

# FOREWORD

**T**he Bible Exposition Commentary had a modest beginning in 1972 when Victor Books published my commentary on 1 John and called it *Be Real*. Nobody remembers who named the book, but for me it was the beginning of three decades of intensive Bible study as I wrote additional commentaries, all of them with *Be* in the title. It took twenty-three books to cover the New Testament, and they were published in two bound volumes in 1989. Then I started the Old Testament *Be* series, and *Be Obedient*, on the life of Abraham, was published in 1991. Over twenty books are now available in the Old Testament series and, the Lord willing, I hope to complete the Old Testament within a year.

This volume on the Old Testament History comprises 9 separate books covering Joshua through Esther, and we plan to issue one more volume on the rest of the Old Testament: the wisdom and poetical books (including Psalms and Song of Solomon, which will not have been published in *Be* books). The Bible Exposition Commentary will then be complete in six volumes, the joyful work of over thirty years. During this time I have written books for several publishers, but “doing the next *Be* book” was always at the top of the agenda.

Victor Books was purchased by Cook Communications Ministries in 1996, but the *Be* series continued to carry the Victor imprint. I owe a great debt of gratitude to the editorial staff for their encouragement and cooperation these many years, including Mark Sweeney, Jim Adair, Lloyd Cory, Greg Clouse, and Craig Bubeck. These men have been faithful to “shepherd” me through book after book, and I appreciate the friendship and ministry of each more and more. Every author should be as fortunate as I’ve been to work with such dedicated, skillful people who always take a personal interest in their authors. To the best of my knowledge, during these years we’ve ministered together, we’ve never had a cross word or a serious misunderstanding.

I especially want to thank the Lord for His kindness and mercy in allowing me to minister in this way through the printed page. I can think of many of my friends who could have done a far better job than I in this series, but the Lord graciously gave the privilege to me. He also gave me the wisdom and strength to get each book written on time—and sometimes ahead of time—in the midst of a very busy life as a husband and father, a pastor, a radio Bible teacher, a seminary instructor, and a conference speaker.

This leads me to say that I couldn't have done it without the loving care of my wife, Betty. She manages our household affairs so well and takes such good care of me that I've always had the time needed for studying and writing. When I started this series, our four children were all at home. Now they're all married, and my wife and I have eight wonderful grandchildren! Time flies when you're checking proofs!

The numerous readers of the Be series have been a great source of encouragement to me, even when they have written to disagree with me! I have received letters from many parts of the world, written by people in various walks of life, and they have gladdened my heart. Unless a writer hears from his readers, his writing becomes a one-way street, and he never knows if what he wrote did anybody any good. I want to thank the pastors, missionaries, Sunday school teachers, and other students of the Word who have been kind enough to write. We could compile a book of letters telling what God has done in the lives of people who have studied the Be series. To God be the glory!

As I close, there are some other people who ought to be thanked. Dr. Donald Burdick taught me New Testament at Northern Baptist Seminary and showed me how to study the Word of God. Dr. Lloyd Perry and the late Dr. Charles W. Koller both taught me how to "unlock" a Scripture passage and organize an exposition that was understandable and practical. I recommend their books on preaching to any preacher or teacher who wants to organize his or her material better.

For ten happy years, I was privileged to pastor the Calvary Baptist Church in Covington, Kentucky, just across the river from Cincinnati. One of my happy duties was writing Bible study notes for "The Whole Bible Study Course," which was developed by the late Dr. D.B. Eastep, who pastored the church for thirty-five fruitful years. No church I have ever visited or ministered to has a greater love for the Bible or a deeper hunger for spiritual truth than the dear people at Calvary Baptist. The Be series is, in many respects, a by-product of Dr. Eastep's kindness in sharing his ministry with me, and the church's love and encouragement while I was their pastor. I honor his memory and thank God for their continued friendship and prayer support.

To you who study God's Word with me, "I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32 KJV).

*Warren W. Wiersbe*

# JOSHUA

## A SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF JOSHUA

**Key Theme:** Claiming our victory and our inheritance in Christ

**Key Verse:** Joshua 1:8

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## CHAPTER ONE A NEW BEGINNING

### *Introduction to the Book of Joshua*

**W**hy should anybody today study the Book of Joshua, an ancient book that gives a grim account of war, slaughter, and conquest? If the Book of Joshua were fiction, we might accept it as an exciting adventure story; but the book conveys real history and is a part of inspired Holy Scripture. What does it mean to us today?

“There never was a good war, or a bad peace,” Benjamin Franklin wrote in 1783; but it’s possible that the wise old patriot was wrong for once. After all, God called Joshua to be a general and to lead the army of Israel in holy conquest. *But there were bigger issues involved in that conquest than the invasion and possession of a land—issues that touch our lives and our faith today.*

That’s why we’re embarking on this study. The Book of Joshua is the book of new beginnings for the people of God, and many believers today need a new beginning. After forty years of wandering in the wilderness, Israel claimed their inheritance and enjoyed the blessings of the land that God had prepared for them, “as the days of heaven upon the earth” (Deut. 11:21). That’s the kind of life God wants us to experience today. Jesus Christ, our Joshua, wants to lead us in conquest now and share with us all the treasures of His wonderful inheritance. He has “blessed us with all spiritual blessings” (Eph. 1:3), but too often we live like defeated paupers.

#### **1. The new leader**

From Exodus 3 to Deuteronomy 34, the Bible focuses attention on the ministry of

Moses, God’s chosen servant to lead the nation of Israel. But Moses died; and though he would not be forgotten (he’s named over fifty times in the Book of Joshua), a new “servant of the Lord” (Josh. 24:29) would take his place. “God buries His workers, but His work goes on.” We shall note later that this change in leadership carries with it a tremendous spiritual lesson for believers who want to experience God’s best in their lives.

**Joshua the slave.** God spent many years preparing Joshua for his calling. He was born into slavery in Egypt and was given the name Hoshea (Num. 13:8), which means “salvation.” Moses later changed it to Joshua (v. 16, NIV), “Jehovah is salvation,” which is the Hebrew form of “Jesus” (Matt. 1:21; see Acts 7:45 and Heb. 4:8). When his parents gave the baby the name “salvation,” they were bearing witness to their faith in God’s promise of redemption for His people (Gen. 15:12-16; 50:24-26). Joshua belonged to the tribe of Ephraim and was the firstborn son of Nun (1 Chron. 7:20-27). This meant that his life was in danger the night of Passover, but he had faith in the Lord and was protected by the blood of the lamb (Ex. 11-12).

While in Egypt, Joshua saw all the signs and wonders that God performed (Ex. 7-12); and he knew that Jehovah was a God of power who would care for His people. The Lord had humiliated the gods of Egypt and demonstrated that He alone was the true God (Ex. 12:12; Num. 33:4). Joshua saw the Lord open the Red Sea and then close the waters and drown the pursuing Egyptian army (Ex. 14-15). Joshua was a man of faith who knew the Lord and trusted Him to do wonders for His people.

**Joshua the soldier.** The first official recorded act of Joshua in Scripture is his defeat of the Amalekites when they

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attacked Israel about two months after Israel's Exodus from Egypt (17:8-16). Moses was a prophet and legislator, but Joshua was a general with exceptional military skills. He was also a man of great courage, who wasn't afraid to confront the enemy and trust the Lord for victory.

Where did Joshua learn to use a sword and to command an army? Certainly he was especially gifted by the Lord, but even heavenly gifts must be discovered and developed in an earthly setting. Had Joshua in some way been involved with the Egyptian army and received his early training in its ranks? This is possible, though the Scriptures are silent and we must not be dogmatic. Just as Moses refused a high position in Pharaoh's palace but received his education there (Heb. 11:24-26; Acts 7:22), so Joshua may have turned down army promotions that he might identify with his people and serve the Lord.

According to Exodus 17:14, the writer suggests that God had chosen Joshua for a special work in the future. Unknown to Joshua, the battle with Amalek was a testing time when God was examining his faith and courage. "Make every occasion a great occasion, for you can never tell when someone may be taking your measure for a larger place" (Marsden). Joshua's conflict with Amalek was the preparation for many battles he would fight in the Promised Land.

**Joshua the servant.** In Exodus 24:13, Joshua is called Moses' servant ("minister"), which indicates that Joshua was now an official assistant to the leader of Israel. He accompanied Moses to the mount and went with him when he judged the people for making the golden calf (32:17). It wasn't enough that Joshua be a good warrior; he also had to know the God of Israel and the holy laws God

gave His people to obey. We shall discover that the secret of Joshua's victories was not his skill with the sword but his submission to the Word of God (Josh. 1:8) and to the God of the Word (5:13-15).

During Israel's wilderness journey, Moses had a special tent set up outside the camp where he could meet with God (Ex. 33:7-11). It was Joshua's responsibility to stay at the tent and guard it. Not only was Joshua a warrior, but he was also a worshiper and knew how to live in the presence of God.

Joshua was jealous not only for the glory of God but also for the honor and authority of Moses. This is a good characteristic for a servant to have, and it showed up when God sent His Spirit upon the seventy elders Moses had chosen to assist him in his work (Num. 11:16-30). When the Spirit came upon Eldad and Medad in the camp, two men who had not assembled with the other elders at the tabernacle, Joshua protested and asked Moses to stop them from prophesying. (For a New Testament parallel, see Luke 9:49-50.) The breadth of Moses' spirit must have moved Joshua as Moses claimed no special privileges for himself. It's worth noting that when the inheritance was allotted after the conquest of the Promised Land, Joshua took his share last (Josh. 19:49-51).

**Joshua the spy.** When Israel arrived at Kadesh Barnea, on the border of the Promised Land, God commanded Moses to appoint twelve men to spy out the land of Canaan—Joshua among them (Num. 13). After forty days of investigating the land, the spies returned to Moses and reported that the land was indeed a good one. But ten of the spies discouraged the people by saying that Israel wasn't strong enough to overcome the enemy, while two of the spies—Caleb and Joshua—

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encouraged the people to trust God and move into the land. Sadly the people listened to the faithless ten spies. It was this act of unbelief and rebellion that delayed the conquest of the land for forty years.

This crisis revealed some fine leadership qualities in Joshua. He was not blind to the realities of the situation, but he didn't allow the problems and difficulties to rob him of his faith in God. The ten spies looked at God through the difficulties, while Joshua and Caleb looked at the difficulties through what they knew about God. Their God was big enough for the battles that lay ahead!

Knowing he was right, Joshua wasn't afraid to stand up against the majority. He, Moses, and Caleb stood alone and risked their lives in so doing; *but God stood with them*. It has well been said that "one with God is a majority." It would take that kind of courage for Joshua to lead Israel into their land so they could defeat their enemies and claim their inheritance.

Think of the years of blessing in the Promised Land that Joshua forfeited because the people had no faith in God! But Joshua patiently stayed with Moses and did his job, knowing that one day he and Caleb would get their promised inheritance (Num. 14:1-9). Leaders must know not only how to win victories but also how to accept defeats. I have a suspicion that Joshua and Caleb met each other regularly and encouraged each other as the time of their inheritance drew near. Day after day, for forty years, they saw the older generation die off, but each day brought them closer to Canaan. (See Heb. 10:22-25 for a New Testament parallel.)

**Joshua the successor.** Throughout that wilderness journey, God was preparing Joshua for his ministry as successor to Moses. When Israel defeated Og, king of Bashan, Moses used that victory to

encourage Joshua not to be afraid of his enemies (Deut. 3:21-28; Num. 21:33-35). When Moses was preparing to die, he asked God to give the people a leader; and God appointed Joshua (27:12-23; Deut. 3:23-29). In his final message to Israel, Moses told the people that God would use Joshua to defeat their enemies and help them claim their promised inheritance; and he also encouraged Joshua to trust God and not be afraid (31:1-8). Moses laid hands on Joshua, and God imparted to Joshua the spiritual power he needed for his task (34:9).

Like Moses, Joshua was human and made his share of mistakes; but he was still God's chosen and anointed leader, and the people knew this. This is why they said to Joshua, "Just as we heeded Moses in all things, so we will heed you" (Josh. 1:17, NKJV). God's people in the church today need to acknowledge God's leaders and give them the respect that they deserve as the servants of God (1 Thess. 5:12-13).

The secret of Joshua's success was his faith in the Word of God (Josh. 1:7-9), its commandments and its promises. God's Word to Joshua was "Be strong!" (vv. 6-7, 9, 18; and see Deut. 31:6-7, 23); and this is His Word to His people today.

### **2. The new land**

**The promise of the land.** The word "land" is found eighty-seven times in the Book of Joshua because this book is the record of Israel's entering, conquering, and claiming the Promised Land. God promised to give the land to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-7; 13:15-17; 15:7, 18; 17:8; 24:7), and He reaffirmed the promise to Isaac (26:1-5), Jacob (28:4, 13, 15; 35:12), and their descendants (50:24). The Exodus narrative gives many reaffirmations of the promise (3:8, 17; 6:4, 8; 12:25; 13:5, 11;

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16:35; 23:20-33; 33:1-3; 34:10-16), and these are repeated in Leviticus (14:34; 18:3; 19:23; 20:22-24; 23:10; 25:2, 38) and Numbers (11:12; 15:2, 18; 16:13-14; 20:12, 24; 27:12; 33:53; 34:2, 12). (See also 1 Chron. 16:14-18.)

In Moses' "farewell speech" (Deut.), he frequently mentioned the land and the nation's responsibility to possess it. The word "land" is found nearly 200 times in Deuteronomy and the word "possess" over 50 times. Israel *owned* the land because of God's gracious covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-5), but their *enjoyment* of the land depended on their faithful obedience to God. (See Lev. 26 and Deut. 28-30.) As long as the Jews obeyed God's law He blessed them, and they prospered in the land. But when they turned from God to idols, God first chastened them *in the land* (the Book of Judges); and then He took them *from their land* to the land of Babylon. After they had been chastened for seventy years, Israel returned to their land; but they never fully recovered the glory and blessing that they once had known.

