

Olivet Baptist Church

3500 Edmondson Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21229

Wednesday Night Bible Study (7:00 pm)

Book of Joshua – Facilitator: Rev. Alex O. Stone

Overall Theme: The Seven Year Conquest of “The Promise Land” (1:1–13:7)

- I. **God Commissions Joshua (Joshua 1:1-1:18)**
 - A. Joshua Commands Israel (Joshua 1:10-1:15)
- II. **Rahab Hides the Spies (Joshua 2:1-2:24)**
 - A. Faith of Rahab (Joshua 2:1-2:21)
- III. **Israel Crosses the Jordan River (Joshua 3:1-3:17)**
- IV. **The Memorial Stones (Joshua 4:1-4:24)**
- V. **Second Generation Circumcised (Joshua 5:1-5:15)**
 - A. Joshua Prepares Israel Spiritually (Joshua 5:2-5:12)

CURRENT FOCUS: “ISRAEL PREPARES FOR THE CONQUEST ” (Joshua 1:1–5:15)

God’s Commission to Joshua

1 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, it came to pass that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, saying: **2** “Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel. **3** Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. **4** From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory. **5** No man shall *be able to* stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. **6** Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. **7** Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. **8** This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it.

For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.
⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

The Order to Cross the Jordan

¹⁰ Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, ¹¹ “Pass through the camp and command the people, saying, ‘Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you will cross over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess.’ ”

¹² And to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh Joshua spoke, saying, ¹³ “Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, ‘The LORD your God is giving you rest and is giving you this land.’ ¹⁴ Your wives, your little ones, and your livestock shall remain in the land which Moses gave you on this side of the Jordan. But you shall pass before your brethren armed, all your mighty men of valor, and help them, ¹⁵ until the LORD has given your brethren rest, as He gave you, and they also have taken possession of the land which the LORD your God is giving them. Then you shall return to the land of your possession and enjoy it, which Moses the LORD’s servant gave you on this side of the Jordan toward the sunrise.”

¹⁶ So they answered Joshua, saying, “All that you command us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. ¹⁷ Just as we heeded Moses in all things, so we will heed you. Only the LORD your God be with you, as He was with Moses. ¹⁸ Whoever rebels against your command and does not heed your words, in all that you command him, shall be put to death. Only be strong and of good courage.”

Rahab Hides the Spies

2 Now Joshua the son of Nun sent out two men from Acacia Grove to spy secretly, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.”

So they went, and came to the house of a harlot named Rahab, and lodged there.

² And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, “Behold, men have come here tonight

from the children of Israel to search out the country.”³ So the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the country.”⁴ Then the woman took the two men and hid them. So she said, “Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they *were* from.”⁵ And it happened as the gate was being shut, when it was dark, that the men went out. Where the men went I do not know; pursue them quickly, for you may overtake them.”⁶ (But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order on the roof.)⁷ Then the men pursued them by the road to the Jordan, to the fords. And as soon as those who pursued them had gone out, they shut the gate.

⁸ Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof,⁹ and said to the men: “I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you.”¹⁰ For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who *were* on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed.¹¹ And as soon as we heard *these things*, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He *is* God in heaven above and on earth beneath.¹² Now therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the LORD, since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father’s house, and give me a true token,¹³ and spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.”

¹⁴ So the men answered her, “Our lives for yours, if none of you tell this business of ours. And it shall be, when the LORD has given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with you.”¹⁵ Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house *was* on the city wall; she dwelt on the wall.¹⁶ And she said to them, “Get to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you. Hide there three days, until the pursuers have returned. Afterward you may go your way.”

¹⁷ So the men said to her: “We *will be* blameless of this oath of yours which you have made us swear,¹⁸ unless, *when* we come into the land, you bind this line of scarlet

cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you bring your father, your mother, your brothers, and all your father's household to your own home. ¹⁹ So it shall be *that* whoever goes outside the doors of your house into the street, his blood *shall be* on his own head, and we *will be* guiltless. And whoever is with you in the house, his blood *shall be* on our head if a hand is laid on him. ²⁰ And if you tell this business of ours, then we will be free from your oath which you made us swear."

²¹ Then she said, "According to your words, so *be* it." And she sent them away, and they departed. And she bound the scarlet cord in the window. ²² They departed and went to the mountain, and stayed there three days until the pursuers returned. The pursuers sought *them* all along the way, but did not find *them*. ²³ So the two men returned, descended from the mountain, and crossed over; and they came to Joshua the son of Nun, and told him all that had befallen them. ²⁴ And they said to Joshua, "Truly the LORD has delivered all the land into our hands, for indeed all the inhabitants of the country are fainthearted because of us."

Israel Crosses the Jordan

3 Then Joshua rose early in the morning; and they set out from Acacia Grove and came to the Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they crossed over. ² So it was, after three days, that the officers went through the camp; ³ and they commanded the people, saying, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, the Levites, bearing it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it. ⁴ Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you must go, for you have not passed *this* way before."

⁵ And Joshua said to the people, "Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you." ⁶ Then Joshua spoke to the priests, saying, "Take up the ark of the covenant and cross over before the people." So, they took up the ark of the covenant and went before the people. ⁷ And the LORD said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. ⁸ You shall command the priests who bear the ark of the

covenant, saying, 'When you have come to the edge of the water of the Jordan, you shall stand in the Jordan.' "

⁹ So Joshua said to the children of Israel, "Come here, and hear the words of the LORD your God." ¹⁰ And Joshua said, "By this you shall know that the living God *is* among you, and *that* He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Hivites and the Perizzites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Jebusites: ¹¹ Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is crossing over before you into the Jordan. ¹² Now therefore, take for yourselves twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man from every tribe. ¹³ And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, *that* the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, the waters that come down from upstream, and they shall stand as a heap."

¹⁴ So it was, when the people set out from their camp to cross over the Jordan, with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, ¹⁵ and as those who bore the ark came to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks during the whole time of harvest), ¹⁶ that the waters which came down from upstream stood *still, and* rose in a heap very far away at Adam, the city that *is* beside Zaretan. So the waters that went down into the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, failed, *and* were cut off; and the people crossed over opposite Jericho. ¹⁷ Then the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan; and all Israel crossed over on dry ground, until all the people had crossed completely over the Jordan.

The Memorial Stones

4 And it came to pass, when all the people had completely crossed over the Jordan, that the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying: ² "Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from every tribe, ³ and command them, saying, 'Take for yourselves twelve stones from here, out of the midst of the Jordan, from the place where the priests' feet stood firm. You shall carry them over with you and leave them in the lodging place where you lodge tonight.' "

⁴ Then Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the children of Israel, one man from every tribe; ⁵ and Joshua said to them: "Cross over before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of the Jordan, and each one of you take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, ⁶ that this may be a sign among you when your children ask in time to come, saying, 'What do these stones *mean* to you?' ⁷ Then you shall answer them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. And these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever."

