

## Conquering the Land (1400 – 1100 BCE)

### *Preparation for Conquest*

Readings: *Joshua 1:1-5:15*

### ***Reflections:***

- Here at a very significant transition point in the history of Israel, we see again the events are incredibly pregnant with meaning. This is common in the narrative of Scripture and in many times in our lives of following Christ. At significant transition points God packs in a lot of meaning and learning for his children to experience and grasp.
- Upon Moses' death Joshua is commissioned. As one song says, "Every new beginning comes from some other new beginning's end." Everything the people ever knew or understood about following God was tied to Moses. Now they must learn to trust a new leader for this new season of their life.
- The commands of God are interwoven with powerful promises:
  - I will give you every place where you set your foot. (promise)
  - Your territory will .... [He sets out boundaries] (promise)
  - No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. (promise)
  - I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. (promise)
  - Be strong and courageous because you will lead these people to inherit the land. (command)
  - Be strong and very courageous. (this command is restated as no doubt fear was a big issue Joshua wrestled with)
  - Obey the law by meditating on it (this literally meant repeating it over and over in your conversation); do not let it depart from your mouth. This means "don't ever stop talking about it and talking it through. Don't go silent but make my word the constant conversation of your community and life.
  - Then you will be prosperous and successful. (promise)
  - Be strong and courageous. (encouraged again with this command)

- Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged (command)
- For the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. (promise)
  - We see that God's calling is grounded upon the promise of his love, loyalty, presence and power.
- Joshua sends out spies apparently as a tactical strategy to gather information on the land.
- Rahab: Here again right at the very outset God messes up everyone's pre-conceived ideas about who is acceptable to Him. First, the spies are sent out from Shittim, the place where the Israelite men first got involved in sexual relations with the Canaanite women (See Numbers 25:1). They immediately go to a prostitute's home. Are they thinking, "Who cares? This prostitute is going to be dead soon anyways?" They are inept and immediately found out by the ruler of the city. The way the story is told, it seems painfully obvious that these spies are both fools and lacking in any sense of integrity. God then does the complete unexpected. He works through a pagan, female prostitute! Talk about having three strikes against you. Not only does she demonstrate great faith in God ("The Lord your God is God in heaven above and the earth below") but she also is used by God to protect and help these foolish, sinful spies as a part of God's overall purposes. Rahab also bold-face lies to protect the spies and there seems to be no problem with this. It isn't that she was even close to just using misdirection. She simply lies and God uses it to complete his purposes. A lot of Christian sensitivities are out the door on this one. It reminds us, we cannot judge. Only God can judge the heart and the heart is what he looks at.
- It is interesting that Rahab uses a scarlet cord. It becomes a symbol of salvation and the red may point towards the saving power of shed blood. The spies use it to escape. Also, it is tied to her door and her family is saved. Now, the picture of red on the door no doubt pointed back to the blood on the door frames as the angel of death passed over Egypt and all the Israelites were saved at the passover (i.e. death passes over).
- We also see the importance of unity. The three tribes must recommit to the whole community. Everyone must help with this mission. Notice how these tribes encourage Joshua to be "Strong and courageous." Those who join a God-honoring mission have tremendous ability to encourage the leaders of that mission.
- The Ark of the Covenant was the physical expression of God's presence. The battle is the Lord's and therefore he is to lead the way. In a sense this is a reminder that Christ-followers must not try to fight spiritual battles in our own strength but allow his presence to lead them. The key is to follow God's presence, "...follow it (i.e. the Ark). Then you will know which way to go since you have never been this way before." Being close with God is always critical to completing the mission he gives.

- “Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow God will do amazing things.” God calls his people to recommitment before he acts powerfully in and through them.
- God exalts Joshua in the eyes of Israel. God knows it is important for people to clearly see who he is blessing for leadership. Consistently in the story of Israel as well as in the Jesus movement, it is not about leaders being the most worthy or qualified. They are simply chosen and affirmed by God because of their humility.
- God gives the people a visible miracle to build their faith that he is going to deal with their enemies. He recreates the exodus experience of Egypt. Remember these people have only received the story but did not experience it themselves. So they are being shown that everything they have learned about God and their story is true.
- The memorial stones are God setting up a physical reminder for future generations of the historical truth of what God accomplished. These stones are there to help people remember what he has done. Sometimes at milestone moments in our lives we need to create memory markers so that we don’t forget what God has accomplished in our lives.
- Notice that the monument was also set up so that “all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful.” Here we see a quick reference to Israel’s calling and destiny for all the nations of the world. Genesis 18:18 states, “all nations on earth will be blessed through [Abraham].” Also see Genesis 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; I Kings 8:43, 60; Isaiah 51:4; Isaiah 60:3. God’s ultimate heart was for all the nations to know him. In Christ we see this all realized.
- God’s miraculous powers cause his enemies to fall back in fear. Spiritually, Christ-followers have nothing to fear because of God’s power at work in and through them, even in their weakness.
- The very first thing they do in the Promised Land is circumcise the males. This made the entire community completely vulnerable. Anyone could attack them and there was not a prayer the men could fight. They were made completely weak and vulnerable in their being set apart for God. It physically shows again that God’s power is perfected in our weakness. God doesn’t need the strong; he needs those who are submitted. Again, praise God we are in the new covenant. Now we must face our own weakness as we are set apart by him and our hearts are circumcised. In Romans 2:29 Paul refers to true Israelites are those that are circumcised by the heart through the Spirit.
- The men are circumcised at Gilgal. Gilgal means “wheel” and so this could give a sense that Israel has come full circle in their spiritual journey. Gilgal is also a compound word from the term “to roll” and “heap” or “dung” and so it could also suggest that something big was rolled away, their sin as symbolized by circumcision. In that region was also an ancient place of worship that was essentially a circle of stones. It is possible that this influenced the place being called “wheel”.

- They observe the Passover and remember the deliverance of God. Again, each step of this journey is all about remembering God's power and trusting in him through complete faith and obedience.
- The manna finally stops after all these years. They have now arrived at the place of fullness and fulfillment and so God's miraculous provision is no longer needed.
- The reference to the divine commander is intriguing. Like the Priest of Salem, this divine commander is a mysterious figure. Notice he will not declare he is for anyone exclusively. From the larger narrative of Scripture this may well be Christ and how he will ultimately not simply side with Israel but will call all people to himself. The commander of the Lord's army declares that the ground is holy and Joshua responds with worship. Again, this suggests it is God with them which then make sense that this may be Christ, a physical appearing of God. See Revelation 19:11 and the following verses. "I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. 'He will rule them with an iron scepter.' He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords."