

A NATION POSSESSES - LIFE IN THE LAND

Study 1

COURAGE TO CONQUER

Read

Joshua chapter 1

The book of Joshua is a record of how God gave to the Israelites the possession of the land which He had promised a long time before to their fathers. When was the promise first given? If you look at **Genesis 12: 1-7** you will find the answer. When God called Abraham He not only wanted him to go out of Ur in faith, but He assured him that He would bring him into a land which was to be rich and well worth possessing.

In studying the history of Israel it is interesting to notice how the nation gradually took shape. After the Exodus, Moses led them through all the ups and downs of the wilderness journeyings. Things at times looked far from promising, even disastrous, but God keeps His promises. If it had depended upon Moses and the people all would have been lost.

Now, in this opening chapter, we see the nation poised ready to enter the **Promised Land**. Moses is dead and Joshua now has the leadership in his hands. It was a great responsibility and Joshua feels it very much. Remember he had been Moses' servant and he had seen all that his master had to contend with. However could he be equal to the task?

Notice how the book is divided into three natural parts:

1. Conquest of Canaan, **Chapters 1-12**.
2. Distribution of the land among the Tribes, **Chapters 13-22**.
3. Joshua's farewell to the people, **Chapters 23-24**.

This opening chapter is a reminder to us that God never expects anyone to enter into work for Him without His encouragement and blessing. God knew just what Joshua was capable of doing. He knew that he was only a man and no doubt at this stage feeling very insufficient and weak. Think how large an undertaking it was for an ordinary man - yet he had an extraordinarily great God. This wonderful God is going to encourage Joshua to be courageous as he enters into the land of Canaan.

We think now of the possibilities opening up to Joshua and the people (**verses 2-4**). God told Joshua to go over Jordan. When the land was entered, so great were the possibilities of victory that "**every place**" that was trodden upon could be theirs. The boundaries are given, (**verse 4**) and God said that nothing would stop their progress. God meant what He said when He told Joshua "**every place**". We know that Israel failed to enter fully into these possessions even though God intended them to have them.

As Christians, God also has given us great blessings. **Ephesians 1: 1-3** tells us that these are in Christ. Do not think that, for the Christian, Canaan is a picture of Heaven as the **Promised Land**. God has blessings for us to enjoy and enter into now, but you will soon notice that in Canaan there was conflict. This is true today when Christians seek to enjoy their blessing in the Lord Jesus. Remember that all conflict will be over when we reach Heaven. I suggest that you read **Ephesians** also while you do this study. It is the 'Joshua' of the New Testament.

God wanted Joshua to be sure of His presence with him as he entered the land. "**As I was with Moses so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you**", (**verses 5 and 9**). Undoubtedly Joshua was feeling very much alone in his leadership. Maybe he was thinking that he had no one to turn to if problems came and difficulties increased. God never gives us a job to do and then leaves us to do it alone. For the Christian, as for Joshua, the companionship of the Lord can be very real. When Jesus sent out His disciples He said something very similar to them. "**Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age**". (**Matthew 28: 20**) You will notice as you go on in your studies that victory only came to Israel when they knew the presence of God.

It is important to notice the provision that God made for victory as Joshua and Israel went forward. **Verses 7 & 8** tell us of this. Obedience to the "**Book of the Law**" was the secret of their prosperity. The Word of God was the guide-book to victory. The story of Joshua underlines for us the value of true obedience. The nation was strongest and most victorious when they were careful to observe God's commands. A strong victorious Christian life is built upon the instructions found in the Bible. It tells us how to possess our riches in Christ.

All these things make us aware of the fact that there are perils to be faced in the "Land of Promise". There were giants for Joshua to meet; strong opponents to progress and possession. As soon as the nation stepped out of Jordan, the battle was on.

Preparation was needed (**verse 11**), because every step would be contested. No wonder God said so often, "**Be strong and of good courage**" (**verses 6, 7 & 9**). We shall come back to this again in our studies when we consider some of the opposition which Joshua met. Never treat Satan's work lightly. He seeks to rob you of your joy in knowing the Lord Jesus and will do everything possible to prevent you obtaining those things which God waits to give. It is a constant warfare and only through Christ can we be victorious.

So we are ready to enter the land. Pray as you study these lessons that God will teach you the value of the wonderful blessings He has given you in Christ.

