

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
12-14-22

Overview Book of Joshua

DO YOU REMEMBER the childhood game “follow the leader”? The idea was to mimic the actions of the person in front of you in the line of boys and girls winding through the neighborhood. Being a follower was all right, but being leader was the most fun, creating imaginative routes and tasks for everyone else to copy.

In real life, great leaders are rare. Often, men and women are elected or appointed to leadership positions but then falter or fail to act. Others abuse their power to satisfy their egos, crushing their subjects and squandering resources. But without faithful, ethical, and effective leaders, people wander.

For 40 years, Israel had journeyed a circuitous route through the wilderness, but not because they were following their leader. Quite the opposite was true—with failing faith, they had refused to obey God and to conquer Canaan. So they wandered. Finally, the new generation was ready to cross the Jordan and possess the land. Having distinguished himself as a man of faith and courage (he and Caleb had given the minority scouting report recorded in Numbers 13:30–14:9), Joshua was chosen to be Moses’ successor. This book records Joshua’s leadership of the people of God as they finished their march and conquered the Promised Land.

Joshua was a brilliant military leader and a strong spiritual influence. But the key to his success was his submission to God. When God spoke, Joshua listened and obeyed. Joshua’s obedience served as a model. As a result, Israel remained faithful to God throughout Joshua’s lifetime.

The book of Joshua is divided into two main parts. The first narrates the events surrounding the conquest of Canaan. After crossing the Jordan River on dry ground, the Israelites camped near the mighty city of Jericho.

God commanded the people to conquer Jericho by marching around the city 13 times, blowing trumpets, and shouting. Because they followed God’s unique battle strategy, they won (chapter 6). After the destruction of Jericho, they set out against the small town of Ai. Their first attack was driven back because one of the Israelites (Achan) had sinned (chapter 7). After the men of Israel stoned Achan and his family—purging the community of its sin—the Israelites succeeded in capturing Ai (chapter 8). In their next battle against the Amorites, God even provided extended daylight to aid them in their victory (chapter 10). Finally, after defeating other assorted Canaanites led by Jabin and his allies (chapter 11), they possessed most of the land.

Part two of the book of Joshua records the assignment and settlement of the captured territory (chapters 13–22). The book concludes with Joshua’s farewell address and his death (chapters 23–24).

Joshua was committed to obeying God, and this book is about obedience. Whether conquering enemies or settling the land, God’s people were required to do it God’s way. In his final message to the people, Joshua underscored the importance of obeying God. “So be very careful to love the LORD your God” (23:11), and “choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, . . . But as for

me and my household, we will serve the LORD” (24:15). Read Joshua and make a fresh commitment to obey God today. Decide to follow your Lord wherever he leads and whatever it costs.

VITAL STATISTICS

PURPOSE: To give the history of Israel’s conquest of the Promised Land

AUTHOR: Joshua, except for the ending, which may have been written by the high priest, Phinehas, an eyewitness to the events recounted there

ORIGINAL AUDIENCE: The people of Israel

SETTING: Canaan, also called the Promised Land, which occupied the same general geographical territory of modern-day Israel

KEY VERSE: “Go through the camp and tell the people, ‘Get your provisions ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own” (1:11).

KEY PEOPLE: Joshua, Rahab, Achan, Phinehas, Eleazar

KEY PLACES: Jericho, Ai, Mount Ebal, Mount Gerizim, Gibeon, Gilgal, Shiloh, Shechem

SPECIAL FEATURE: Out of over a million people, Joshua and Caleb were the only two who left Egypt and entered the Promised Land.

THE BLUEPRINT

A. ENTERING THE PROMISED LAND (1:1–5:12)

1. Joshua leads the nation
2. Crossing the Jordan

Joshua demonstrated his faith in God as he took up the challenge to lead the nation. The Israelites reaffirmed their commitment to God by obediently setting out across the Jordan River to possess the land. As we live the Christian life, we need to cross over from the old life to the new, put off our selfish desires, and press on to possess all God has planned for us. Like Joshua and Israel, we need courageous faith to live the new life.

B. CONQUERING THE PROMISED LAND (5:13–12:24)

1. Joshua attacks the center of the land
2. Joshua attacks the southern kings
3. Joshua attacks the northern kings
4. Summary of conquests

Joshua and his army moved from city to city, cleansing the land of its wickedness by destroying every trace of idol worship. Conflict with evil is inevitable, and we should be as merciless as Israel in destroying sin in our lives.

C. DIVIDING THE PROMISED LAND (13:1–24:33)

1. The tribes receive their land
2. Special cities are set aside
3. Eastern tribes return home
4. Joshua's farewell to Israel

Joshua urged the Israelites to continue to follow the Lord and worship him alone. The people had seen God deliver them from many enemies and miraculously provide for all their needs, but they were prone to wander from the Lord. Even though we may have experienced God at work in our lives, we, too, must continually renew our commitment to obey him above all other authority and to worship him alone.

MEGATHEMES

Success

EXPLANATION: God gave success to the Israelites when they obeyed his master plan, not when they followed their own desires. Victory came when they trusted in him rather than in their military power, money, muscle, or mental capacity.

IMPORTANCE: God's work done in God's way will bring his success. The standard for success, however, is not to be set by the society around us but by God's Word. We must adjust our minds to God's way of thinking in order to see his standard for success.

Faith

EXPLANATION: The Israelites demonstrated their faith by trusting God daily to save and guide them. By noticing how God fulfilled his promises in the past, they developed strong confidence that he would be faithful in the future.

IMPORTANCE: Our strength to do God's work comes from trusting him. His promises reassure us of his love and that he will be there to guide us in the decisions and struggles we face. Faith begins with believing he can be trusted.

Guidance

EXPLANATION: God gave instructions to Israel for every aspect of their lives. His law guided their daily living, and his specific marching orders gave them victory in battle.

IMPORTANCE: Guidance from God for daily living can be found in his Word. By staying in touch with God, we will have the needed wisdom to meet the great challenges of life.

Leadership

EXPLANATION: Joshua was an example of an excellent leader. He was confident in God's strength, courageous in the face of opposition, and willing to seek God's advice.

IMPORTANCE: To be a strong leader like Joshua, we must be ready to listen and to move quickly when God instructs us. Once we have his instructions, we must be diligent in carrying them out. Strong leaders are led by God.

Conquest

EXPLANATION: God commanded his people to conquer the Canaanites and take all their land. Completing this mission would have fulfilled God's promise to Abraham and brought judgment on the evil people living there. Unfortunately, Israel never finished the job.

IMPORTANCE: The Israelites were faithful in accomplishing their mission at first, but their commitment faltered. To love God means more than being enthusiastic about him. We must complete all the work he gives us and apply his instructions to every corner of our lives.