

## Lesson 10. JOSHUA LEADS ISRAEL ACROSS THE JORDAN

**READING:** Joshua 1, 3 and 4.

**AIM:** To show how Joshua took over from Moses and led Israel across the Jordan into their promised inheritance.

### 1. BACKGROUND

Israel were camped at the border of the Promised Land on the east side of the River Jordan when Moses was buried in an unknown resting place. From the early chapters of the Book of Joshua we see how work commenced by Moses was carried on by Joshua. Now, after the long years of discipline in the wilderness, the people were ready under Joshua's command to enter the land covenanted to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

A new chapter opens in Israel's history with the crossing of the Jordan and the conquest of Canaan. A new "dimension" is introduced into their history - that of the Land. We shall find ourselves constantly referring to places, which, from now onwards, are intimately associated with Israel's national history. This will involve familiarity with the map of Canaan and a knowledge of the physical features of the land.

Canaan was occupied at this time by a number of peoples. Num.13: 29 refers to the Amalekites, who dwelt in the south; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites in the mountains, and the Canaanites by the sea. The word "Canaanite" means "lowlander" and "Amorite" means "hill-dweller". Broadly speaking, the Canaanites lived in the plains and the Amorites in the hill country, though the terms Canaanite and Amorite sometimes refer to the people who inhabited the whole of Canaan. Hivites, Girgashites. Perizzites and also the Anakim were other tribes dwelling in the land. Many of them had their own ruler or king.

### 2. JOSHUA'S QUALIFICATIONS AS LEADER

God's election of a successor to Moses was made with perfect knowledge of the man. Joshua had already shown himself to be a faithful and obedient servant of God. With Caleb, he had brought a "good report" back to Moses, when sent to spy out the land of Canaan from Kadesh- Barnea. He had been a right-hand man to Moses in the wilderness, and had been chosen by Moses to lead the Israelite army in their battle against Amalek (Exod. 17: 9). He was well qualified, both by character and training for the important and exacting mission with which he was now entrusted. The name Joshua indicated his mission, for it means "God is salvation". The Greek name "Jesus" in the New Testament is the equivalent of the Hebrew name "Joshua" in the Old Testament. Joshua was Israel's "saviour", performing a work typical of Jesus, who is our Saviour and "the captain of our salvation" and who will bring us into the Promised Land if we trust in him.

### 3. JOSHUA'S COMMISSION. Josh. 1.

God told Joshua that he and all the people were to go over Jordan to the land of their inheritance. God defined the boundaries of their possession: Lebanon on the north-west, Euphrates on the north-east and the Great Sea (Mediterranean) on the west. The land they were about to enter was the land "which I swore unto their fathers to give them".

Joshua had to destroy the seven mighty nations of Canaan with a nation of untried warriors. God assured him, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee". The Law given through Moses was Joshua's guide, for only by doing all that was written there could Joshua succeed. If he obeyed God's commands, God would be with him: "Be strong and of good courage: for thou shalt bring the children of Israel into the land which I swore unto them: and I will be with thee" (Deut.31: 23; see Josh. 1: 6).

Certain preparations were necessary before Israel could transfer their camp to the west side of Jordan. Joshua directed officers to see that Israel had food for three days in readiness. Reuben, Gad and part of the tribe of Manasseh were reminded of the agreement made in Moses' days. They had asked for the land of Gilead east of Jordan for their inheritance and were promised it on condition that they first helped their brethren fight the Canaanites. Refer to Num.32: 1-5, 29-30. These tribes readily promised to obey Joshua's commands and assist in the conquest. (Josh. 2 then deals with two spies who were sent by Joshua to report on Jericho. This episode forms part of the next lesson.)

**4. THE PASSAGE OF JORDAN. Josh. 3**

For three days Israel camped near the banks of the river, which was in flood at this time of the year. It was the time of harvest, when the snows of Hermon melted and the Passover was at hand. Israel were commanded to sanctify themselves to prepare and set themselves apart to God. They were to wash themselves and put on clean clothes in readiness for the Lord's providence to be displayed.

The Ark, carried by the priests, was to go before Israel and be the signal for Israel to move. The Ark was the visible sign of God's presence and when it was carried across Jordan, Israel was to understand that God was directing their march and would give them victory over the nations of Canaan.

When the feet of the priests touched the water, a dry passage miraculously appeared. The waters parted and remained banked up on the right hand and drained away on the left. The priests with the Ark remained on dry ground in the midst of the river, and all Israel passed over. "When the priest's feet were lifted up unto dry ground, the waters of the Jordan returned".

This miracle demonstrated to Israel that God was indeed, "the Lord of all the earth". As for the Canaanites, the report of this miraculous event would cause them to fear Israel and their God. By these great works, not only God was magnified, but also Joshua. God caused all Israel to fear and honour Israel's new leader, who had faithfully and fearlessly followed the Lord's instructions (Josh. 4: 14).

**5. THE TWO MEMORIALS. Josh. 4**

Israel reached the western bank of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month and camped at Gilgal. Joshua commanded a chosen man from each tribe to take a stone from the bed of the Jordan. These 12 stones were set up at Gilgal for a memorial to future generations to teach them that God had dried up the waters of the Jordan for His people, just as He had at the Red Sea. It was to speak of God's might and power to all nations of the earth. A second memorial of 12 stones (one for each tribe) was set up in the midst of the river where the priests had stood.

**6. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

1. Israel entered the Promised Land to begin a new era in their history. It was a fulfilment of the promise made to Abram (Gen. 15: 13-16). The old generation in the wilderness "entered not because of unbelief" (Heb. 4: 6), and a new generation passed through Jordan.
2. Joshua was acknowledged as Israel's new leader with God's assurance of help. He had courage, faith and works (for faith without works is dead).
3. The memorials were a witness and a lasting testimony to the fact that they were God's people, who should fear the Lord forever.
4. Circumcision was reinstated, the Passover was kept, and the manna ceased when Israel crossed the Jordan and ate corn of the land (Josh.5: 10-12).
5. With Christ as our leader we begin a new life and have a long battle to fight against our own natural desires and worldly things, which can lead us away from God. In our battle, God will help us to overcome, as He helped Joshua and Israel, if we obey Him and set ourselves apart for His service.

**REFERENCE LIBRARY**

"The Ways of Providence," chapter 12.

"The Visible Hand of God," chapter 21.

"Scriptural Coincidences," part 2, chapter 1. Joshua.

**QUESTIONS**

1. Why was Joshua a good choice to be Israel's leader?
2. Describe the crossing of Jordan and explain what effect this event would have upon Joshua's leadership?
3. In what way was Joshua a "fore-runner" of Jesus Christ?