God called the Promised Land "a good land" (8:7-10) and contrasted it with the monotony and barrenness of Egypt (11:8-14). It was to be Israel's place of rest, her inheritance, and the dwelling place of God (12:9, 11). After enduring slavery in Egypt and misery in the wilderness, the Jews would finally find rest in their Promised Land (Josh. 1:13, 15; 11:23; 21:44; 22:4; 23:1). This concept of "rest" will show up again in Psalm 95:11 and Hebrews 4 as an illustration of the victory Christians can have if they give their all to the Lord.

The Prophet Ezekiel called the land of Israel "the glory of all lands" (Ezek. 20:6, 15), which the NIV translates "the most beautiful of all lands." Daniel calls it "the pleasant land" (8:9) and "the glorious

land" (11:16 and 41). Often it is described as "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. 3:8, 17; 13:5; 33:3; Lev. 20:24; Num. 13:27; Deut. 6:3; 11:9; etc.). This was a proverbial statement meaning "a land of plenty," a place of peaceful pastures and gardens where the herds could graze and the bees could gather pollen and make honey.

**The importance of the land.** The Prophet Ezekiel said that Jerusalem was "in the center of the nations" (5:5, NIV) and that the land of Israel was "the center of the world" (38:12, NASB). The Hebrew word translated "center" also means "navel," suggesting that Israel was the "lifeline" between God and this world; for "salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22). *God chose the land of Israel to be the "stage" on which the great drama of redemption would be presented.*

In Genesis 3:15, God promised to send a Savior to the world; and the first step in the fulfilling of that promise was the call of Abraham. Beginning with Genesis 12, the Old Testament record focuses on the Jews and the land of Israel. Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees to go to that new land, and there Isaac and Jacob were born. God announced that the Redeemer would come from the tribe of Judah (49:10) and the family of David (2 Sam. 7). He would be born of a virgin in Bethlehem (Isa. 7:14; Micah 5:2) and one day die for the sins of the world (Isa. 53; Ps. 22). All these important events in the drama of redemption would take place in the land of Israel, the land that Joshua was called to conquer and claim.

### **3. The new life**

It's unfortunate that some of our Christian songs have equated Israel's crossing the Jordan with the believer's dying and going to heaven, because this mistake brings confusion when you start

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interpreting the Book of Joshua. “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” is a beloved spiritual, but I fear its imagery is not biblical. The hymn “On Jordan’s Stormy Banks” perpetuates that same error, as does the third verse of “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah”:

When I tread the verge of  
Jordan,  
Bid my anxious fears subside;  
Death of death, and hell’s  
destruction,  
Land me safe on Canaan’s  
side.

(William Williams)

The events recorded in the Book of Joshua have to do with the *life* of God’s people and not their *death!* The Book of Joshua records battles, defeats, sins, and failures—none of which will take place in heaven. This book illustrates how believers today can say good-bye to the old life and enter into their rich inheritance in Jesus Christ. It explains how we can meet our enemies and defeat them, and how to claim for ourselves all that we have in Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:3). What Paul’s letter to the Ephesians explains doctrinally, the Book of Joshua illustrates practically. It shows us how to claim our *riches* in Christ.

But it also shows us how to claim our *rest* in Christ. This is one of the major themes of the Book of Hebrews and is explained in chapters 3 and 4 of that epistle. In those chapters, we find four different “rests,” all of which are related: God’s Sabbath rest after creating the worlds (Heb. 4:4; Gen. 2:2); the salvation rest we have in Christ (Heb. 4:1, 3, 8-9; Matt. 11:28-30); the believer’s eternal rest in heaven (Heb. 4:11); and the rest God gave Israel after their conquest of Canaan (3:7-19).

God’s promise to Moses was “My

Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest” (Ex. 33:14, NKJV). The Jews certainly had no rest in Egypt or during their wilderness wanderings, but in the Promised Land, God would give them rest. In his farewell message to the people, Moses said, “For as yet you have not come to the rest and the inheritance which the Lord your God is giving you” (Deut. 12:9, NKJV; and see 3:20; 12:9-10; 25:19). *This “Canaan rest” is a picture of the rest that Christian believers experience when they yield their all to Christ and claim their inheritance by faith.*

The four geographic locations seen in the history of Israel illustrate four spiritual experiences. *Egypt* was the place of death and bondage from which Israel was delivered. They were delivered from death by the blood of the lamb and from bondage by the power of God who opened the Red Sea and took them across safely. This illustrates the salvation we have through faith in Jesus Christ, “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29, NKJV) Through His death and resurrection, Jesus Christ delivers the believing sinner from bondage and judgment.

*The wilderness* experience of Israel depicts believers who live in unbelief and disobedience and don’t enter into the rest and riches of their inheritance in Christ, either because they don’t know it’s there or they know and refuse to enter. Like Israel, they come to a crisis place (Kadesh Barnea), but refuse to obey the Lord and claim His will for their lives (Num. 13-14). They are delivered from Egypt, but Egypt is still in their hearts; and like the Jews, they have a desire to go back to the old life (Ex. 16:1-3; Num. 11; 14:2-4; see Isa. 30:3; 31:1). Instead of marching through life as conquerors, they meander through life as wanderers and never enjoy the full-

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ness of what God has planned for them. It's this crowd that is especially addressed in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

*Canaan* represents the Christian life as it ought to be: conflict and victory, faith and obedience, spiritual riches and rest. It's a life of faith, trusting Jesus Christ, our Joshua, the Captain of our salvation (Heb. 2:10), to lead us from victory to victory (1 John 5:4-5). When Israel was in Egypt, the enemy was *around* them, making their lives miserable. When they crossed the Red Sea, Israel put the enemy *behind* them; but when the nation crossed the Jordan River, they saw new enemies *before* them, and they conquered these enemies by faith.

The victorious Christian life isn't a once-for-all triumph that ends all our problems. As pictured by Israel in the Book of Joshua, the victorious Christian life is a series of conflicts and victories as we defeat one enemy after another and claim more of our inheritance to the glory of God. The eminent Scottish preacher Alexander Whyte used to say that the victorious Christian life was "a series of new beginnings."

According to Joshua 11:23, the whole land was taken; but according to 13:1, there remained "very much land to be possessed." Is this a contradiction? No, it's the declaration of a basic spiritual truth: In Christ, we have all that we need for victorious Christian living, but we must possess our inheritance by faith, a step at a time (Josh. 1:3), a day at a time. Joshua's question to his people is a good question to ask the church today: "How long will you wait before you begin to take possession of the land that the Lord . . . has given you?" (18:3, NIV)

The fourth geographic location on Israel's "spiritual map" is *Babylon*, where the nation endured seventy years of cap-

tivity because they disobeyed God and worshiped the idols of the pagan nations around them. (See 2 Chron. 36; Jer. 39:8-10). When God's children are willfully rebellious, their loving Father must chasten them until they learn to be submissive and obedient (Heb. 12:1-11). When they confess their sins and forsake them, God will forgive and restore His children to fellowship and fruitfulness (1 John 1:9; 2 Cor. 7:1).

