it is said in this passage in our study. We will see it again in the following passages. Then again, it will be noted in Joshua 10:25. But there was always a catch. Joshua would have success in the Promised Land and the LORD would protect Joshua and the people as long as they held to the law and did not vary away from it one degree.

4. Joshua's Guidance in the Promised Land (1:8-9)

The LORD states that the law is Joshua's guidance in the Promised Land. Verse 8. *"This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. ⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."* (1:8-9)



Figure 1: The Negev Desert



Figure 3: The Negev to Lebanon

The word “*meditate*” in Hebrew is *bagab*. The root word means to *ponder*. When it was first translated in the English Bible by Tyndale, it meant *to ponder as to engage in mental contemplation*. In other words, the LORD expected Joshua to read the only Bible he had every day. What did Joshua have as a Bible? He had Moses’ books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. He had inserted passages himself in the last four. He knew the content of each, but the LORD did not want him to forget. Forgetting the words of the LORD in the law would forfeit his success. Following the words of the LORD in the law would guarantee his success. The LORD said again to Joshua, “*Be strong and courageous ... for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.*” What could be a better calling than that?

B. The Great Command of Joshua (1:10-15)

1. Prepare Tribes to Move Ahead (1:10-11)

From the great calling of Joshua, we come to the great command of Joshua. His first task is to prepare the tribes to move ahead. Verse 10. “*Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, ‘Pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, saying, ‘Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you are to cross this Jordan, to go in to possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you, to possess it.’*” (1:10-11)

The notice went out in the mouths of the officers of each tribe, “*Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you are to cross this Jordan ...*” Joshua is specific. He does not say *in three days*; he says “*within three days.*” We know the day they crossed the Jordan River. Joshua tells the exact day in chapter 4:19. “*Now the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth of the first month and camped at Gilgal on the eastern edge of Jericho.*” (4:19) If they cross the river on Nisan the 10th, that means that Joshua gave the command to “*Prepare provisions*” on Nisan the 7th. Here is why. The camp of Israel was currently near the mountains on the east side of the Plains of Moab in a village area they called Abel-shittim. It was there that Balaam came to curse the people. It was there that the Amorite King Sihon began the war with them that Sihon lost. The name means *the meadow of acacia trees*. We saw that word in Exodus because the structures of all the Tabernacle furniture, as well as the poles and beams, were made from acacia wood before they were covered with gold. The Hebrews gave the name to the area because of all the acacia trees. The area was about five miles across the plain from the Jordan River. It was good that it was there because, with the spring rains, the Jordan River would overflow its banks both east and west of the river. In 4:18, we will find out that the waters of the Jordan were out of their banks as normal in that spring season. In chapter three, we are going to learn that the camp moved from Abel-shittim down to the bank of the Jordan River the next day (3:1). Then, instructions were given for the crossing on the third day (3:2). We will study the crossing when we come to chapter three.

We must ask about the provisions the camp needed to prepare. First, the people packed everything they had, and they would not be unpacking until they reached their camp on the other side of the Jordan. They will camp at a place that they will call Gilgal. The name means *rolling*, and it was a good name because the hills were rolling there as they decreased into the sand on the west side of the Jordan River. The place of the camp will not have a name until the Hebrews give it the name Gilgal. Therefore, the camp knows they are headed across the Jordan River, but they did not know how long they would be packed up.

Second, the provisions of cooking their food needed to be in place for those days. They did not have to store food because the LORD was still feeding them manna, although that would end in eight days.

Third, the men of two and a half tribes needed to say their good-byes to their wives and children, as we will see next.

2. Prepare Tribes to Leave Behind (1:12-15)

Joshua had a meeting with the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half-tribe of Manasseh to prepare the men to leave behind their families. It was an agreement they made with Moses when the land on the east side of the Jordan River was taken from the Amorite kings, and these tribes asked for that land to be theirs. Verse 12. *“To the Reubenites and to the Gadites and to the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, ¹³ ‘Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, ‘The LORD your God gives you rest and will give you this land.’ ¹⁴ Your wives, your little ones, and your cattle shall remain in the land which Moses gave you beyond the Jordan, but you shall cross before your brothers in battle array, all your valiant warriors, and shall help them, ¹⁵ until the LORD gives your brothers rest, as He gives you, and they also possess the land which the LORD your God is giving them. Then you shall return to your own land, and possess that which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you beyond the Jordan toward the sunrise.”* (1:12-15)

Moses had already divided the land of the Amorite kings Sihon and Og to the inheritances of Reuben, Gad, and half-tribe of Manasseh. All the Amorites were killed; however, their cities and villages were not destroyed. Everything in those cities and villages was left fully furnished and ready for occupation. It was a fulfillment of Moses’ words found in Deuteronomy. *“Then it shall come about when the LORD your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you, great and splendid cities which you did not build, ¹¹ and houses full of all good things which you did not fill, and hewn cisterns which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant, and you eat and are satisfied....”* (Deuteronomy 6:10-11). For the families left behind, all they had to do was leave Abel-shittim when the camp moved to the Jordan River and journey to their new homes on the eastern side of the river. I suppose they did not do that. I imagine that the families moved down to the Jordan with their men and said their goodbyes there before they turned to live in their new homes. The women and children would not know at that time how long it would be until they see their men again. We are in chapter 1 of this book. Joshua will send the men home to be with their families until chapter 22. They will be gone a long time – five years as we will discover later.

C. The Great Promise to Joshua (1:16-18)

With the great calling of Joshua and the great command of Joshua, we come to the great promise to Joshua from all the people. Verse 16. *“They answered Joshua, saying, ‘All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us, we will go. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Anyone who rebels against your command and does not obey your words in all that you command him, shall be put to death; only be strong and courageous.”* (1:16-18)

Joshua was entirely in charge of the people, and they had pledged their loyalty to him and his leadership just as they did to Moses. Thinking back on the people with Moses, the promise to Joshua may not have had much credence. Moses’ people were hit-or-miss with him. They will be hit-or-miss with Joshua, too, to some extent.

Notice the promise the people make toward the rebels who would be against Joshua’s command – death. It will be only a few days before the people will have the opportunity to fulfill this promise – at least once. We will see that in Chapter 7 with a man by the name of Achan and his family. Yet, we must notice that the people ended their promise with the exact words spoken to Joshua by the LORD and Moses, *“Be strong and courageous.”* For that, Joshua will do. He will be strong and courageous.