

OUTLINE STUDIES IN THE BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

by

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CHAPTER EIGHT

JOSHUA

The book of Joshua is the record of the conquest of Canaan and its partition amongst the chosen people. Moses, the representative of the law, could bring Israel to the borders of the inheritance, but he could not lead them into it. Joshua (Jehoshua, *the Lord is the Saviour*) alone could. **“The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith,”** Galatians 3:24.

The book is divided into two parts:

Part I, chapters 1-12, the conquest;

Part II, chapters 13-24, distribution of the land among the various tribes.

The key word is *possession*; the key verses are, Joshua 1:2, 3.

The history of Israel continues through this and the following books. The historical portions of the Old Testament are devoted to the subject of the theocracy, its practical working, and the failures of the chosen people to attain that for which more especially they were called of God.

Joshua was written not long after the events it narrates. We cannot enter now into the proof of it. But let the reader ponder chapters 5:1, 6; 6:25; 24:26, etc. If, as Lias and others hold, it was written not later than fifty years after the events recorded in it, then Deuteronomy was in existence at that remote period; cf. chapter 8:30-34; Deuteronomy 27:2-8.

1. *A lesson in courage*, 1:2-9; 5:13-15.

Joshua was Moses' successor as the leader of Israel, Numbers 27:18; Deuteronomy 34:9. To him was given the supreme task of leading the people into the inheritance and conquering it for them. What he needed was faith, assured confidence in God who had promised to give them the land, and courage to execute his commission; and these he had in an eminent degree. It is remarkable how large a place courage has in the Bible. Count its **“fear nots”** if you can. **“Add to your faith virtue,”** i. e., courage, II Peter 1:5.

Boldness is an essential element in courage, to do and to dare. All successful workers for God have it. Paul had it but longed for more of it, Ephesians 6:18-20 (See Acts 4:13, 29, 31, etc.).

Courage has its root in faith, and faith its root in the Word of God. See what wonderful use Joshua's faith makes of God's promise after the perilous defeat at Ai, 7:9: "**And what wilt thou do unto thy great name?**" What a mighty plea that is! As if his defeat were God's defeat! This is faith and courage combined. A fearful man, a discouraged man, never accomplishes much in this world. "**They were afraid to confess him.**" "**I was afraid and went and hid thy talent in the earth.**" Fear is a failure. "**Be strong and of a good courage.**" Read and study Hebrews 11.

2. *The passage of the Jordan*, chapters 3, 4.

It was a memorable event, this transit across the ancient river, one to be perpetuated forever, 5:1-3, 20-24. The passage of the Jordan meant for Israel the exchange of the wandering, nomadic life, for one of settled habits and permanent abode. It meant the organization of the Hebrews into a nation, and the development of their national life; the preservation of the knowledge and truth of God, and the custody of the revelation which was now being given. The conquest of the little strip of territory called Palestine, where God was to make Himself known as nowhere else in all the world, where in due time His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, was to appear, was an era in the world's history. Let us note some things respecting it.

(1) *The order of the passage*, 3:6. The Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, borne by the priests, was to lead the march. The reason is assigned in 3:10. It was to strengthen the faith and courage of the people. If God open the river for them to pass over, is it not a token and a pledge that He will do for them all He has promised as to the possession of the land? God goes before them, for the ark was His throne; there His presence was displayed, Exodus 25:22.

A mighty struggle confronted them; a task so great, an enterprise so difficult, that human sagacity and prowess were no match for it. God goes before, to encounter, Himself, the difficulties and the dangers, and to open for His people a way which they could not open for themselves. See John 10:3, 4. Jesus is our Leader.

(2) *The time of the passage*, 3:15. The barley-harvest occurred about the end of March or in early April (See 2:6, a proof of the exact knowledge of the writer of Joshua of the time and circumstances).

The river was at its flood, bank-full, from the melting of the snows in the Lebanon. At such times, travelers tell us, it rushes on like a "mill race." From its rise at the foot of the Lebanon to its grave in the Dead Sea, the Jordan has a fall of 3,000 feet—more than fifteen feet to the mile. It is likely the two spies swam it; and it may be they were selected for this reason; but it was simply impossible that the mixed multitude of men, women, children, and flocks and herds should do so. God chose this season that His power might be manifested. It was nothing for Him to arrest the swift volume of water which that day was pouring down to the Dead Sea; for at His bidding once before, the waters of the earth had found their proper beds and settled there, Genesis 1:9.

Thus the passage of the Jordan was an additional proof and pledge of His love and care for them, and therefore they could enter on the conquest of their inheritance with confidence and courage.

3. *Capture of Jericho*, chapter 6. Jericho was the key to the land. It was immensely important that a signal victory should be achieved at this point. If the invaders failed here all was lost. But they could not fail, for God marched at the head of their column. What an extraordinary assault it was, to be sure, if such it can be called.

A procession round the walls for seven days; not a word spoken nor a sound heard, save the blowing on seven horns by seven priests, until the seventh day arrives, when they were to make the circuit seven times and the army was to “shout” at the close of the seventh round. Nothing more!

Think of General Grant trying to take Vicksburg with bands of music, or Von Moltke the great fortress of Metz with its splendid French army by drum and fife! Could anything be more absurd? Hall thinks the soldiers and people of Jericho made themselves merry with the spectacle of those solemn processions round their city.