The leading person in the Book of Joshua is not Joshua but the Lord Jehovah, the God of Joshua and of Israel. In all that Joshua did by faith, he desired to glorify the Lord. When the Jews crossed the Jordan River, Joshua reminded them that the living God was among them and would overcome their enemies (Josh. 3:10). Through Israel's obedience, Joshua wanted all the people of the earth to know the Lord and fear Him (4:23-24). In his "farewell addresses" to the leaders (chap. 23) and to the nation (chap. 24), Joshua gave God all the glory for what Israel had accomplished under his leadership.

At least fourteen times in this book, God is called "the Lord God of Israel" (7:13, 19-20; 8:30; 9:18-19; 10:40, 42; 13:14, 33; 14:14; 22:24; 24:2, 23). *Everything that Israel did brought either glory or disgrace to the name of their God.* When Israel obeyed by faith, God kept His promises and worked on their behalf; and God was glorified. But when they disobeyed in unbelief, God abandoned them to their own ways and they were humiliated in defeat. The same spiritual principle applies to the church today.

As you look at your life and the life of the church where you fellowship, do you see yourself and your fellow believers wandering in the wilderness or conquering in the Promised Land? In the wilderness, the Jews were a complaining people;

but in Canaan, they were a conquering people. In the wilderness, Israel kept looking back, yearning for what they had in Egypt; but in the Promised Land, they looked forward to conquering the enemy and claiming their rest and their riches. The wilderness march was an experience of delay, defeat, and death; but their experience in Canaan was one of life, power, and victory.

As you look at the “spiritual map” of your Christian life, where are you living?

## CHAPTER TWO FOLLOW THE LEADER

### *Joshua 1*

**T**wice during my years of ministry, I’ve been chosen to succeed distinguished and godly leaders and carry on their work. I can assure you that it wasn’t easy to follow well-known Christians who sacrificially poured years of their lives into successful ministries. I can identify with Joshua when he stepped into Moses’ sandals and discovered how big they were!

When I succeeded D.B. Eastep as pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Covington, Kentucky, I remember how his widow and his son encouraged me and assured me of their support. I recall one of the deacons, George Evans, coming to the church office to tell me he would do anything to help me, “including washing your car and polishing your shoes.” I never asked George to do either of those things, but his words expressed the encouraging attitude of all the church staff and leaders. I felt like a raw recruit taking the place of a seasoned veteran, and I needed all the help I could get!

Nearly a quarter of a century later when I succeeded Theodore Epp at Back to the Bible, I had a similar experience. The board and headquarters staff, the leaders in the overseas offices, the radio listeners, as well as many Christian leaders from all over the world, assured me of their prayer support and availability to help. When you feel like a midget taking the place of a giant, you appreciate all the encouragement God sends your way.

What a new leader needs is not advice but encouragement. “To encourage” literally means “to put heart into.” General Andrew Jackson said “one man with courage makes a majority,” and he was right. As God’s people today face the challenges that God gives us, we would do well to learn from the threefold encouragement found in this chapter.

#### **1. God encourages His leader (Josh. 1:1-9)**

**Encouragement from God’s commission (vv. 1-2).** Leaders don’t lead forever, even godly leaders like Moses. There comes a time in every ministry when God calls for a new beginning with a new generation and new leadership. Except for Joshua and Caleb, the old generation of Jews had perished during the nation’s wanderings in the wilderness; and Joshua was commissioned to lead the new generation into a new challenge: entering and conquering the Promised Land. “God buries His workmen, but His work goes on.” It was God who had chosen Joshua, and everybody in Israel knew that he was their new leader.

Over the years I’ve seen churches and parachurch ministries flounder and almost destroy themselves in futile attempts to embalm the past and escape the future. Their theme song was, “As it was in the beginning, so shall it ever be,

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world without end." Often I've prayed with and for godly Christian leaders who were criticized, persecuted, and attacked simply because, like Joshua, they had a divine commission to lead a ministry into new fields of conquest; but the people would not follow. More than one pastor has been offered as a sacrificial lamb because he dared to suggest that the church make some changes.

J. Oswald Sanders writes: "A work originated by God and conducted on spiritual principles will surmount the shock of a change of leadership and indeed will probably thrive better as a result" (*Spiritual Leadership*, p. 132).

In describing the death of King Arthur, Lord Tennyson put some wise and profound words in the mouth of the king as his funeral barge moved out to sea. Sir Bedevire cried out, "For now I see the true old times are dead"; and Arthur replied:

The old order changeth, yielding  
place to new, And God fulfills  
himself in many ways, Lest  
one good custom should corrupt  
the world.

["The Passing of Arthur"]

"Would that life were like the shadow cast by a wall or a tree," says the *Talmud*, "but it is like the shadow of a bird in flight." Trying to clutch the past to our hearts is as futile as trying to embrace the passing shadow of a bird in flight.

A wise leader doesn't completely abandon the past but builds on it as he or she moves toward the future. Moses is mentioned fifty-seven times in the Book of Joshua, evidence that Joshua respected Moses and what he had done for Israel. Joshua worshiped the same God that Moses had worshiped, and he obeyed the same Word that Moses had given to the

nation. There was continuity from one leader to the next, but there wasn't always conformity; for each leader is different and must maintain his or her individuality. Twice in these verses Moses is called God's servant, but Joshua was also the servant of God (24:29). The important thing is not the servant but the Master.

Joshua is called "Moses' minister" (1:1), a word that described workers in the tabernacle as well as servants of a leader. (See Ex. 24:13; 33:11; Num. 11:28; Deut. 1:38.) Joshua learned how to obey as a servant before he commanded as a general; he was first a servant and then a ruler (Matt. 25:21). "He who has never learned to obey cannot be a good commander," wrote Aristotle in his *Politics*.

God commissioned Joshua to achieve three things: lead the people into the land, defeat the enemy, and claim the inheritance. God could have sent an angel to do this, but He chose to use a man and give him the power he needed to get the job done. As we have already seen, Joshua is a type of Jesus Christ, the Captain of our salvation (Heb. 2:10), who has won the victory and now shares His spiritual inheritance with us.

**Encouragement from God's promises (vv. 3-6).** Since Joshua had a threefold task to perform, God gave him three special promises, one for each task. God would enable Joshua to cross the river and claim the land (vv. 3-4), defeat the enemy (v. 5), and apportion the land to each tribe as its inheritance (v. 6). God didn't give Joshua explanations as to how He would accomplish these things, because God's people live on promises and not on explanations. When you trust God's promises and step out by faith (v. 3), you can be sure that the Lord will give you the directions you need when you need them.

First, God promised Joshua that **Israel**

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would enter the land (vv. 3-4). Over the centuries God had reaffirmed this promise, from His first words to Abraham (Gen. 12) to His last words to Moses (Deut. 34:4). God would take them over the Jordan and into enemy territory. He then would enable them to claim for themselves the land that He had promised them. There would be no repetition of the fear and unbelief that had brought the nation into defeat at Kadesh Barnea (Num. 13).