⁸ And the children of Israel did so, just as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones from the midst of the Jordan, as the LORD had spoken to Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, and carried them over with them to the place where they lodged, and laid them down there. ⁹ Then Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests who bore the ark of the covenant stood; and they are there to this day.

¹⁰ So the priests who bore the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan until everything was finished that the LORD had commanded Joshua to speak to the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua; and the people hurried and crossed over. ¹¹ Then it came to pass, when all the people had completely crossed over, that the ark of the LORD and the priests crossed over in the presence of the people. ¹² And the men of Reuben, the men of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh crossed over armed before the children of Israel, as Moses had spoken to them. ¹³ About forty thousand prepared for war crossed over before the LORD for battle, to the plains of Jericho. ¹⁴ On that day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they had feared Moses, all the days of his life.

¹⁵ Then the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying, ¹⁶ "Command the priests who bear the ark of the Testimony to come up from the Jordan." ¹⁷ Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, "Come up from the Jordan." ¹⁸ And it came to pass, when the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD had come from the midst of the

Jordan, *and* the soles of the priests' feet touched the dry land, that the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks as before.

¹⁹ Now the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth *day* of the first month, and they camped in Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. ²⁰ And those twelve stones which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal. ²¹ Then he spoke to the children of Israel, saying: "When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, 'What *are* these stones?' ²² then you shall let your children know, saying, 'Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry land'; ²³ for the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over, ²⁴ that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it *is* mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever."

The Second Generation Circumcised

5 So it was, when all the kings of the Amorites who *were* on the west side of the Jordan, and all the kings of the Canaanites who *were* by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan from before the children of Israel until we had crossed over, that their heart melted; and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the children of Israel.

² At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives for yourself, and circumcise the sons of Israel again the second time." ³ So Joshua made flint knives for himself, and circumcised the sons of Israel at the hill of the foreskins. ⁴ And this *is* the reason why Joshua circumcised them: All the people who came out of Egypt *who were* males, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way, after they had come out of Egypt. ⁵ For all the people who came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness, on the way as they came out of Egypt, had not been circumcised. ⁶ For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people *who were* men of war, who came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they did not obey the voice of the LORD—to whom the LORD swore that He would not show them the land which the LORD had sworn to their fathers that He would give us, "a land flowing with milk and honey." ⁷ Then Joshua circumcised their

sons *whom* He raised up in their place; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way.

⁸ So it was, when they had finished circumcising all the people, that they stayed in their places in the camp till they were healed. ⁹ Then the LORD said to Joshua, “This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.” Therefore the name of the place is called Gilgal to this day. ¹⁰ Now the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. ¹¹ And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day. ¹² Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year.

The Commander of the Army of the LORD

¹³ And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, “Are You for us or for our adversaries?”

¹⁴ So He said, “No, but *as* Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, “What does my Lord say to His servant?” ¹⁵ Then the Commander of the LORD’s army said to Joshua, “Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand *is* holy.” And Joshua did so.

Commentary: Israel Prepares For The Conquest (CHAP. 1:1-5:15)

1. JOSHUA’S LISTENING TO THE LORD (1:1–9)

Joshua 1:1. The words, **After the death of Moses**, link this book with Deuteronomy (cf. Deut. 34:1–9). Before Moses’ death **Joshua** was designated his successor (cf. Num. 27:15–23; Deut. 3:21–22; 31:1–8). Joshua had been **Moses’** young **aide** for a

number of years (Ex. 24:13; 33:11; Num. 11:28). Joshua was from the tribe of Ephraim (Num. 13:8), and lived 110 years (Josh. 24:29).

Joshua may have felt a sense of loneliness, and waited expectantly near the Jordan River to hear the voice of God. He was not disappointed. When God's servants take time to listen, He always communicates. In the present Age He usually speaks through His written Word. But in the Old Testament He spoke in dreams by night, in visions by day, through the high priest, and occasionally in an audible voice.

Joshua 1:2. In whatever way God communicated with Joshua, the message came through clearly. **Moses God's servant was dead.** (Interestingly Moses is called "the servant of the LORD" 3 times in Josh. 1 [vv. 1, 13, 15; cf. Ex. 14:31], and 13 times elsewhere in the Book of Josh. And at the end of Joshua's life he too was called "the servant of the LORD" [Josh. 24:29].) But though Moses was dead, God's purpose was quite alive, and Joshua was now the key figure to fulfill God's program. His instructions were explicit. Joshua was to assume immediate command of **all the people** and lead them across **the Jordan River into the land** God was **about to give to them.** No one can question God's right to give Canaan **to the Israelites** for He owns all the earth. As a psalmist later affirmed, "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Ps. 24:1).

Joshua 1:3–4. Though the land was God's gift to Israel, it could be won only by hard fighting. **The Lord gave them title to the territory, but they had to possess it by marching on every part.** The boundaries established by God and **promised to Abraham** (Gen. 15:18–21) and **Moses** (Deut. 1:6–8) were to extend from the

wilderness on ¹ the south to the **Lebanon** mountain range on the north, and from **the Euphrates** River on the east to **the Great Sea**, the Mediterranean, **on the west**. The added expression, **all the Hittite country**, probably refers not to the extensive empire of that name north of Canaan but to the fact that in ancient times the whole population of Canaan or any part of it was sometimes called “Hittite” (cf. Gen. 15:20). “Pockets” of Hittite peoples existed here and there in Canaan.

Thirty-eight years earlier Joshua had explored this good and fruitful land as 1 of the 12 spies (Num. 13:1–16; there [Num. 13:8] he is called “Hoshea,” a variant spelling of his name). The memory of its beauty and fertility had not dimmed. Now he was to lead the armies of Israel to conquer that territory.

What is the extent of these boundaries? The territory actually conquered and possessed in the time of Joshua *was much less than what was promised* in Genesis 15:18–21. Even in the time of David and Solomon, when the land reached its greatest extent, the outlying districts were only within Israel’s sphere of influence.

When will the nation of Israel fully possess the land? The prophets have declared that at the time of Christ’s return to earth He will regather the Jews and reign in the land over a converted and redeemed Israel. Full and complete possession of the land awaits that day (cf. Jer. 16:14–16; Amos 9:11–15; Zech. 8:4–8).