No doubt the Jews heard many a bitter gibe at the stupendous military skill of their General Joshua. But if so, their pleasantry was not for long. The “shout” brought down the walls.

(1) Obviously, there is not the slightest connection between the means and the end. No sword drawn; no engine planted; no sappers and miners to undermine the walls; no assault made. They were to go round the city day after day, and then go into camp at the close of each investment. Nothing more.

(2) It was a sublime lesson in faith, Hebrews 11:30, “**By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.**” Faith appears in their obedience to the divine directions. They believed God. The Jews knew quite well that the means were not adequate to the end. But God had spoken; this was enough for them. It was not something which faith did or to which faith prompted, but something God had promised, and faith acted on the ground of the promise. Faith can dare anything where God leads the way. Faith removes mountains.

(3) The miracle was calculated to inspire the Jews with confidence and enthusiasm.

- They were invading Canaan.
- They were to encounter immense difficulties and obstructions in the execution of their divinely appointed mission.
- They saw these huge walls tumble down by a “shout” of their army; and they could not but see how strong and mighty the God is who marched at the head of their forces. How the event must have filled and thrilled their hearts with courage and confidence! Psalm 44:1-3.

(4) It was intended to strike terror to the hearts of the Canaanites. We know from the record that it had this effect. The hearts of the idolaters melted within them, and they fought for a cause already lost.

4. *The extermination of the Canaanites*, Deuteronomy 7:1-6; Joshua 6:17-21. This is a serious topic; for it involves the justice and holiness of God, and our sense of right. Of course, in a brief paper such as this, it is impossible to discuss it as it should be. However, some things must be set down which may tend to help the reverent student of the Bible to a correct view. God gave this commandment. Why?

(1) Palestine was Israel's by gift and grant of God, Genesis 12:7; 13:15; 26:3, 4, etc. The Jews, therefore, were conquering their own territory. Their right to dispossess the Canaanites is based upon the right of God to govern this world, and to dispose of any portion of it according to His sovereign pleasure.

(2) The Canaanite probation, Genesis 15:16. For four hundred years at least God had borne with them. Ample opportunity they had to amend their ways, and obey God. They blindly refused, held steadily to their evil pursuits, and sank deeper in sin, and at length judgment broke down upon them in appalling severity.

(3) Their moral character, Leviticus 18:21-25, 27-30; 20:1-24; Deuteronomy 12:29-32, etc. What is told us of them in the Bible, presents them in the darkest possible terms.

Their wickedness was something colossal. Profane history gives them the like character (The reader is referred to any competent writer on the Phoenicians, who formed part of the original inhabitants of Palestine). They were fallen into total apostasy; into immoralities, the most revolting human sacrifices, licentious orgies, worship of demons, practices which cannot even be alluded to were common. Cruelty the most atrocious, crimes the most unnatural and defiling were a part of their religion.

It was simply a question whether Israel should be kept pure by their extermination, or all knowledge and truth of God be swamped. The two peoples could not live together.

(4) God punishes nations for their sins in time! for nations have no existence as such in the life beyond. Israel was expelled from the same land for their apostasy from God, and their rejection of the Messiah.

(5) It was terrible surgery this; but it was surgery, and not murder: the excision of the cancer that the healthy part may remain. The words of Carlyle touching Cromwell's work in Ireland, fit this case:

“An armed soldier, solemnly conscious to himself that he is the soldier of God the Just,—a consciousness which it well beseems all soldiers and all men to have always—armed soldier, terrible as death, relentless as doom; doing God's judgments on the enemies of God! It is a phenomenon not of joyful nature; no, but of awful, to be looked at with pious terror and awe.”

5. *Defeat at Ai*, chapters 7, 8. It was caused by the disobedience of Achan. Achan's sin sprang from covetousness, 7:21. This is the root of sin; Genesis 3:6; James 1:15.

- (1) Sin robs God. All the metals were to be brought into the treasury, 6:19.
- (2) Sin delights in what God abominates, 7:11 “**The accursed thing**” refers probably to the Babylonish garment Achan stole.
- (3) Sin breaks covenant with God, 7:11, 15. All believers are in covenant relation with Him.
- (4) Sin involves others as well as the sinner himself. The crime of Achan was imputed to all Israel, 7:11. Sin never stops short with the transgressor.
- (5) Sin brings defeat, shame and death.

6. *Battle of Bethhoron*, chapter 10. A word as to the disputed point in this record touching the “**sun standing still.**” The writer does not accept the view that this is poetry, vs. 13, and no miracle was wrought. He believes that God interposed to grant what His servant had asked. A miracle should not be magnified beyond the purpose for which it was wrought. God observes a kind of parsimony in His supernatural operations.

What Joshua really asked for was, prolongation of light, as the astronomer Kepler has said. And it is believed that light was supernaturally given him in answer to his prayer. He who gave the Hebrews light in Egypt while their neighbors, the Egyptians, sat in darkness, could easily give light over the restricted region.

7. *Partition of the land*, chapters 13-21. By this division every family of Israel had its homestead. On the basis of it, restoration of alienated property was made at the year of jubilee.

When the Jews are restored to their own land again they will settle there according to this ancient distribution. The land is God’s, Leviticus 25:23. It can never be disposed away finally.

Joshua’s farewell to Israel is mingled with warning and pathos. There is in his words the entreaty of the father, and the command of the soldier. Let his noble resolve be that of us all:

“But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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