God had already given them the land; it was their responsibility now to step out by faith and claim it (Josh 1:3; see Gen. 13:14-18). The same promise of victory that God had given to Moses (Num. 11:22-25), He reaffirmed to Joshua; and He carefully defined the borders of the land. Israel didn't reach that full potential until the reigns of David and Solomon.

The lesson for God's people today is clear: God has given us all spiritual blessings . . . in Christ" (Eph. 1:3), and we must step out by faith and claim them. He has set before His church an open door that nobody can close (Rev. 3:8), and we must walk through that door by faith and claim new territory for the Lord. *It is impossible to stand still in Christian life and service; for when you stand still, you immediately start going backward.* "Let us go on!" is God's challenge to His church (Heb. 6:1), and that means moving ahead into new territory.

God also promised Joshua **victory over the enemy (Joshua 1:5)**. The Lord told Abraham that other nations were inhabiting the Promised Land (Gen. 15:18-21), and He repeated this fact to Moses (Ex. 3:17). If Israel obeyed the Lord, He promised to help them defeat these nations. But He warned His people not to compromise with the enemy in any way, for then Israel would win the war but lose the victory (23:20-33). Unfortunately, that's exactly

what happened. Since the Jews began to worship the gods of their pagan neighbors and adopt their evil practices, God had to chasten Israel in their land to bring them back to Himself (Judg. 1-2).

What a promise God gave to Joshua! "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you or forsake you" (Josh 1:5, NIV). God had given a similar promise to Jacob (Gen. 28:15), and Moses had repeated God's promise to Joshua (Deut. 31:1-8). God would one day give this same promise to Gideon (Judg. 6:16) and to the Jewish exiles returning from Babylon to their land (Isa. 41:10; 43:5); and David would give it to his son Solomon (1 Chron. 28:20). But best of all, *God has given this promise to His people today!* The Gospel of Matthew opens with "Emmanuel . . . God with us" (1:23) and closes with Jesus saying, "Lo, I am with you always" (28:20 NKJV). The writer of Hebrews 13:5 quotes Joshua 1:5 and applies it to Christians today: "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (NKJV).

This means that God's people can move forward in God's will and be assured of God's presence. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31) Before Joshua began his conquest of Jericho, the Lord appeared to him and assured him of His presence (Josh. 5:13-15). That was all Joshua needed to be guaranteed of victory.

When my wife and I were in our first pastorate, God led the church to build a new sanctuary. The congregation was neither large nor wealthy, and a couple of financial experts told us it couldn't be done; but the Lord saw us through. He used 1 Chronicles 28:20 in a special way to strengthen and assure me throughout that difficult project. I can assure you from experience that the promise of God's presence really works!

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God's third promise to Joshua was that **He would divide the land as an inheritance for the conquering tribes (Josh. 1:6)**. This was God's assurance that the enemy would be defeated and that Israel would possess their land. God would keep His promise to Abraham that his descendants would inherit the land (Gen. 12:6-7; 13:14-15; 15:18-21).

The Book of Joshua records the fulfillment of these three promises: the first in chapters 2-5, the second in chapters 6-12, and the third in chapters 13-22. At the close of his life Joshua could remind the leaders of Israel that "not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed" (23:14, NKJV).

Before God could fulfill His promises, however, Joshua had to exercise faith and "be strong and of good courage" (1:6). Divine sovereignty is not a substitute for human responsibility. God's sovereign Word is an encouragement to God's servants to believe God and obey His commands. As Charles Spurgeon put it, Joshua "was not to use the promise as a couch upon which his indolence might luxuriate, but as a girdle wherewith to gird up his loins for future activity" (*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 14, p. 97). In short, God's promises are prods, not pillows.

**Encouragement from God's written Word (vv. 7-8)**. It's one thing to say to a leader, "Be strong! Be very courageous!" and quite something else to enable him to do it. Joshua's strength and courage would come from meditating on the Word of God, believing its promises, and obeying its precepts. This was the counsel Moses had given to all the people (Deut. 11:1-9), and now God was applying it specifically to Joshua.

During the years of his leadership, Moses kept a written record of God's words and acts and committed this record to the care of the priests (Deut. 31:9). He wrote in it a reminder to Joshua to wipe out the Amalekites (Ex. 17:14). Among other things, the "Book of the Law" included "the Book of the Covenant" (24:4, 7), a record of the journeys of the people from Egypt to Canaan (Num. 33:2), special regulations dealing with inheritance (36:13), and the song that Moses taught the people (Deut. 31:19). Moses kept adding material to this record until it included everything God wanted in it (v. 24). We have reason to believe the entire five Books of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy) comprised "the Book of the Law," the greatest legacy Moses could leave to his successor.

But it wasn't enough for the priests to carry and guard this precious book; Joshua had to take time to read it daily and make it a part of his inner person by meditating on it (Ps. 1:2; 119:97; see Deut. 17:18-20). The Hebrew word translated "meditate" means "to mutter." It was the practice of the Jews to read Scripture aloud (Acts 8:26-40) and talk about it to themselves and to one another (Deut. 6:6-9). This explains why God warned Joshua that the Book of the Law was not to depart out of his *mouth* (Josh. 1:8). In numerous conferences, I have often told pastors and seminary students, "If you don't talk to your Bible, your Bible isn't likely to talk to you!"

In the life of the Christian believer, *prosperity* and *success* aren't to be measured by the standards of the world. These blessings are the by-products of a life devoted to God and His Word. If you set out on your own to become prosperous and successful, you may achieve your goal and *live to regret it*. "In whatever man

does without God,” wrote Scottish novelist George MacDonald, “he must fail miserably, or succeed more miserably.” The questions God’s people need to ask are: Did we obey the will of God? Were we empowered by the Spirit of God? Did we serve to the glory of God? If we can answer yes to these questions, then our ministry has been successful in God’s eyes, no matter what people may think.

**Encouragement from God’s commandment (v. 9).** God’s commandments are still God’s enablements for those who obey Him by faith. Gabriel’s words to Mary are as true today as when he spoke them in Nazareth: “For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:37). I especially like the translation of this verse found in the *American Standard Version* (1901): “For no word from God shall be void of power.” The very word that God speaks has in it the power of fulfillment if we will but trust and obey!

In the years to come, whenever Joshua faced an enemy and was tempted to be *afraid*, he would remember that he was a man with a divine commission—and his fears would vanish. Whenever things went wrong and he was tempted to be *dismayed*, he would recall God’s command—and take new courage. Like Moses before him, and Samuel and David after him, Joshua had a divine mandate to serve the Lord and do His will—and that mandate was sufficient to carry him through.

### **2. The leader encourages the officers (Josh. 2:10-15)**

The nation of Israel was so organized that Moses could quickly communicate with the people through his officers who formed a chain of command (Deut. 1:15). Moses didn’t assemble the leaders to ask for their advice but to give them God’s orders. There are times when leaders

must consult with their officers, but this was not one of them. God had spoken, His will was clear, and the nation had to be ready to obey.