¹ Campbell, D. K. (1985). [Joshua](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 327–328). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Joshua 1:5. As Joshua faced the tremendous task of conquering Canaan, he needed a fresh word of encouragement. From personal observation Joshua knew that the Canaanites and others were vigorous people who lived in strongly fortified cities (cf. Num. 13:28–29). Frequent battles kept their warriors in trim fighting condition. And for the most part the land was mountainous, a fact that would make war maneuvers most difficult. But when God gives a command He often accompanies it with a promise, so He assured Joshua a lifetime of continuous victory over his enemies, based on His unfailing presence and help. The words **I will never leave you** (cf. Josh. 1:9) may be rendered, “I will not drop² or abandon you.” **God never walks out on His promises.**

Joshua 1:6. Flowing from this strong affirmation that God would never let Joshua down was God’s threefold call to courage. First, Joshua was commanded to **be strong and courageous** (cf. vv. 7, 9, 18) **because of God’s promise** of the land. Strength and fortitude would be required for the strenuous military campaign just ahead, but Joshua was to keep uppermost in his mind the fact that he would succeed in causing Israel **to inherit the land** because it had been promised **to their forefathers**, that is, to Abraham (Gen. 13:14–17; 15:18–21; 17:7–8; 22:16–18), Isaac (Gen. 26:3–5), Jacob (Gen. 28:13; 35:12), and the entire nation, the seed of Abraham (Ex. 6:8), as an eternal possession. And Joshua now at last was to **lead** the children of Israel into possession of this Promised Land. What a strategic role he was to play at this crucial time in his nation’s history!

² Campbell, D. K. (1985). [Joshua](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 328). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

While in any given generation the fulfillment of this great and significant promise depends on Israel's obedience to God, there can be no question that the Bible affirms her right to the land. By divine contract the title is hers even though she will not possess it totally and enjoy it fully until she is right with God.

Joshua 1:7–8. Second, Joshua was again commanded to **be strong and very courageous**, being **careful to obey all the Law of Moses**. This command is based on *God's power* through His Word. This is a stronger exhortation, indicating that greater strength of character would be required to obey God's Word faithfully and fully than to win military battles! The emphasis in these verses is clearly on a written body of truth. Many critics argue that the Scriptures did not appear in written form until several centuries later but here is a clear reference to an authoritative **Book of the Law**. To enjoy prosperity and **be ... successful** in the Conquest of Canaan Joshua was **to do three things with regard to the Scriptures:**

- (a) The Law was not to **depart from his mouth**; he was to talk about it (cf. Deut. 6:7);
- (b) He was to **meditate on it day and night**, to think about it (cf. Ps. 1:2; 119:97);
- (c) He was to **do everything written in it**, to obey its commands fully and to act by it (cf. Ezra 7:10; James 1:22–25).

Joshua's life demonstrates that in a practical way he lived according to the teachings of the Law of Moses, the only portion of the Word of God then in written form. This alone explains the victories he achieved in battle and the success that marked his entire career. In one of his farewell addresses to the nation just before he died he urged the people to live in submission to the Scriptures (Josh. 23:6). Tragically they heeded this charge for only a short time. In succeeding generations, *the people of Israel refused to be guided by God's authoritative revelation*, and *they all did what they chose* (Jud. 21:25). **Rejecting an objective standard of righteousness, they chose**

a subjective one characterized by moral and spiritual relativism. *This in turn plunged the nation into centuries of religious apostasy and moral anarchy.*

Joshua 1:9. The third call to courage addressed to Joshua was based on the promise of *God's presence*. This did not minimize the task Joshua faced. He would encounter giants and fortified cities, but God's presence would make all the difference.

Joshua probably had times when he felt weak, inadequate, and frightened. Perhaps he considered resigning before the Conquest even began. But God knew all about his feelings of personal weakness and fear and told Joshua three times, **Be strong and courageous** (vv. 6–7, 9; cf. v. 18). God also urged him **not to be afraid or discouraged** (cf. Deut. 1:21; 31:8; Josh. 8:1). These charges with their accompanying assurances (God's promise, God's power, and God's presence) were sufficient to last a lifetime. Believers in all ages can be uplifted by the same three assurances.

2. JOSHUA'S COMMANDING THE OFFICERS (1:10–15)

The Lord had spoken to Joshua. Now Joshua was to speak to the people, which he did without delay. Joshua's commands had a ring of certainty ³ certainty. The new leader had taken charge with confidence. The situation Joshua and the people faced was not easy. In fact his situation closely paralleled the dilemma Moses and the Israelites encountered at the Red Sea (Ex. 14). In both cases the obstacle occurred at the beginning of the leaders' ministries. Both were impossible to overcome by

³ Campbell, D. K. (1985). *Joshua*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 329). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

natural means. Both demanded implicit trust in and absolute dependence on God's miracle-working power.

Joshua 1:10–11. Two matters demanded attention. First, provisions had to be gathered, for even though the daily manna had not yet ceased **the people** were to gather some of the fruit and grain from the plains of Moab for themselves and their cattle. The order to “prepare” was given by **Joshua** to **the officers** (lit., “scribes”), who like present-day adjutants or staff officers relayed their commanding officer's orders to the people. In **three days** (cf. 2:22) the Conquest would begin.

Joshua 1:12–15. Joshua's second item of business was to remind the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and **the half-tribe of Manasseh** that though they had received their inheritance **east of the Jordan**, they were committed to fight with their **brothers** and assist in conquering **the land** west of Jordan (Num. 32:16–32; Deut. 3:12–20). The key word here is **remember** and their response (Josh. 1:16–18) shows they had not forgotten their promise and were ready to stand by it. In fact, they were to serve as shock troops in leading the attack on Canaan (v. 14, **cross over ahead of your brothers**).

3. JOSHUA'S RECEIVING SUPPORT FROM THE PEOPLE (1:16–18)

Joshua 1:16–18. The response of the two and one-half Transjordanian tribes was enthusiastic and wholehearted. It must certainly have reflected the attitude of all the tribes at this crucial time of preparation for the invasion. What an encouragement this was to the new leader to be sure that the people were united in supporting him. Their pledge of loyalty and obedience (**we will go.... we will obey**

you) included the solemn ⁴ declaration that anyone guilty of disobedience would be executed. The tribes even encouraged Joshua to **be strong and courageous!** (cf. vv. 6–7, 9)

But there was one condition: they were willing to follow **Joshua** if he showed clear evidence that he was being led by **God** (v. 17). This was a wise precaution and one to be carefully followed lest Israel’s leaders turn out to be false prophets or “blind leaders of the blind.”

B. The spying out of Jericho (chap. 2)

Joshua had been 1 of the 12 spies who had explored the land (Num. 13–14). Now as he faced westward and viewed the land God promised across the turbulent Jordan, it was natural for him to secure information necessary for a successful battle. That battle was the first in a long, difficult war.

1. THE SPIES’ COMMISSION TO JERICO (2:1)

Joshua 2:1. Looming in the middle of the path the invaders must take was the walled city of **Jericho**, the key citadel of the Jordan Valley which commanded the passes into the central highlands. But before attacking it Joshua needed complete information about this fortress—its gates, fortified towers, military force, and the morale of its people. So two secret agents were chosen and sent on a carefully concealed mission. Not even the Israelites were to know of it lest an unfavorable report dishearten them as it had their fathers at Kadesh Barnea (Num. 13:1–14:4).

⁴ Campbell, D. K. (1985). [Joshua](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 329–330). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Taking their lives in their hands the **two spies** left **Shittim**, seven miles east of the Jordan, and probably traveled north, swimming across the flooded river (cf. 3:15) at some fords. Turning south they approached Jericho from the west side and soon were moving along its streets, mingling with the people.

How the spies chose **the house of a prostitute named Rahab** is not revealed. While some suggest they saw her walking the streets and followed her, it seems better to believe that in the providence of God the men were led **there**. God's purpose for the visit of the spies to Jericho included more than securing military information. A sinful woman was there whom God in His grace purposed to spare from the judgment soon to fall on the city. So, **the Lord, moving in a mysterious way, brought together two secret agents of the army of Israel and a harlot of Canaan who would become a proselyte to the God of Israel.**

Some, from the time of Josephus to the present, have attempted to soften the situation by arguing that Rahab was only an innkeeper, but the New Testament references to her (Heb. 11:31; James 2:25) indicate that she was an immoral woman. This in no way impugns the righteousness of God who used such a person in the fulfillment of His purposes. Instead, this incident serves to bring His mercy and grace into bold relief (cf. Matt. 21:32; Luke 15:1; 19:10).

2. THE SPIES' SHIELDING BY RAHAB (2:2-7)

Joshua 2:2-3. The disguise of the spies was not adequate. The entire city was on alert, knowing about the camp of Israel opposite them across the Jordan. Someone

detected the agents, followed them to Rahab's **house**, and quickly returned to report to **the king**. **The king**, responding with alacrity, sent messengers who demanded of **Rahab** that the spies be surrendered. In keeping with oriental custom the privacy of even a woman such as Rahab was respected and the king's men refrained from bursting into her house and searching it.

Joshua 2:4–6. But apparently Rahab also had suspicions about the identity of the **two** visitors. When she saw the soldiers approaching her house she took the spies and hid them beneath **the stalks of flax** which had been placed on her flat **roof** for drying. After flax stalks were pulled up at harvesttime, they were soaked in water for three or four weeks to separate the fibers. Then, after drying in the sun, the flax was made into linen cloth.

Hastening down to open her front door to ⁵ providence of God the men were led **there**. God's purpose for the visit of the spies to Jericho included more than securing military information. A sinful woman was there whom God in His grace purposed to spare from the judgment soon to fall on the city. So the Lord, moving in a mysterious way, brought together two secret agents of the army of Israel and a harlot of Canaan who would become a proselyte to the God of Israel.

Some, from the time of Josephus to the present, have attempted to soften the situation by arguing that Rahab was only an innkeeper, but the New Testament

⁵ Campbell, D. K. (1985). [Joshua](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 330–331). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

references to her (Heb. 11:31; James 2:25) indicate that she was an immoral woman. This in no way impugns the righteousness of God who used such a person in the fulfillment of His purposes. Instead, this incident serves to bring His mercy and grace into bold relief (cf. Matt. 21:32; Luke 15:1; 19:10).

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Hastening down to open her front door to the king's messengers, she freely admitted that two strangers had come to her house, but how could she know their

identity and mission? “They **left** here **at dusk**, just about the time **the city gate** is closed,” she lied. “But if you hurry **you** can probably **catch ... them.**”

Joshua 2:7. The soldiers took Rahab at her word, made no search of her property, but quickly **set out** on a wild-goose chase due east **to the fords of the Jordan**, the most likely escape route. **Was Rahab wrong to lie since her falsehood protected the spies?** Are there some situations in which a lie is acceptable?

After all, some say, this was a cultural matter, for Rahab was born and raised among the depraved Canaanites among whom lying was universally practiced. She probably saw no evil in her act. Further, if she had told the truth the spies would have been killed by the king of Jericho.

But such arguments are not convincing. To argue that the spies would certainly have perished if Rahab had been truthful is to ignore the option that God could have protected the spies in some other way. To excuse Rahab for indulging in a common practice is to condone what God condemns. Paul quoted a prophet of Crete who said that Cretans were inveterate liars, and then added, “This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith” (Titus 1:13).

The lie of Rahab was recorded but not approved. The Bible approved her faith demonstrated by good works (Heb. 11:31), but not her falsehood. (However, some explain Rahab’s lying by saying that deception is allowable in war.)

3. THE SPIES' INTELLIGENCE INFORMATION FROM RAHAB (2:8–11)

Joshua 2:8–11. A most remarkable conversation then took place. The king's messengers were gone and Rahab climbed to **the roof** of her home where she talked with **the two spies** in the darkness. One is hardly prepared for her declaration of faith which follows. First, she disclosed that she believed that **the LORD**, the God of Israel,⁶ had **given** them the **land** of Canaan. Though the army of Israel had not yet crossed the Jordan River, Rahab stated in effect, "the Conquest is as good as over."

Second, she revealed to the spies the priceless information that the inhabitants of Jericho as well as the rest of Canaan were utterly demoralized: **All who live in this country are melting in fear because of you.** (Cf. v. 24, and v. 11, **our hearts sank and everyone's courage failed.**) This is as God had said it would be (Ex. 23:27; Deut. 2:25). Since a major objective of the spy mission was to assess the morale of the enemy, this word was indeed "music to their ears." But why the terror? Because of the power of Israel's God which parted **the Red Sea** for the Hebrew slaves 40 years before, and more recently gave them victories over **Sihon and Og**, the mighty **kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan** (Num. 21:21–35). Now that same God was closing in on them and they knew they could not win.

Then Rahab declared her faith in Israel's God: **For the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.** Responding to the word she had received about the mighty working of God, Rahab believed, trusting in His power and mercy.

⁶ Campbell, D. K. (1985). [Joshua](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 331). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

And that faith saved her. But how could Rahab have such a remarkable faith and still be a harlot, and so glibly tell lies? The answer would seem to be that as she responded in belief to the message she heard about God's works, she later responded to further messages concerning God's standards of life and obeyed. After all, spiritual maturity is gradual, not instantaneous. Even John Newton, who wrote the gospel song "Amazing Grace," continued for some time after his conversion in the slave trade before he was convicted about this base and degrading practice and gave it up.

4. THE SPIES' PROMISE TO RAHAB (2:12-21)

Joshua 2:12-13. Rahab demonstrated her faith not only by protecting the spies (Heb. 11:31; James 2:25) but also by showing concern for her family's safety. Admittedly she sought her family's⁷ physical deliverance, but she must have desired also that they too become a part of God's people, serving the one true God of Israel instead of being enslaved to the Canaanites' vile and degrading idolatry.

She pursued this urgent matter delicately but persistently, pressing the spies to make a pact with her because of her cooperation with them. When Rahab asked for **kindness** (*hesed*) to be shown to her **family** she used a significant and meaningful word. Found about 250 times in the Old Testament, *hesed* means loyal, steadfast, or faithful love based on a promise, agreement, or covenant. Sometimes the word is used of God's covenant-love for His people and sometimes, as here, of relationships on the human level. Rahab's request was that the spies make a *hesed* agreement

⁷ Campbell, D. K. (1985). *Joshua*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 331-332). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

with her and her father's family, just as she had made a *hesed* agreement with them by sparing their **lives**.