Study 2

THE SCARLET THREAD



Joshua chapter 2

We have seen how God commissioned Joshua to step into the place of Moses, ready to be Israel's leader. He has been told that the "Land of Promise" is before him. God assures him that, just as He was with Moses, so He will be with him. With the command to be strong and courageous Joshua now begins to move forward. It is interesting to notice that the Old Testament name, 'Joshua', is the same as the New Testament, 'Jesus'. It means 'Saviour'- God will save. I wonder if this means anything to you? We can see a parallel here, in that, just as Joshua was the Captain and Leader of God's people - Israel, so the Lord Jesus is the Captain and Leader of Christian people today. He is called in **Hebrews 2: 10** "**the Captain (Author) of their salvation**". Then, just as Joshua led the people into the enjoyment of the "**Promised Land**", so the Lord Jesus will lead Christians who follow Him into the enjoyment of His great spiritual blessings and eventually lead them home to glory. It is good to keep this comparison in mind as you study the life of Joshua.

We begin with a spy story. Joshua sends two spies to get into Jericho to learn its strength and conditions. He would no doubt remember the time when he and eleven others - one from each of Israel's tribes - were sent by Moses to spy out the **Promised Land**. You can read of this in **Numbers chapter 13**. They saw then many things which convinced them of the beauty and goodness of the land. They brought back some of the best of the produce grown there. But they also brought back tales of fear and terror because of the inhabitants of the land - Giants who made them feel like grasshoppers. Only Caleb and Joshua honoured God and showed courage enough to go in and possess Canaan. So in God's judgment, all those who were there that day eventually died in the wilderness. Only Caleb and Joshua are about to go in. Faith honours God and God honours faith. Joshua is a living example of this as he sends his spies into Jericho.

The strategy of Joshua was sound. Jericho was a strongly defended city, the gateway for Israel to the "**Promised Land**". To gain a foothold for future conquests they had to destroy it. How necessary then to know the nature of the opposition they were to encounter. So, two men enter the city at night and find their way to the house of Rahab. It is essential to know the kind of enemy and opposition we have to face. This was true for Joshua and it is just as true for us as Christians. It is foolish and dangerous to under-estimate Satan's power. Therefore we, in a spiritual way, have to 'spy out' the land; we have to know what we face as believers. **Ephesians 6: 12** tells us the nature of the evil opposition we face as we seek to enjoy the values of a Christian life. Not for us the giants of Jericho or its walls and weapons! Like the spies, we can be made aware of such forces and thus be prepared to meet them victoriously through the Lord Jesus.

The encounter of the spies with Rahab is most interesting. She was a woman of doubtful reputation, a harlot, and yet she finds her place eventually in the records of people who had faith. (**Hebrews 11: 31**) No doubt the men visited her house because the house would be open at night and she would also know the nature of the affairs of the city. But notice her faith: she first of all gives the men a secure hiding place. She then tells them of her reaction to the reports she has heard of the victories of the armies of Israel. More than that she had heard of their God, "**The Lord your God, He is God in Heaven above and on earth beneath.**" (**Joshua 2: 11**)

She believed that they would have the land because of their God. (**verse 9**) This was amazing faith coming from a pagan woman in a doomed city. God was able to use the faith of such a woman to pave the way to victory for His people. He never forgets those who so trust Him.

Having confessed to her faith, Rahab bargains for her life. **Verse 18** tells us of the scarlet thread which was to preserve her from destruction. The men gave her their guarantee that in the day that the city was overthrown all in her house would be saved. The day came when this promise was fulfilled and the scarlet thread saved her life and the lives of her family too. Notice faith, deliverance and life went together.

As we end our lesson we can think of a 'scarlet thread' that seems to run right through the Bible. It is connected with the three words we have linked together. Think back to **Exodus 12** and the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. The means of their deliverance was not a scarlet thread but the blood of the Passover lamb. In faith they put the blood on the outside of the house and sheltered inside. Consequently, they were delivered from slavery and found life instead of death. We could go all the way through our Bibles and find illustrations like this, until finally, we would come to the most wonderful 'scarlet thread' of all. "**We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.**" (**Ephesians 1: 7**) So the invasion of the **Promised Land** begins with a wonderful story of faith and deliverance. The note of confidence in **verse 24** must have come as a great tonic to Joshua as he went forward.

Study 3

OVER THE JORDAN



Joshua chapters 3 & 4

There is something exciting about a new venture. Perhaps it is the attraction of the unknown; the impulse of discovery, or the sense of expectation of fulfilled hopes and promises. All these thoughts and possibly many more filled the minds of Joshua and the people as they stood on the borders of the **Promised Land**. There was one final barrier to be crossed, the great river Jordan. Jordan was an unusual river in that its source was high in the mountains from where it descended more than 3,000 ft. in 200 miles to run eventually into the Dead Sea. It is said that between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea there are twenty-seven rapids. We can understand then from these facts how the river gets its name, which means 'the descender'.