Forty years before, at Kadesh Barnea, the nation had known the will of God but refused to obey it (Num. 13). Why? Because they believed the report of the ten spies instead of believing the commandment of God and obeying by faith. Had they listened to Caleb and Joshua—the minority report—they would have spared themselves those difficult years of wandering in the wilderness. There is a place in Christian service for godly counsel, but a committee report is no substitute for the clear commandment of God.

Instead of the command to prepare food, you would have expected Joshua to say, “Prepare boats so we can cross the Jordan River.” Joshua didn’t try to second-guess God and work things out for himself. He knew that the God who opened the Red Sea could also open the Jordan River. He and Caleb had been present when God delivered the nation from Egypt, and they had confidence that God would work on their behalf again.

Though he trusted God for a miracle, Joshua still had to prepare for the everyday necessities of life. In modern armies the Quartermaster Corps sees to it that the soldiers have food and other necessities of life; but Israel didn’t have a Quartermaster Corps. Each family and clan had to provide its own food. The manna was still falling each morning (Ex. 16) and wouldn’t stop until Israel was in their land (Josh. 5:11–12). But it was important that the people stayed strong because they were about to begin a series of battles for possession of their Promised Land.

Note that Joshua’s words to his leaders were words of faith and encouragement. “You shall pass over! You shall possess the

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land! The Lord will give it to you!" Joshua had made a similar speech forty years before, but that generation of leaders wouldn't listen. Now that generation was dead and the new generation was ready to believe God and conquer the land.

It's unfortunate but true that sometimes the only way a ministry can move forward is by conducting a few funerals. A pastor friend of mine pleaded with his church board to build a new educational plant to house an exploding Sunday School. One of the long-time members of the board, a prominent businessman in the city, said to him, "You'll do this over my dead body!" *And they did!* A few days later, that officer had a heart attack and died; and the church moved ahead and built the much-needed educational plant.

The older we get, the more danger there is that we'll get set in our ways and become "sanctified obstructionists"; *but it doesn't have to happen.* Caleb and Joshua were the oldest men in the camp, and yet they were enthusiastic about trusting God and entering the land. It isn't a matter of *age*; it's a matter of *faith*; and faith comes from meditating on the Word of God (1:8; Rom. 10:17). How I thank God for the "senior saints" who have been a part of my ministry and have encouraged me to trust the Lord and move forward.

Joshua had a special word for the two and a half tribes that lived on the other side of Jordan and had already received their inheritance (Num. 32). He reminded them of Moses' words of instruction and warning (21:21-35; Deut. 3:12-20) and urged them to keep the promise they had made. Joshua was concerned that Israel be a *united* people in conquering the land and in worshiping the Lord. The two and a half tribes did keep their promise to help conquer the land, but they still created a problem for Joshua and Israel

because they lived on the other side of the Jordan (Josh. 22).

In the nation of Israel it was the able men twenty years and older who went out to war (Num. 1:3); and the record shows that the two and a half tribes had 136,930 men available (26:7, 18, 34). But only 40,000 men actually crossed the Jordan and fought in the Promised Land (Josh. 4:13). The rest of the recruits stayed to protect the women and children in the cities the tribes had taken in the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead (32:1-5, 16-19). When the soldiers returned home, they shared the spoils of war with their brothers (Josh. 22:6-8).

It was a concession on Moses' part to allow the two and a half tribes to live outside the Promised Land. The tribes liked the land there because it was "a place for cattle" (Num. 32:1, 4, 16). Apparently their first concern was making a living, not making a life. They would rather have big flocks and herds than dwell with their brothers and sisters in the inheritance God had given them. They were far from the place of worship and had to erect a special monument to remind their children that they were citizens of Israel (Josh. 22:10ff). They represent the many "borderline believers" in the church today who get close to the inheritance but never quite claim it, no matter how successful they may seem to be. They are willing to serve the Lord and help their brethren for a time; but when their appointed job is finished, they head for home to do what they want to do.

### **3. The officers encourage their leader (Josh. 1:16-18)**

The pronoun "they" probably refers to all the officers Joshua had addressed and not to the leaders of the two and a half tribes alone. What an encouragement they were to their new leader!

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To begin with, they encouraged him **by assuring him of their complete obedience (vv. 16-17a)**. “Command us and we will obey! Send us and we will go!” These officers had no hidden agendas, and they asked for no concessions. They would obey *all* his commands and go *wherever* he would send them. We could use that kind of commitment in the church today! Too many times we are like the men described in Luke 9:57-62, each of whom put something personal ahead of following the Lord.

In his novel *The Marquis of Lossie*, author George MacDonald has one of the characters say, “I find the doing of the will of God leaves me no time for disputing about His plan.” That’s the attitude Joshua’s officers displayed. They were not so attached to Moses that they put him above Joshua. God had appointed both Moses and Joshua, and to disobey the servant was to disobey the Master. Joshua didn’t have to explain or defend his orders. He simply had to give the orders, and the men would obey them.

The officers encouraged Joshua **by praying for him (v. 17)**. “The Lord thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses.” The best thing we can do for those who lead us is to pray for them daily and ask God to be with them. Joshua was a trained man with vast experience, but that was no guarantee of success. *No Christian worker succeeds to the glory of God apart from prayer.* “Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tire?” asked Corrie Ten Boom, a question that especially applies to those in places of leadership. When Joshua did not pause to seek the mind of God, he failed miserably (Josh. 7 and 9); and so will we.

They encouraged Joshua **by assuring him that their obedience was a matter of life or death (1:18)**. They took his leader-

ship and their responsibilities seriously. Later, Achan didn’t take Joshua’s orders seriously, and he was killed (Acts 7:15). “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46, NKJV) If God’s people today saw obedience to Christ a matter of life or death, it would make a big difference in our ministry to a lost world. We obey the Lord’s orders if we feel like it, if it’s convenient, and if we can get something out of it. With soldiers like that, Joshua would never have conquered the Promised Land!

Finally, they encouraged him **by reminding him of the Word of God (v. 18b)**. Moses told Joshua to “be ye of good courage” when he sent him and the other men into Canaan to spy out the land (Num. 13:20). Moses repeated the words when he installed Joshua as his successor (Deut. 31:7, 23). These words were written in the Book of the Law, and Joshua was commanded to read that Book and meditate on it day and night (Josh. 1:8).

Four times in this chapter you find the words “be strong and of good courage” (vv. 6-7, 9, 18). *If we are to conquer the enemy and claim our inheritance in Christ, we must have spiritual strength and spiritual courage.* “Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might” (Eph. 6:10).

Soldiers of Christ, arise,  
And put your armor on,  
Strong in the strength which God  
supplies  
Of His eternal Son.  
[Charles Wesley]

The first step toward winning the battle and claiming our inheritance is to let God encourage us and then for us to encourage others. A discouraged army is never victorious.