Joshua 2:14. The response of the spies was immediate and decisive. “**When the LORD gives us the land**, that is, Jericho, we will keep the *hesed* agreement. **If you don't** report our mission, we will protect you and your family or forfeit **our own lives**” (author's paraphrase).

Joshua 2:15–20. As the spies prepared to go they again confirmed the pact by repeating and enlarging the conditions Rahab must abide by. First, her **house** must be marked by a **scarlet cord** hung from **the window**. Because of the position of the house on **the city wall** (see comments on v. 21 about the house on the wall) the cord would be clearly seen by the Israelite soldiers again and again as they would march around the walls (6:12–15). Her home would be clearly marked out and no soldier, however fierce and eager he might be in the work of destruction, would dare violate the oath and kill anyone in that **house**.

Second, Rahab and her **family** were to remain **in the house** during the attack on Jericho. If anybody would wander out and was killed the guilt for his death would be **his own**, not the invaders'. Finally, the spies again emphasized that they would be free of this **oath** of protection if Rahab exposed their mission.

Joshua 2:21. To these conditions Rahab **agreed**, and after the spies left she **tied the scarlet cord in the window**. She probably also hurried and told her family to gather

in her house. The door of her house was a door to safety from the judgment soon to fall on Jericho (cf. Gen. 7:16; Ex. 12:23; John 10:9).

Their mission completed, the spies and Rahab exchanged parting instructions concerning their escape (cf. Josh. 2:15–16). Jericho at this time was surrounded by two walls about 15 feet apart. Planks of wood spanned the gap and then houses were built on this foundation. Probably due to the pressure of space in the small city, Rahab’s house was one of those built “on the wall.” In this way it was “part of the city wall” (v. 15).

5. THE SPIES’ RETURN TO JOSHUA (2:22–24)

Joshua 2:22–24. The spies were carefully lowered by a rope through a window of Rahab’s house (v. 15). Their escape would have been more difficult, if not impossible, had it been necessary for them to go out the city gate. Scarcely a half-mile west of Jericho are limestone cliffs about 1,500 feet high, honeycombed with caves. Here the spies hid (in **the hills**) for **three days** (cf. 1:11) **until the** soldiers of Jericho gave up the hunt. Then under cover of darkness the spies swam back across the Jordan, made their way quickly to the camp at Shittim (cf. 2:1), and reported to **Joshua** about their strange and stirring adventure and the alarm and utter despondency of the Canaanites. **Their conclusion was, The LORD has surely given the whole land into our hands for all the people are melting in fear** (cf. v. 9; Ex. 23:27; Deut. 2:25). How different from the report of the majority of the spies at Kadesh Barnea who said, “We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are” (Num. 13:31).

C. The crossing of the Jordan (chap. 3)

1. PREPARATION FOR THE CROSSING (3:1–4)

Joshua 3:1. Joshua was a man of action. The spies having reported in, Israel's leader began immediate preparations to cross the Jordan and invade Canaan. As yet Joshua had no knowledge of how this massive group of people was to cross the swollen river (cf. v. 15). But believing that God would somehow make it possible, he moved them all, bag and baggage, the seven miles **from Shittim ... to the Jordan**. (Shittim is probably the same as Abel Shittim, mentioned in Num. 33:49.)

Joshua 3:2–3. Having arrived at the river they stopped for **three days**. Time was no doubt needed for the leaders to organize the crossing and pass instructions on to the people. The delay also gave everyone an opportunity to get close and see the river, now a strong and rapid current due to the melting of the winter snows of Mount Hermon in the north. They must have faltered at the seeming impossibility of the crossing.

At the end of the third day of waiting **the people** were given instructions. The pillar of cloud would no longer lead them but they were ⁸ instead to follow **the ark of the covenant**. No army scouts would advance first into the land but rather **priests** bearing the ark (cf. v. 11). And since the ark symbolized **the LORD** Himself, it was Yahweh who led His people into Canaan.

⁸ Campbell, D. K. (1985). [Joshua](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 332–334). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Joshua 3:4. With the ark going ahead the people were to fall in behind, or possibly to spread around it on three sides. But they were to **keep** their **distance** by some 3,000 feet. Why? Probably to remind them of the sacredness of **the ark** and the holiness of the God it represented. They were to have no casual or careless intimacy with God but a profound spirit of respect and reverence. God was to be considered not “the Man upstairs” but the sovereign and holy God of all the earth.

The distance was also essential so that the largest possible number of this great population could see the ark. God was about to lead them over unfamiliar ground, over a **way** they had not taken **before**. It was new territory so without the Lord’s guidance and leadership the people would not know which direction to take.

2. CONSECRATION FOR THE CROSSING (3:5–13)

Joshua 3:5. As the day for the crossing approached **Joshua** commanded **the people** to sanctify or **consecrate** themselves. It would be easier to understand if he had said, “Sharpen your swords and check your shields!” But spiritual not military preparation was needed at this time because God was about to reveal Himself by performing a great miracle in Israel’s midst. As a person would prepare scrupulously to meet someone of earthly fame so it was appropriate for the Israelites to prepare for a manifestation of the God of all the earth. The same command was heard at Sinai when the previous generation prepared itself for the majestic revelation of the Lord in the giving of the Law (Ex. 19:10–13).

But that was not all. The people of Israel were to *expect* God to work a miracle. They were to be eager, gripped by a sense of wonder. Israel was not to lose sight of their God who can do the incredible and the humanly impossible.

Joshua 3:6–8. The LORD then told Joshua how they⁹ would make the crossing, and explained to Joshua that this miracle would magnify or **exalt** him as the leader of the **people**. It was time to establish Joshua’s credentials as God’s representative to guide **Israel**. What better way to accomplish this than for Joshua to direct their passage through a miraculously parted **river**? After the crossing the people did in fact revere Joshua (4:14), knowing that God was **with** him (3:7; cf. 1:5, 9).

Joshua 3:9–13. But when Joshua passed on **the words of God** to the people he did not disclose the special promise that he would be exalted by this miraculous event. Rather he told them that this miracle would certify that the living God, in contrast with the dead idols worshiped by the heathen, was in their midst. Further, besides opening a way across the flooded **Jordan**, the living God would also **drive out** the seven groups of people inhabiting the land.

The promise, **the living God is among you**, became the watchword of the Conquest, the key to victory over the enemies in the land. It is a promise that appears on almost every page of this book: “I will be with you!” It is a promise that still sustains the Lord’s people—the assurance of His presence. Since God is **the Lord** (*’ădôn*,

⁹ Campbell, D. K. (1985). [Joshua](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 333–334). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

“master”) of all the earth (cf. Ps. 97:5), He was certainly capable of getting His people across a river.

