

## **Joshua: God's Conquest, II**

We are going to continue in our discussion of the book of Joshua. Before we launch into that, however, I want to review the kings of Israel and Judah. Learning this information is an important part of the course, and let us begin with the kings of Judah, which is the southern kingdom. The division of the nation is described in 1 Kings 12, which we will cover a little later in the course. Judah has three kings in the tenth century, five in the ninth, five in the eighth, five in the seventh, and two kings in the sixth century, bringing the total number of kings of Judah to twenty. So the kings in their correct order are Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, Ahaziah, Athaliah, Joash, Amaziah, Azariah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manassah, Amon, Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedechiah. I should mention that, although I called them the “kings” of Judah, Athaliah was actually a queen.

The kings of Israel, the northern kingdom, were also twenty in number. There were three kings of Israel in the tenth century, nine in the ninth, and eight in the eighth. The kings of Israel in their order were Jeroboam I [that is, Jeroboam the First], Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Tivni, Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah, Jehoram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Jeroboam II [that is, Jeroboam the Second], Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea. Then Assyria conquered Israel and took them into exile. I do encourage you to practice remembering the kings of Judah and Israel; it will become useful later in the course.

I will offer a short review of what we have already talked about in the book of Joshua. We began by talking about the proper reading method for studying a book like this. We need to learn to stop, listen, and ask questions. Then we need to be very attentive to the text and reflect on the questions we have asked and find answers to them, which may involve using tools such as Bible dictionaries, concordances, and cross-references in study Bibles, among other things. We also mentioned the necessity of reading holistically. In order to get the most out of a book like Joshua or Judges, you need to get a sense of the flow of the book, which is one reason why making an outline of the book can be helpful. That allows you to know where the whole thing is heading.

Now we want to move on to talk about the broad sweep of the book. In my outline of the book of Joshua, I have identified a way of dividing the book into sections that are meaningful to me. I will use my outline as a way of working through the book, and I will make a few comments along the way. So this will be a broad look at the book, which is all we have time for in this class which surveys such a great deal of material. My first major division of the book of Joshua is perhaps a little innovative in that I have divided off chapters 1-6 instead of chapters 1-5. In other words, I have combined the preparations that are recounted in chapters 1-5 with chapter 6, which recounts the fall of the walls of Jericho. I have entitled that whole section “the conquest divinely initiated” because God is at work there. He gives that first victory, and actually it is entirely His victory. We will talk in a little more detail about each of these sections, but I want to continue outlining the overall sections of the book.

The next section, spanning chapter 7 through the middle of chapter 10, is “the conquest humanly mitigated.” In Joshua 7 we find out that the conquest is humanly mitigated because of Achan's sin. In other words, the conquest is impaired or hindered or somehow jeopardized by the sin of Achan. So what was divinely initiated is now humanly mitigated. It remains so until God begins to encourage His people and they find themselves having to pay a price for their sin in chapters 9-10 as they actually fight on behalf of a Canaanite city, which they should have been dispossessing by that point.

Joshua 10:29 begins the next section, which extends through the end of chapter 12, and I call it “the conquest divinely consummated.” We see God enabling His people to conquer the land that He sent them in to conquer. Then Joshua 13-21 is called “the conquest allocated.” That is a fairly complicated section to outline, trying to see what was allocated to whom and how it was done. Next Joshua 22-24 is “the conquest consecrated.” I have included chapter 22 in that section, which describes the altar of testimony, even though some people like to include it with what preceded. But I think it fits nicely with the final chapters.

My outline is not much different from what I expect other people would come up with. Most people would see Joshua 1-12 as the conquest proper, and the first half of that, or chapters 1-5, as preparation. Most agree that Joshua 13-21 is discussing the conquered territories allotted to the various tribes. And then there is an epilogue of some sort. So I have just summarized the book with the section headings: the conquest initiated, the conquest mitigated, the conquest consummated, the conquest allocated, and the conquest consecrated.

Let us now talk about these sections in a little more detail. In the first chapter Joshua receives his charge from God. He receives his commission when God says, “Moses my servant is dead,” and therefore Joshua has a job to do. So in chapter 1 Joshua receives his charge and in chapter 2 he begins to take charge. He begins to act upon the charge he has received. He sends out spies. There is a question about whether Joshua was acting strictly upon God’s orders in sending out those spies or whether he was simply doing what had been done before. There is always a danger that we will do what is habitual for us. He had been a spy, spying out the land himself. Whether God ordered him to send out these spies is not clear from the text. One clue may be that we discover later that the next time Joshua sends out spies he comes to grief. When he sends out spies to the city of Ai they report back that they would not even need the whole force to take over the city, but they end up suffering a defeat. They suffer a defeat because of the sin in the camp and God is not with them and thus they are defeated. So we may have this question in our minds about human initiatives that are not divinely directed. In a later scene we also see Joshua entering into an agreement with the Gibeonites that specifically, according to the text, was not divinely directed. That may be a subtle hint to us that this kind of thing can happen even in the life of Joshua. I am not sure about it, but it is possible. The whole issue is in one of those literary gaps that is not easy to fill.