“See, the Lord your God has given you

the land. Go up and take possession of it as the Lord, the God of your fathers, told you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged" (Deut. 1:21, NIV).

Be strong! The battle is the Lord's!

## CHAPTER THREE A CONVERT IN CANAAN

### *Joshua 2*

Only two women are personally named in Hebrews 11, "The Hall of Fame of Faith": Sarah, the wife of Abraham (v. 11), and Rahab, the harlot of Jericho (v. 31).

Sarah was a godly woman, the wife of the founder of the Hebrew race; and God used her dedicated body to bring Isaac into the world. But Rahab was an ungodly Gentile who worshiped pagan gods and sold her body for money. Humanly speaking, Sarah and Rahab had nothing in common. But from the *divine* viewpoint, Sarah and Rahab shared the most important thing in life: *They both had exercised saving faith in the true and living God.*

Not only does the Bible associate Rahab with Sarah; but in James 2:21-26, it also associates her with Abraham. James used both Abraham and Rahab to illustrate the fact that true saving faith always proves itself by good works.

But there's more: The Bible associates Rahab with the Messiah! When you read the genealogy of the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 1, you find Rahab's name listed there (v. 5), along with Jacob, David, and the other famous people in the messianic line. She has certainly come a long way from being a pagan prostitute to being an ancestress of the Messiah! "But where sin

abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20).

But keep in mind that the most important thing about Rahab was her faith. That's the most important thing about any person, for "without faith it is impossible to please Him [God]" (Heb. 11:6). Not everything that is called "faith" is really true faith, the kind of faith that is described in the Bible. What kind of faith did Rahab have?

#### **1. Courageous faith (Josh. 2:1-7)**

Both Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25 indicate that Rahab had put her faith in Jehovah God *before* the spies ever arrived in Jericho. Like the people in Thessalonica, she had "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9). She wasn't like the people of Samaria centuries later who "feared the Lord, and [at the same time] served their own gods" (2 Kings 17:33).

Jericho was one of many "city-states" in Canaan, each one ruled by a king (see Josh. 12:9-24). The city covered about eight or nine acres, and there is archeological evidence that double walls about fifteen feet apart protected the city. Rahab's house was on the wall (2:15).

Meanwhile, Jericho was a strategic city in Joshua's plan for conquering Canaan. After taking Jericho, Joshua could then cut straight across and divide the land; and then it would be much easier to defeat the cities in the south and then in the north.

Forty years before, Moses had sent twelve spies into Canaan; and only two of them had given an encouraging report (Num. 13). Joshua sent two men to spy out the land and especially to get information about Jericho. Joshua wanted to know how the citizens were reacting to the arrival of the people of Israel. Since

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Joshua knew that God had already given him the land and the people, the sending of the spies wasn't an act of unbelief (see 1:11, 15). A good general wants to learn all he can about the enemy before he goes into battle.

How did the two spies make their way through the city without being immediately recognized as strangers? How did they meet Rahab? We certainly have to believe in the providence of God as we watch this drama taking place. Rahab was the only person in Jericho who trusted the God of Israel, and God brought the spies to her.

The Hebrew word translated "harlot" can also mean "one who keeps an inn." If all we had was the Old Testament text, we could absolve Rahab of immorality and call her the "proprietary of an inn." But there is no escape, for in James 2:25 and Hebrews 11:31, the writers use the Greek word that definitely means "a prostitute."

It's remarkable how God in His grace uses people we might think could never become His servants. "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. 1:27-29, NKJV). Jesus was the "friend of publicans and sinners" (Luke 7:34), and He wasn't ashamed to have a former prostitute in His family tree!

Rahab took her life in her hands when she welcomed the spies and hid them, but that in itself was evidence of her faith in the Lord. *True saving faith can't be hidden for long.* Since these two men represented God's people, she was not afraid to assist

them in their cause. Had the king discovered her deception, he would have slain her as a traitor.

Since Rahab was a believer at that time, how do we defend her lies? On the one hand, she demonstrated her faith in the Lord by risking her life to protect the spies; but, on the other hand, she acted like any pagan in the city when she lied about her guests. Perhaps we're expecting too much from a new believer whose knowledge of God was adequate for salvation but certainly limited when it came to the practical things of life. If seasoned believers like Abraham and Isaac resorted to deception (Gen. 12:10-20; 20; 26:6-11), as well as David (1 Sam. 21:2), we had better not be too hard on Rahab. This is not to excuse or encourage lying, but simply to take her circumstances into consideration lest we condemn her too severely.

Lying is wrong (Prov. 12:22), and the fact that God had Rahab's lies recorded in Scripture is no proof that He approved of them. However, let's confess that most of us would hesitate to tell the truth *if it really were a matter of life or death.* It's one thing for *me* to tell the truth about myself and suffer for it; but do I have the right to cause the death of *others*, especially those who have come under my roof for protection? Many people have been honored for deceiving the enemy *during wartime* and saving innocent lives, and this was war! Suppose we looked upon Rahab as a "freedom fighter"; would that change the picture at all?

Ethical problems aside, the main lesson here is that Rahab's faith was conspicuous, and she demonstrated it by receiving the spies and risking her life to protect them. James saw her actions as proof that she was truly a believer (James 2:25). Her faith wasn't hidden; the spies could tell that she was indeed a believer.

### 2. Confident faith (Josh. 2:8-11)

Faith is only as good as its object. Some people have faith in faith and think that just by *believing* they can make great things happen. Others have faith in lies, which is not faith at all but superstition. I once heard a psychologist say that the people in a support group “must have some kind of faith, even if it’s faith in the soft drink machine.” But faith is only as good as its object. How much help can you get from a soft drink machine, especially after you’ve run out of money?

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones reminds us that “faith shows itself in the whole personality.” True saving faith isn’t just a feat of intellectual gymnastics by which we convince ourselves that something is true that really isn’t true. Nor is it merely a stirring of the emotions that gives us a false sense of confidence that God will do what we *feel* He will do. Nor is it a courageous act of the will whereby we jump off the pinnacle of the temple and expect God to rescue us (Matt. 4:5-7). True saving faith involves “the whole personality”: the mind is instructed, the emotions are stirred, and the will then acts in obedience to God.

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet [the intellect], moved with fear [the emotions], prepared an ark [the will] . . .” (Heb. 11:7). Rahab’s experience was similar to that of Noah: *She knew* that Jehovah was the true God [the mind]; *she feared* for herself and her family when she heard about the great wonders He had performed [the emotions]; and *she received* the spies and pleaded for the salvation of her family [the will]. Unless the whole personality is involved, it is not saving faith as the Bible describes it.

Of course, this doesn’t mean that the mind must be fully instructed in every aspect of Bible truth before a sinner can be saved. The woman with the hemorrhage

only touched the hem of Christ’s garment and she was healed, but she acted on the little knowledge that she did possess (Matt. 9:20-22). Rahab’s knowledge of the true God was meager, but she acted on what she knew; and the Lord saved her.

