

Open Heart, Open Bible

Joshua and Acts of the Apostles

Linking Theme: Fulfilment

Passage for weekly reading (week 27):

Joshua ch. 's 1 – 6

Crossing Over

We have seen in our readings from Exodus onwards how Joshua, as Moses' young assistant, has been thoroughly prepared for the leadership task before him, and is specifically commissioned for the role by Aaron's son, Eleazar, now the High Priest (Num. 27 v.'s 15-23). The Greek form of the name Joshua is Jesus, and he was an early type of Christ in that he completed the work begun by Moses in leading God's people into their inheritance. Moses brought them out, and Joshua brought them in (Deut. 6 v.23). One man could not accomplish the complete deliverance. Moses may have done, but sin disabled him – all have sinned, as we recently read in Romans. The only One who could both initiate and complete our salvation would be the Man Christ Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb.2 v.2). The story of Joshua in this Book, believed to have been written by him, is the account of the fulfilment of the divine promise to Abraham to give him the land of Canaan (Gen.17v.8).

We read in Num.13v.16 that Moses changed the name of his servant from Hoshea to Joshua. Hoshea means "deliverer", whereas Joshua is an abbreviated form of Jehoshua, meaning Jehovah saves. The salvation of God Himself, in historical time, is now being effected through His chosen instrument, and the new name is powerfully indicative of that. Joshua is the human agent of the eternal God to bring covenant rest and security to His people, in a land of abundant fruitfulness.

Much as the Lord promises to be with Joshua in all his undertakings (1 v.5), he is told three times in ch.1 v.'s 6-9 to be strong and (very) courageous. He is about to embark on a campaign that will make great demands on him. Only by walking closely with God will he succeed (v.'s7&8). No human strength will suffice in this battle, any more than human strength could have wrested the Israelites from Pharaoh's grip in the first place. The Reubenites and the other tribes who will eventually settle east of the Jordan give Joshua the same message – that's his confirmation! (v.18).

As Moses had done those forty years previously, Joshua sends out two spies to reconnoitre the city of Jericho, the first stronghold that needed to be destroyed. The difference between this occasion and the initial scouting of the land by the twelve leaders (Num.13) was that these two men had no doubt that they were on

the victory side. It wasn't "if" but "when" the Lord gives us the land (2 v.14), as they were speaking to Rahab the prostitute. She had, of course, already told the two of them that the people's hearts were melting in fear of Israel because of the news of victories already won. Rahab is to the O.T. what Mary Magdalene is to the N.T. She is commended for her faith in both Hebrews and James, and is included in Matthew's genealogy in the royal lineage of Jesus. The scarlet cord which guaranteed her safety when Jericho would fall reminds us of the smearing of the blood of the Passover lamb over the doorposts of the Israelites when their firstborn sons were spared. When the spies return to Joshua, there is no fearful report this time, rather a certainty that the whole land is ready for the taking (v.24).

Ch.'s 3&4 give us the well-known account of the crossing of the Jordan. Moses had to cross the Red Sea; Joshua crosses the Jordan. The people were to "consecrate" themselves in the same way as they did before the Sinai encounter, when the law was first given (Ex.19 v.'s 10-15). Consecration, then as now, meant washing and sexual abstinence. This in itself generated a sense of reverence and expectancy. Joshua was close enough to the Lord to know what He (the Lord) would do as the priests stepped into the water's edge – his leadership credibility depended on it! (3 v.13) The twelve men selected pick up the stones from the river bed as instructed, in order to commemorate the place of crossing. The priests continue to stand in the middle of the dried-up river until all the Israelites have safely reached the western side. They then complete the crossing themselves, still carrying the ark of the covenant. The river returns to its normal flow.

N.B. The name of the place where the stones were set was Gilgal. The name has two possible meanings, which are interconnected. The one is described in the Biblical text in 5 v.9, to roll, or to roll away. More particularly, the name means "wheel", and the analogy is that of a whirlwind. The text does not say how the Lord rolled back the waters of the Jordan, but it does say that it was a "strong east wind" that He used to dry up the waters of the Red Sea in Ex. 14 v.21. Joshua says that the Lord did to the Jordan just what he did to the Red Sea (4 v.23), so the implication is that a supernatural whirlwind of immense power produces the desired result. **"He (the Lord) did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful and so that you might always fear the Lord your God"** (4 v.24).

The immediate effect of this spectacular crossing is to further immobilise the Canaanites with fear (5 v.1), but the Lord requires something else of His people before they engage the enemy. Circumcision was the O.T. sign of the cutting off of the old life, and the beginning of a new life in the fulness of God's promise, and the situation is now particularly appropriate for the reaffirmation of covenant faithfulness and obedience. After the men have healed, the Passover is celebrated

and the manna stops. It is indeed a time of new beginnings! Worship before warfare!

Now, Joshua himself has an encounter with God that will mark his leadership for the rest of his life. He did not realise who the Person was initially (v.13), and his question comes across in a slightly arrogant way – “Are you for us or for our enemies?” (What would he have done if the warrior were for his enemies?) This man is not here to take sides, however. Rather, He was there to ensure that Joshua was on His side, and Joshua’s response makes it very clear that he quickly understood the meaning of the visit. He addresses the Person as “Adonai” (Lord, Master, Controller), the way in which the Israelites would often personally address the living God, because Jehovah or Jahweh was the unpronounceable, unspeakable name. The people had worshipped corporately. Their leader worships personally. Interesting, too, that the instruction given him is exactly the same as that given to Moses at the burning bush – “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground”.

The instructions for taking Jericho are very clear (6 v.’s 2-5). Joshua follows them to the letter, and also said that there was to be no plunder – everything in the City was to be “devoted to the Lord”, which usually meant utter destruction. All the valuables were to go into the Tabernacle treasury (v.19). Only Rahab and her family were spared (v.’s 22,23&25). The curse spoken by Joshua over the stricken city was activated some 500 years later, when a man called Hiel from Bethel tried to rebuild it (1 Kings 16 v.34).

Food for thought / discussion / prayer

- 1) As Joshua commences his leadership of the Israelite people, taking over from one so established and honoured as Moses, what strikes you most in respect of that leadership from this weeks’ chapters?
- 2) Gilgal is the place where the “reproach of Egypt” was finally rolled away from the Israelites. This was never the case for the previous forty years. Although Israel was “saved”, she was not fully delivered until now. Does this say something to you of our Christian experience? Is it possible to be saved, and yet not fully delivered? Can anyone testify along these lines? Does any N.T. teaching back up this view?
- 3) In Deuteronomy we read in detail about blessings and curses. Here, in 6 v. 26, Joshua pronounced a curse which was activated all those centuries later. Can curses still bedevil our lives this side of the cross?

Next week’s passage: Joshua 7 – 12