Then in Joshua 3 we read about the crossing of the Jordan, which I title “the waters stacked up,” for the waters were stacked up there like a pile at the town of Adam. Next in Joshua 4 we have the record of the memorial stones that were set up to commemorate the crossing of the Jordan. The crossing of the Jordan begins to underscore the way this entry into the land of Israel is very similar to the exodus out of the land of bondage, out of the land of Egypt. Just as God had brought Israel out of Egypt, being led by Moses, now Joshua is a new Moses. He was Moses’ aid, and now that Moses is dead, Joshua is taking the leadership for which God has groomed him. There are many traits here that establish Joshua as a second Moses. He is described according to the Mosaic pattern. Joshua is charged to replace Moses. He was exalted like Moses, which we read about at the end of chapter 1 when the people say they will obey him as they obeyed Moses. And in chapter 3 God establishes Joshua’s credibility and the people obey him as they obeyed Moses.

Then as we approach Joshua 5, which I entitle “ritual renewal, divine encounter,” we see a couple of things going on. Israel is circumcised after having neglected that in the wilderness. Then it says that the reproach of Egypt rolled away at a place called Gilgal. That is a nice literary touch because “Gilgal” comes from a Hebrew word that means “to roll.” So that is the place of rolling, and the narrator makes

good use of that name because you can remember what happened there based upon the name of the place. And that is where the reproach of Egypt was rolled away.

What would the “reproach of Egypt” have been? What would that be referring to? It is related to the fact that Israel had seemingly gone out into the desert to die. Think about the sequence of events. These people had been dramatically delivered from Egypt by this God who had held up for mockery the gods of Egypt. He had demonstrated His power, but then the people had been wandering around and a whole generation but for a few had died in the wilderness. You can imagine that the Egyptians, who were smarting with pain from what they had suffered, took some delight in the reproach that they could now heap upon these people. It seemed the Israelites were better off back in Egypt rather than out there dying in the wilderness. So you can see how Egypt would have scoffed at them and reproached them. But this is an appropriate juncture, now that Israel has crossed the Jordan and finally entered the land of promise, for this cutting rite, the circumcision of the people, to reestablish the covenant. And taking on the sign of the covenant again is seen to roll away the reproach of Egypt. They cannot laugh anymore, for the Israelites have arrived. Likewise the Passover is celebrated, and the manna, which was provided in the wilderness days, stops. They are now in a land flowing with milk and honey and that special provision is no longer necessary.

At the end of chapter 5 something interesting takes place. It is one of the aspects of the experience of Joshua that reminds us strongly of Moses, as Joshua is told to take off his sandals because the place he is standing is holy. That sounds much like what was said to Moses when he encountered the bush that was burning but not consumed and God spoke to him from the bush. Beginning in Joshua 5:13 we read: “Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, ‘Are you for us or for our enemies?’ ‘Neither,’ he replied, ‘but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.’ Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, ‘What message does my Lord have for his servant?’ The commander of the Lord’s army replied...” And the reply in essence told Joshua that the commander of the Lord’s army had not come to bring a message but rather to impress Joshua with the fact that God is at work. So Joshua was told, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.” This is something that reinforces my suspicion as to whether Joshua should have been information gathering, such as when he sent out the spies. Now that Joshua is asking, “What is the message? What is the strategy? What is God’s messenger going to tell me?” He is simply told to take off his sandals because the place he is standing is holy.

It is perplexing in verse 13 when Joshua asks, “Are you for us or for our enemies?” and the messenger of God replies, “Neither.” What does that mean? It sounds like he is saying, “I am non-partisan. I am not for you. I am not for the Canaanites.” Would that make sense? Perhaps it has to do with the idea that he was sent only to carry a message, and no more than that. But we know that God was for His people and against the Canaanites, whose iniquity was full. How can we make sense of this exchange? This is an issue in which looking at another translation, or reading a commentary, or, if you have the opportunity, learning Hebrew can help. In Hebrew Joshua’s question can just as well, and perhaps better, be translated, “Are you with us or with our enemies?” Joshua sees a man, or at least someone the text describes as a man. Joshua may not have known this was a divine visitor. But he sees a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword. In a military situation, it makes sense that the first thing he would ask is “Whose side are you on? Are you one of my troops or one of their troops? Are you ours or theirs?” So when the messenger answers, “Neither,” he means that he is not one of Joshua’s men, nor one of the enemies’ men. It is not that he is non-partisan, but rather he has come because God is for His people. He is God’s man, not Joshua’s soldier. This understanding simplifies the text and causes it to make sense.