Rahab showed more faith in the Lord than the ten spies had exhibited forty years before, when she said, “I know that the Lord has given you the land” (Josh. 2:9, NKJV). Her faith was based on facts, not just feelings; for she had heard of the miracles God had performed, starting with the opening up of the Red Sea at the Exodus. “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17, NKJV).

Since the report of the Lord’s power had traveled to the people of Canaan, they were afraid; but this is what Israel expected their great God to do. “The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on the inhabitants of Palestine. Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them” (Ex. 15:14-16). God promised to do this for Israel, and He kept His promise. “This day I will begin to put the dread and fear of you upon the nations under the whole heaven, who shall hear the report of you, and shall tremble and be in anguish because of you” (Deut. 2:25, NKJV).

“The Lord your God, He is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath” (Josh. 2:11). What a confession of faith from the lips of a woman whose life had been imprisoned in pagan idolatry! She believed in *one God*, not in the multitude of gods that populated the heathen temples. She believed He was a *personal* God (“your God”), who would work on behalf of those who trusted Him. She believed He was *the*

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*God of Israel*, who would give the land to His people. This God whom she trusted was not limited to one nation or one land, but was *the God of heaven and earth*. Rahab believed in a great and awesome God!

Our confidence that we are God's children comes from the witness of the Word of God before us and the witness of the Spirit of God within us (1 John 5:9-13). However, the assurance of salvation isn't based only on what we know from the Bible or how we feel in our hearts. It's also based on how we live; for if there hasn't been a change in our behavior, then it's doubtful that we've truly been born again (2 Cor. 5:21; James 2:14-26). It isn't enough to say "Lord, Lord!" We must obey what He tells us to do (Matt. 7:21-27). Rahab's obedience gave evidence of a changed life.

Rahab's conversion was truly an act of God's grace. Like all the citizens of Canaan, Rahab was under condemnation and destined to die. God commanded the Jews to "utterly destroy them" and show them no mercy (Deut. 7:1-3). Rahab was a Gentile, outside the covenant mercies shown to Israel (Eph. 2:11-13). She didn't deserve to be saved, but God had mercy on her. If ever a sinner experienced Ephesians 2:1-10, it was Rahab!

### **3. Concerned faith (Josh. 2:12-14)**

Rahab, however, wasn't concerned only about her own welfare, for once she had personally experienced the grace and mercy of God, she was burdened to rescue her family. After Andrew met the Lord Jesus, he shared the good news with his brother Simon and brought him to Jesus (John 1:35-42). The cleansed leper went home and told everybody he met what Jesus had done for him (Mark 1:40-45). "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise" (Prov. 11:30).

Rahab wanted assurance from the two spies that when the city was taken, they would guarantee her family's safety. The men gave her that guarantee in two ways: They pledged their word, and they pledged their lives that they would not break their word. In other words, they became surety for Rahab's family, the way Judah became surety for Benjamin (Gen. 43:8-9). The Book of Proverbs warns against "*suretyship*" in the business world because it involves a risk that could lead to your losing everything (Prov. 6:1ff; 11:15; 20:16; 27:13). However, in the realm of the spiritual, we are saved because Jesus Christ, who owed no debts, was willing to become surety for us (Heb. 7:22, NIV). The next time you sing "Jesus Paid It All," remember that Jesus has pledged Himself as "the guarantee of a better covenant" (Heb. 7:22, NIV). He died for us; and as long as He lives, our salvation is secure. Because of the promise of His Word and the guarantee of His eternal suretyship, we have confidence that "He is able to save completely [forever] those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them" (v. 25, NIV).

The spies warned Rahab that she must not divulge any of this information to anybody in the city other than the members of her family. If she did, their agreement was canceled. What a contrast to the believer's relationship to Jesus Christ, for He wants *everybody* to know that He has paid the price of redemption and that they can be saved by trusting Him. If Rahab talked too much, her life was in danger; but if we don't talk enough, the lives of lost people around us are in danger.

### **4. Covenant faith (Josh. 2:15-24)**

A covenant is simply an agreement, a contract between two or more parties, with certain conditions laid down for all par-

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ties to obey. You find a number of *divine* covenants recorded in Scripture: God's covenant with our first parents in Eden (Gen. 2:16); God's covenants with Noah (Gen. 9), Abraham (12:1-3; 15:1-20), and Israel (Ex. 19-20); the covenant concerning the land of Palestine, as explained in Deuteronomy; the messianic covenant with David (2 Sam. 7); and the New Covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ Jer. 31:31; Matt. 26:28; Heb. 12:24). You also find *human* covenants, such as the agreement between David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 18:3; 20:16) and between David and the people of Israel (2 Sam. 5:1-5).

Before the two spies left Rahab's house, they reaffirmed their covenant with her. Since the men didn't know God's plan for taking the city, they couldn't give Rahab any detailed instructions. Perhaps they assumed that the city would be besieged, the gates smashed down, and the people massacred. The men were certain that the city would fall and that ultimately the land would be taken.

Often in biblical covenants, God appointed some physical or material "token" to remind the people of what had been promised. His covenant with Abraham was "sealed" by the rite of circumcision (Gen. 17:9-14; Rom. 4:11). When God established His covenant with Israel at Sinai, both the covenant book and the covenant people were sprinkled with blood (Ex. 24:3-8; Heb. 9:16-22). God gave the rainbow as the token of the covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:12-17), and the Lord Jesus Christ used the broken bread and the cup of wine as tokens of the New Covenant (Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26).

In the case of Rahab, the spies instructed her to hang a scarlet rope out of the window of her house, which was built into the wall (Josh. 2:18). This scarlet rope would identify the "house of safety" to

the army of Israel when they came to take the city. The color of the rope is significant for it reminds us of blood. Just as the blood on the door posts in Egypt marked a house that the angel of death was to pass over (Ex. 12:1-13), so the scarlet rope marked a house on the Jericho wall whose occupants the Jewish soldiers were to protect. Rahab let the men down from the window with that rope and kept it in the window from that hour. This was the "sure sign" of the covenant that she had asked for (Josh. 2:12-23).

It's important to note that Rahab and her family were saved by faith in the God of Israel and not by faith in the rope hanging out the window. The fact that she hung the rope from the window was proof that she had faith, just as the blood of the slain lamb put on the door posts in Egypt proved that the Jews believed God's Word. Faith in the living God means salvation, and faith in His covenant gives assurance; but faith in *the token of the covenant* is religious superstition and can give neither salvation nor assurance. The Jews depended on circumcision to save them, but they ignored the true spiritual meaning of that important rite (Rom. 2:25-29; Deut. 10:12-16; 30:6). Many people today depend for their salvation on their baptism or their participation in the Lord's Table (the Eucharist, Communion); but this kind of faith is vain. Rahab had faith in the Lord and in the covenant promises He had made through His servants; and she proved her faith by hanging the scarlet rope from the window. When the Jews captured Jericho, they found Rahab and her family in her house; and they rescued them from judgment (Josh. 6:21-25).

Rahab was a woman of great courage. She had to tell all her relatives about the coming judgment and the promise of salvation, and this was a dangerous thing to