3. COMPLETION OF THE CROSSING (3:14–17)

Joshua 3:14–15a. The day of the crossing of the **Jordan**, the day when Israel was to enter Canaan, finally arrived. The people folded their tents and followed the ark-bearing **priests** to the brink of the **Jordan**. It was the time of the barley **harvest**, the month of Nisan (March–April), the first month of their year (4:19). The river was at **flood stage**—a foreboding sight to the priests and people and a severe test of their faith. Would they hesitate in fear or would they advance in faith, believing that what God had promised (about the water stopping, 3:13) would actually happen? ¹⁰

Joshua 3:15b–17. Dramatic things happened the moment the **priests** carrying the **ark** of the covenant stepped into the muddy, swirling waters. **The water from upstream stopped flowing** (cf. v. 13). Piling up **at a town called Adam**, waters from other streams were **completely cut off** so as not to enter the Jordan. **So the people crossed over opposite Jericho**. This is reminiscent of the Red (Reed) Sea crossing (cf. Ex. 15:8; Ps. 78:13).

Though the place named “Adam” is found only here it is usually identified with Tell ed-Damiyeh, about 16 miles north of the ford opposite Jericho. A wide stretch of riverbed therefore was dried up, allowing the people with their animals and baggage to hurry across (cf. Josh. 4:10).

¹⁰ Campbell, D. K. (1985). [Joshua](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 333–335). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

How could this sensational event occur? Many insist that this was no miracle since the event can be explained as a natural phenomenon. They point out that on December 8, 1267 an earthquake caused the high banks of the Jordan to collapse near Tell ed-Damiyeh, damming the river for about 10 hours. On July 11, 1927 another earthquake near the same location blocked the river for 21 hours. Of course, these stoppages did not occur during flood season. Admittedly God could have employed natural causes such as an earthquake and a landslide and the timing would have still made it a miraculous intervention. But does the biblical text allow for such an interpretation of this event?

Considering all the factors involved it seems best to view this occurrence as a special act of God brought about in a way unknown to man. Many supernatural elements were brought together:

- (1) The event came to pass as predicted (3:13, 15).
- (2) The timing was exact (v. 15).
- (3) The event took place when the river was at flood stage (v. 15).
- (4) The wall of water was held in place for many hours, possibly an entire day (v. 16).
- (5) The soft, wet river bottom became **dry** at once (v. 17).
- (6) The water returned immediately as soon as the people had crossed over and **the priests** came up out of the river (4:18).

Centuries later the Prophets Elijah and Elisha crossed the same river on dry ground to the east (2 Kings 2:8). Soon thereafter Elisha crossed back over the river on dry ground. If a natural phenomenon is necessary to explain the Israelites' crossing under Joshua, then one would have to conclude that two earthquakes occurred in quick sequence for Elijah and Elisha, which seems a bit presumptuous.

By this great miracle, the crossing of **the Jordan** River at flood stage by a nation of about 2 million people, God was glorified, Joshua was exalted, **Israel** was encouraged, and the Canaanites were terrorized. **For Israel the crossing of the Jordan meant they were irrevocably committed to a struggle against armies, chariots, and fortified cities.** They were also committed to walk by faith in the living God and to turn from walking according to the flesh as they had often done in the wilderness.

For believers today, crossing the Jordan represents passing from one level of the Christian life to another. (It is not a picture of a believer dying and entering heaven. For the Israelites Canaan was hardly heaven!) It is a picture of entering into spiritual warfare to claim what God has promised. This should mean the end of a life lived by human effort and the beginning of a life of faith and obedience.

D. The erecting of memorials (chap. 4)

Joshua 4:1–3. It was important that Israel never forget this great miracle. *So that the Israelites would remember how God acted on their behalf on this historic day* God had them erect a 12-stone memorial. This memorial celebrated the crossing of the Israelite multitudes over the dry riverbed of **the Jordan**. **The LORD** told **Joshua** to direct **12 men**, previously chosen (cf. 3:12), to carry **12 stones from the** bed of the river to the place of the first night's encampment.

Joshua 4:4–8. Calling **the 12** tribal representatives **together** Joshua instructed them. They were to return to **the middle of the** riverbed and **each** one was to bring back one **stone**. These stones would be a vivid reminder (**a memorial**) of God's work of

deliverance (cf. v. 24) and an effective means for the Israelites to teach their young (vv. 6–7; cf. vv. 21–24). The response of the 12 **men** was immediate and unquestioning. They could well have feared reentering the Jordan. After all, how long would it stay dry? Whatever fears they may have had were put aside and they unhesitatingly obeyed God's instructions.

Joshua 4:9. Joshua joined these men on their strange mission, and while they were wrenching up great stones from the bed of the river, he **set** another pile of **12 stones** (NIV marg.) in the riverbed itself to mark the precise **spot where the priests** stood with **the ark of the covenant**. This was apparently done on Joshua's own initiative and expressed his desire to have a personal reminder of God's faithfulness at the very beginning of the Conquest of Canaan.

Joshua 4:10–18. All was now accomplished that **the LORD ... commanded**. In anticipation of **the Jordan** flowing again the details of the crossing were reviewed.

- (1) **The priests** and **the ark remained** in the riverbed while **the people hurried** across (v. 10; cf. 3:17).
- (2) The **armed** men of the Transjordanian tribes, not hampered with families and goods, led the crossing (4:12–13).
- (3) As soon as all the people had crossed and the special mission for the memorials was completed, **the priests** left the riverbed—they were the first ones in, last ones out—and resumed their position at the head of the people (vv. 11, 15–17).
- (4) Immediately **the Jordan** resumed its flow (v. 18).

Thus, all the tribes participated in the crossing, though **Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh** sent only representative armies. The rest of those two and one-half tribes remained on the east side to protect their homes and cities (cf. v. 13). The population of males in those tribes 20 years of age or older totaled 136,930 (Num.

26:7, 18, 34). The **40,000** soldiers (Josh. 4:13) were 29 percent of that adult male population—less than one of every three adult males. Alexander Maclaren wrote, “The one point made prominent is the instantaneous rush back to the impatient torrent as soon as the curb was taken off. Like some horse rejoicing to be free, the tawny flood pours down, and soon everything looks ‘as aforetime’ except for the new rock, piled by human hands, round which the water chafed” (*Expositions of Holy Scripture*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1908, 3:119).

One can imagine what it must have been like for the Israelites to stand on the riverbank, watching the hurrying torrent covering up their path, and then lifting their eyes to look at the opposite side where they had stood that morning. There was no returning now. A new and exciting chapter in their history had begun.

Joshua 4:19–20. But this was no time for reflection. **Joshua led the people to Gilgal**, their first encampment in Canaan, about two miles from **Jericho**. **There the 12 stones ... taken out of the Jordan were set up**, perhaps in a small circle. The name Gilgal means “circle,” and may have been taken from an ancient circle of stones of pagan significance. If so, the more recent circle commemorating Yahweh’s great work would serve to counteract the idolatrous association of the site.