To arrive in the **Promised Land**, Joshua had to lead the nation either over, or through, the Jordan. How were they going to get across? God's intentions for His people were clear; they were going in to possess the land. The wilderness wanderings were going to end and the settled life of a nation with their own possessions would be enjoyed. Before we study the details of the crossing, remember that Canaan stands as a picture of the Christian life, not of Heaven. No doubt you have heard sung, old hymns or spirituals which speak of crossing Jordan as dying, or entering into Heaven. This is perhaps an excusable idea, but we are not going to look at it in this way. We are going to think of the **Promised Land** as a picture of the blessings that can be enjoyed in the Christian life through the Lord Jesus. Jordan is the dividing line in picture between a life of selfishness and sinful disobedience and a new life of victory and possessions in Christ. Just keep this in your mind as we study these incidents.

Preparation was needed before the people could cross over. Notice the words of **Chapter 3: 5**, "**Sanctify yourselves; for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you**". This is a tremendous verse but it stresses a serious point. God is ready to do wonderful things and His power is unlimited, but those who would enter into a victorious Christian life must see that they put away evil things from their lives. This reminds us that God is holy and if we want His blessing we must be clean and right in the lives we live.

The **Presence** of God was essential if the nation was to cross over safely. Perhaps you wonder how we know this. **Verse 3** tells us about the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord. Notice that the priests, the Levites, carried it as a sign that God was with His people. Then there had to be a distance between the people and the Ark. This was to play an important part in the crossing of the river. Yes, it was absolutely necessary that Joshua and the people should be sure of God's presence. When they saw the Ark carried aloft by the priests, they would know God was with them. This is another important lesson for us to learn. Christians, too, need to know that the Lord Jesus is with them, for without Him victory and joy are impossible.

Now we can look at the **Pathway** that God opened up through Jordan. God's plan had to be followed to the letter. What He had commanded must be obeyed or there would be no progress or possession. The priests and the Ark went first. **(3: 14)** As soon as their feet touched the fringe of the river the miracle happened. The waters parted and the way across was opened up. **(verses 15-16)** Notice how orderly everything was. The priests with the Ark stood in the middle while the people, led by the heads of each tribe, went through. Everything went smoothly for two reasons. Firstly, because God was in control and He had made the plans. Secondly, because the people with Joshua as their leader did exactly what God told them to do. As a Christian you will find that the Lord is ready to open the path to blessing for you, providing you are willing to obey Him and always go His way.

Possession began for the people as soon as their feet stood on the **Promised Land**. Twelve stones were taken

out of Jordan and set up in the new land as a sign of the beginning for the nation. It was a sign that they were about to come into their possessions. Did you notice that twelve stones were set up in the river bed and were eventually buried beneath the waters? **(4: 9)** This was a sign that the old life of the nation with its wanderings in the wilderness, and all its sin was ended for ever. They were a new people with new possibilities before them. They had entered the land of promise.

Romans 6: 3 & 4 tells us about baptism. When we are baptised we are publicly declaring that our old life and ways have been buried with Christ. As we come up out of the waters of baptism, we are showing that we have risen with Christ to '**walk in newness of life**'. We have entered into a new life of blessing. Baptism is the first step of obedience in the Christian life. Do you see the connection between this and our study of **Joshua 3 & 4**? I hope you will take to heart the lessons of this passage.

Study 4

JERICHO



Joshua chapters 6

The conflict began as soon as Israel entered into the **Promised Land**. Progress depended upon conquest. There were nations entrenched in the land that had to be destroyed because of their wickedness. Remember that the warfare in which they were engaged was not just a casual business, left to their own discretion to order and plan.

God intended two things. One was that the people who belong to Him should enjoy possession of the land which He had promised. Secondly, He determined that the wicked nations which were in possession should be destroyed. The sad story of Bible history is that Israel never fully possessed their land because they never really destroyed their enemies. God's enemies were theirs, yet they did not deal with them as they should. It is important that we take the Christian life seriously. If we are going to enjoy life in Christ we must not allow Satan and his powers to control us in any way.

The conquest of Jericho was vital to all further progress of Joshua in the land of Canaan. At the point where the Jordan was crossed lay the plain of the Jordan with Jericho situated in it. Because of the rumours of Israel's strength the city was fortified to its limit against siege and conquest. A formidable task lay ahead of the Israelites, the key to the interior of Canaan was the destruction of Jericho. How important then that victory should be achieved.

Look through **chapter 5** before you go any further in this study. It tells of three points of preparation for Joshua's victory. **Verses 1-9** give us the account of the renewal of the rite of circumcision. Simply described, this was a sign that the nation was separated from other nations, chosen for God alone. They had forgotten this rite in the wilderness wanderings, so now God commands that there shall be renewal before victory. Then **verse 10**

tells us about the keeping of the Passover. In this they remembered God's love and power in delivering them from Egypt. It was the same God who was going to give them victory now. So remembrance comes before victory. Then in a tremendous way God meets with Joshua, the leader, and gives him assurance that He is the Captain of the hosts of Israel. (**verses 13-15**) Joshua had to recognise that he could only conquer through the power of the Lord, his Captain. Think about these three points in relation to a victorious Christian life.

Let us now study the conquest of Jericho. We do well to remember that in God's plan the victory was won. **Chapter 6: 2** makes this clear. **"I have given Jericho into your hand"**. What tremendous encouragement. Joshua could have looked at the means at his disposal to wage war, and then at the walls of Jericho. But did he fear the opposition? Did he wonder how he could destroy the city? No! He had God's Word to lay hold on. Yet faith had to make this real to him. I wonder if he said, as Paul did so many years later, **"If God is for us who can be against us?" (Romans 8: 31)** **"In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us". (Romans 8: 37)** We can say this as we face temptation and Satan, our great enemy. For only in God's power will the victory come but God has promised that this can be ours.

Look at the method of conquest. **Verses 5-14** give an account of the first six days' siege of the city. Quietness and simplicity were the order of the day. The method was, humanly speaking, the most unlikely to produce victory. Once each day they were to march around the city. Early in the morning the Ark of the Lord was taken, and with the priests before it and the people behind it, the procession set off. There was no clash of weapons, no sounding of trumpets, for the Ark was in the middle of the hosts of Israel. Remember that the Ark symbolised God's presence and He must be at the very centre of the victory.

Now on the seventh day we see the accomplishment of Conquest. The people marched seven times around the city. At the seventh time the trumpets sounded and the great shout of victory went up. **"The Lord has given you the city." (verse 16)** Victory came as the walls of Jericho fell down and the armies of Israel utterly destroyed the city. Or did they? Notice **verses 17-18** - men, women, children, animals; everything living, was to be destroyed. The city itself was to be burned down (**verses 21 & 24**). Gold, silver, brass and iron, the precious things of the city, were for the Lord and eventually for His house. (**verse 19**) None of these possessions were to be kept for the people. The victory was the Lord's and therefore the spoils of victory were His. This tells us that when we accomplish things for God in our Christian lives, it is His power that gives us the victory, so therefore we must give the praise and the glory to Him.

As we end, notice what is said about Rahab and her house. (**verse 25**) The Lord kept His word and saved her and her relatives from destruction. As the messengers

saw the scarlet cord they went into the house and brought her safely out. What a good note to end on! God is faithful, that is why every believer in Jesus is saved, not only for a short time, not only when things go well, but through all the dangers and perils of life. And this deliverance will last for ever.

Questions

Study 1

COURAGE TO CONQUER

1. When and to whom was Israel's inheritance first promised?
2. What can we learn from the book of Ephesians in connection with this study?
3. Of what is Canaan a spiritual picture?
4. What value in our Christian lives is emphasised by the story of Joshua?
5. What is Satan's objective in the life of any Christian?

Study 2

THE SCARLET THREAD

1. In what way is Joshua like the Lord Jesus?
2. Why did only two of the Israelites who left the land of Egypt enter the **Promised Land** and who were they?
3. What does the work of the spies tell us that we need to do as Christians?
4. How did Rahab show her faith was genuine?
5. What is the greatest event of which the 'scarlet thread' is a picture?

Study 3

OVER THE JORDAN

1. What was God's intention for Israel?
2. Of what is Jordan a picture?
3. What was needed before the people could cross over Jordan?
4. a) Of what was the Ark of the Covenant a sign to the Children of Israel?
b) If we want blessing in our Christian lives what must we always do?
5. Of what is baptism a public declaration?

Study 4

JERICHO

1. What two things had God intended for Joshua and His people?
2. Why was it so important for Israel to conquer Jericho?
3. What did circumcision at this point mean to the Children of Israel?
4. How can we know victory over sin and Satan in our Christian lives?
5. What incident in this chapter illustrates God's faithfulness?