Some people want to read a Christological interpretation into this passage. They wonder if the messenger's answer is a prediction of how Christ came to die for the sins of all people and not just the Israelites. But I would be wary of that approach. Certainly there is a way that this prefigures Christ. The messenger of the Lord prefigures Christ. And there has even been debate about whether this figure is a pre-incarnate manifestation of Jesus Christ Himself. But at least this figure does foreshadow the incarnation in some way. Yet there is much mystery surrounding how we ought to understand this messenger of the Lord. My preference is to be wary of saying that the significance of this encounter with the messenger of the Lord standing before Joshua is intended to make any kind of sweeping theological assertion. I think the solution I have offered is simpler, and when there is a simpler solution available, it is usually to be preferred. Joshua simply saw a man with a sword and wanted to know if he needed to draw his sword. So he asked, "Are you our or theirs?" And the messenger said, "I have come to you from neither army. I have come to you as captain of the army of the Lord." So he asked, "Are you ours or theirs?" And the messenger said, "I have come to you from neither army. I have come to you as captain of the army of the Lord."

Joshua has been charged to take the people into the land of promise. And he has been gathering information by sending out spies. But something he is supposed to realize from this encounter with the messenger of the Lord is that he should not begin to think it is his work. It is like when we are sent to accomplish a particular task in the church or in the community where we are sent by God to minister. We may begin to strategize, but God may occasionally need to remind us that we are not going to accomplish anything on our own, and it is not going to be our work or our clever strategies or our planning or our education. It is God's work. We need to take off our sandals and realize we are on holy ground. God will do His work as we trust Him. It is very striking that the first victory we read about in Joshua, which comes in chapter 6 at Jericho, occurs because God is faithful and it is entirely His doing. All they had to do was go in and actually take the city. They did not have to batter the walls down. They did not have to come up with a clever ruse to get inside the city. God defeated the city and all they were responsible for was the cleanup operation.

Part of the issue is one of agendas. The enemy has an agenda. Joshua probably has an agenda. But neither of those agendas matters because God has the real program and He is the one that is to direct our steps. That is a lesson that we need to learn as we embark upon any kind of adventure or any task that we have been called to do. We need to realize that it is really God's work.

As we look at chapter 6 and what went on there, imagine yourself as an Israelite. In many kinds of encounters first impressions are deemed important. To use an illustration from sports, coaches will often instruct their players to make the first showing of strength in order to set the tone. You must not let your opponent get the upper hand on the first encounter. You can imagine the Israelites coming into the land and thinking they needed to impress their enemies. Joshua had sent spies particularly to Jericho. Admittedly, good came of that in the end because Rahab was discovered and she expressed faith and ultimately joined the lineage that would issue in Jesus Christ Himself. Yet while good came of that spying mission, none of it was necessary because Joshua did not need to know a thing except to follow orders. Those orders had him marching around the city for six days and then marching around it seven times on the seventh day and then blowing trumpets and shouting. That was all it took for the walls to fall. You can imagine that such a plan seemed ludicrous to the soldiers. Yet sometimes what God calls us to do seems crazy at the time.

It is possible that what they were doing meant a great deal to the city of Jericho. I hate to continue to say that things are "possible" or to make it seem that my ideas are always tentative. But sometimes that is the nature of trying to find out these things, and we cannot always be sure. There is a man named David

Livingstone who talks about a mythological text from Ugarit, which was a city that was north of the land of Israel. Ugaritic culture would have been fairly pervasive in that day. Livingstone links this story of Jericho to a story from that text about a king who went on a seven day journey to another city in order to stand below that city's walls and shout to the king so that he might be given the king's daughter in marriage. And in the culmination of that story he is given the king's daughter in marriage and everything turns out well in the end.

It is possible that the inhabitants of Jericho might have gone through some kind of ritual reenactment of that scenario, perhaps on an annual basis. It is possible that they would annually march around their own city for seven days and call out to the walls and the daughter of the king would be given and there would be a great celebration. It would indicate that all was right with the world. Maybe God had His people do what they did in order to say something very sobering to the inhabitants of Jericho. Maybe it was a way to hold up their gods to mockery. God certainly did that when He brought His people out of Egypt. Some of the plagues are clearly understood to be instances of mockery of the gods of Egypt. The text of Scripture actually says that is what He did. So it is the kind of thing God might do to make a point. So what may seem like nonsense to us might have been very significant to those who were involved. And in our own lives, what we might be called to do might seem like nonsense to us, but it might be very significant to those who are watching us. It is God's work and we are standing on holy ground. All we do is obey. All we do is trust and follow Him.