Joshua 4:21–23. The purpose of the stones was clearly pedagogical: to remind Israel for generations to come that it was **God** who brought them through **the Jordan** (cf. vv. 6–7) just as He had taken their fathers through **the Red Sea**.

But how were the **future** generations to know what the stones meant? The answer is clear. Parents were to teach God's ways and works to their children (cf. Deut. 6:4–7). A Jewish father was not to send his inquisitive child to a Levite for answers to his questions. The father was to answer them himself.

Joshua 4:24. However, besides serving as a visual aid for parental instruction of children, the memorial stones had a broader purpose: **that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful.** As the families of Israel spent their first night in the land, their hearts may well have been filled with uncertainty ¹¹ and fear. The mountains rising steeply to the west looked foreboding. But then the people looked at the 12 stones taken out of the Jordan and were reminded that God had done something great for them that day. Surely they could trust Him for the days ahead.

E. The consecration of the Israelites (5:1–12)

Under Joshua's leadership and by miraculous intervention some 2 million soldiers and civilians crossed the Jordan. A beachhead was quickly established at Gilgal, and from every human point of view it was time to strike immediately at the strongholds of Canaan. After all, *the morale of the people of Canaan had utterly collapsed in the face of one old and two recent news items* that had spread through the land:

- (a) that the God of Israel had dried up the Red (Reed) Sea (2:10);
- (b) that the Israelites had defeated the powerful kings of the Amorites in Transjordan (2:10);
- (c) that Yahweh had also dried up the waters of the Jordan River so that the Israelites could cross over into Canaan (5:1; cf. 4:24).

¹¹ Campbell, D. K. (1985). *Joshua*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 336). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

As this news spread, so did fear. What better time to strike a paralyzing blow? Certainly, the military leaders of Israel must have favored an immediate all-out offensive. But this was not God's plan. He is never in a hurry though His children often are. From God's point of view Israel was not yet ready to fight on Canaan's soil. There was some unfinished business—and it was spiritual in character. It was time for renewal. Consecration must precede conquest. Before God would lead Israel to victory, **He would lead them through three experiences:**

- (a) the renewal of circumcision (5:1–9),
- (b) the celebration of the Passover (v. 10), and
- (c) the appropriation of the land's produce (vv. 11–12).

1. THE RENEWAL OF CIRCUMCISION (5:1–9)

Joshua 5:1–3. When the nations of the land were filled with terror (cf. 4:24) the **LORD** commanded **Joshua** to **circumcise** the sons of Israel. He obeyed, even though it must have been difficult for him as a military commander to incapacitate his entire army in that hostile environment.

Joshua 5:4–7. An explanation is given. Though **all the men** of Israel **had been circumcised** before they left **Egypt**, they **died** in the wilderness because of their disobedience at Kadesh Barnea (Num. 20:1–13; cf. Num. 27:14; Deut. 32:51). **Their sons** born during the wilderness wanderings were not **circumcised**, which was further evidence of their parents' spiritual indifference. This sacred rite therefore needed to be performed on this new generation.

Joshua 5:8–9. After all the males were **circumcised ... the LORD** acknowledged the completed task by declaring, **Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.** Since the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, they did not practice circumcision until they were about to leave. No doubt the Egyptians prohibited the practice since it was reserved for their own priests and upper-class citizens. “The reproach of Egypt” may refer to the Egyptians’ mocking the Israelites for not having possessed the land of Canaan.

Another indication of this event’s importance is the fact that a new significance was attached to the name **Gilgal** (NIV marg.). Not only was the meaning “circle” to remind Israel of the memorial stones (see comments on 4:19–20), but now the related idea of “rolling” would commemorate Israel’s act of obedience at the same site. But **why was circumcision so important?** The Bible’s answer is clear. Stephen, in his dynamic speech before the Sanhedrin, declared that God “gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision” (Acts 7:8). *Circumcision, then, was no ordinary religious rite; it was rooted in the Abrahamic Covenant, a contract guaranteeing the everlasting continuation of Abraham’s seed and their ever-lasting possession of the land* (Gen. 17:7–8). In this connection God adopted circumcision as the “sign” or symbol of that contract (Gen. 17:11). God instructed Abraham that every male in his household as well as every male descendant of his was to be circumcised. And Abraham immediately obeyed (Gen. 17:23–27).

But why did God choose circumcision as the symbol of His covenant with Abraham and his seed? Why not some other sign or work? *The act of circumcision itself symbolized a complete separation from the widely prevalent sins of the flesh: adultery, fornication, and sodomy.* Further, the rite had spiritual overtones not only

in relation to sexual conduct but in every phase of life. “Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer” (Deut. 10:16; cf. Deut. 30:6; Jer. 4:4; Rom. 2:28–29).

So, Israel was to understand that circumcision was not simply a cutting of flesh; also their lives were to be holy. This is why at Gilgal God said, in effect, “Before I fight your battles in Canaan you must have this mark of the covenant in your flesh.” **Joshua** understood the cruciality of this divine requirement and led all males in unhesitating obedience.

Paul affirmed that a Christian has been “circumcised” in Christ (Col. 2:11). This circumcision is spiritual not physical, relating not to an external organ but to one’s inward being, the heart. This circumcision takes place at the time of salvation when the Holy Spirit joins a believer to Christ. At that time one’s sinful nature is judged (Col. 2:13). A Christian is to recognize that fact (Rom. 6:1–2) even though his carnal nature remains a part of him during this life. He is to treat his carnal nature as a judged and condemned (though not yet executed) enemy.

2. THE CELEBRATION OF THE PASSOVER (5:10)

Joshua 5:10. Israel, **camped at Gilgal**, now kept **the Passover**. Without circumcision they would have been unqualified to participate in this important event (Ex. 12:43–44, 48). Interestingly the nation arrived across the Jordan just in time to celebrate the Passover on **the 14th day of the month** (Ex. 12:2, 6). God’s timing is always precise! **This was only the third Passover the nation had observed.** The first was observed in Egypt the night before their deliverance from bondage and oppression

(Ex. 12:1–28). The second was observed at Mount Sinai just before the people broke camp and moved toward Canaan (Num. 9:1–5).

Apparently, the Passover was not observed during the wilderness wanderings, but now at Gilgal in Canaan the feast was again observed. The recent Jordan crossing was so similar to the crossing of the Red (Reed) Sea that vivid memories were brought back to those who had been in Egypt (persons under 20 at the time of the Exodus were not excluded from Canaan). No doubt many an Israelite remembered how his father killed a lamb and sprinkled its blood on the doorpost and lintel. Those now in Canaan could still hear the awful death cries of the Egyptians' firstborn. Then there was the excitement of the midnight departure, the terror of the Egyptian pursuit, and the thrill of walking between walls of water to escape Egypt.

Now they were reliving it again. As the lambs were slain, they were assured that as the Red Sea crossing was followed by the destruction of the Egyptians, so the crossing of the Jordan would be followed by the defeat of the Canaanites. So, remembering the past was an excellent preparation for the tests of the future.

3. THE APPROPRIATION OF THE LAND'S PRODUCE (5:11–12)

Joshua 5:11. The morning after Israel had eaten the Passover and were prepared for battle, they ate some of the produce of the land. Since they gave evidence of wanting to be fully obedient to the Law of God it is probable that they first brought the wave-offering of a sheaf of grain, prescribed in Leviticus 23:10–14. Then the people ate freely of the harvest, including unleavened cakes and parched corn.

Roasted ears of **grain** are still considered a delicacy in the Middle East and are eaten as a substitute for bread. God had promised to bring Israel into a land of abundance, “a land with wheat and barley¹² vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil, and honey” (Deut. 8:8). Now at last they had tasted the fruit of the land and realized it was a foretaste of blessings to come.

Joshua 5:12. The next day **the manna stopped**. For 40 long years it had continued (cf. Ex. 16:4–5), but now it ceased as suddenly as it had begun, demonstrating that its provision was not a matter of chance but of special providence. It is noteworthy that *God did not discontinue the manna when Israel despised it* (Num. 11:6), or even when the unbelieving generation turned away from Kadesh Barnea and wandered in the trackless wilderness. At least for the sake of their children He continued to give it, till they grew and entered the land of promise. Then God stopped performing this miracle since natural **food** was available.

II. The Conquest of Canaan (5:13–12:24)

A. Introduction: The divine Commander (5:13–15)

God had just brought the Israelites through three events: the rite of circumcision, the celebration of the Passover, and eating the produce of Canaan. All of these were for Israel’s edification. Next came an experience for Joshua alone. It too was extremely meaningful and would shortly be shared with the people.

¹² Campbell, D. K. (1985). *Joshua*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 338). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Joshua 5:13. It seemed obvious that the next step would be the capture of **Jericho**. But since no divine message of instruction had yet come to **Joshua** (as before the crossing of the Jordan), he went out to reconnoiter the seemingly impregnable city. Was Joshua perplexed as he viewed the secure walls of Jericho? The spies reported at Kadesh Barnea that the cities of Canaan were “large, with walls up to the sky” (Deut. 1:28). Despite Joshua’s long military experience he had never led an attack on a fortified city that was prepared for a long siege. In fact, of all the walled cities in Palestine, Jericho was probably the most invincible. There was also the question of armaments. Israel’s army had no siege engines, no battering rams, no catapults, and no moving towers. Their only weapons were slings,¹³ arrows, and spears—which were like straws against the walls of Jericho. Joshua knew the battle of Jericho must be won because, now that they had crossed the Jordan, Israel’s troops had no place to which they could retreat. Further, they could not bypass the city because that would leave their women, children, goods, and cattle at Gilgal exposed to certain destruction.

Pondering these heavy thoughts, Joshua was startled when something came across his sphere of vision. **He lifted up** his eyes to see a Soldier brandishing His **sword**. Instinctively he challenged the Stranger, saying in effect, “Who goes there—friend or foe?” If He were a friend, an Israelite, He was off limits and had some explaining to do. Especially was this true since Joshua had given no command for anyone to draw a sword! If the Stranger were an enemy, **Joshua** was ready to fight!

¹³ Campbell, D. K. (1985). [Joshua](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 338–339). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Joshua 5:14. The response was startling and revealing. Something occurred that convinced Joshua this was no mortal soldier. As with Abraham under the oak at Mamre, Jacob at Peniel, Moses at the burning bush, and the two disciples at Emmaus, there was a flash of revelation and Joshua knew he was in the presence of God. It seems clear that Joshua was indeed talking to the Angel of the Lord, another appearance in Old Testament times of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (cf. 6:2).

The **Commander of the army of the LORD** stood **with a drawn** sword, indicating that He would fight with and for Israel. But the sword also shows that God's long-suffering delay of judgment was over and the iniquity of the Amorites was now full (cf. Gen. 15:16). The Israelites were to be the instruments by whom judicial punishment would fall.

What kind of a military force did this divine Commander lead? The "army of the LORD" was surely not limited to the army of Israel though it may have been included. More specifically, it referred to the angelic host, the same "army" of heaven that later surrounded Dothan when Elisha and his servant appeared to be greatly outnumbered by the Aramean army (2 Kings 6:8–17 ¹⁴ 2 Kings 6:8–17). In the Garden of Gethsemane at the time of His arrest, Jesus referred to this heavenly army when He said that 12 legions of angels were ready to defend Him (Matt. 26:53). In Hebrews 1:14 they are described as "ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation." Though invisible, they serve and care for God's children in times

¹⁴ Campbell, D. K. (1985). [Joshua](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 339). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

of great need. **Joshua**, recognizing his heavenly visitor with the drawn sword, **fell on his face and worshiped, saying, in effect, "Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening."**

Joshua 5:15. The reply of the Lord to Joshua was brief but urgent. Remove **your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy**. The presence of the holy God sanctified this spot in a strange and defiled land (cf. a similar command to Moses, Ex. 3:5).

This was a deeply significant experience for Joshua. He had anticipated a battle between two opposing armies, Israelite and Canaanite. He had thought this was to be his war and that he was to be the general-in-charge. But then he confronted the divine Commander and learned that the battle was the Lord's. The top general of **the LORD's army** had not come to be an idle Spectator of the conflict, or even an ally. He was in complete charge and would shortly reveal His plans for capturing the citadel of Jericho.

How comforting all this was for **Joshua**. He did not need to bear the heavy burden and responsibility of leadership alone. By removing his sandals he gladly acknowledged that *this battle and the entire conquest of Canaan was God's conflict* and that *he was merely God's servant*.

B. The central campaign (chaps. 6–8)

The pattern of divine strategy for the conquest of Canaan was based on geographic factors. From their camp at Gilgal near the Jordan River the Israelites could see steep hills to the west. Jericho controlled the way of ascent into these mountains,

and Ai, another fortress, stood at the head of the ascent. If the Israelites were to ¹⁵ capture the hill country, they must certainly take Jericho and Ai. This would put them on top of the hill country and in control of the central ridge, having driven a wedge between the northern and southern sections of Canaan. Israel could then engage the armies of the south in battle followed by the more remote enemy in the north. *But first, Jericho must fall—and it would if Joshua and the people followed the Lord's plan of action.*

¹⁵ Campbell, D. K. (1985). Joshua. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 339–340). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

JOSHUA

Commissioning the Leader Preparing the People		Conquering the Enemy		Dividing the Spoil		Warning the Victors			
Invasion of land		Subjection of land		Distribution of land		The Conclusion			
		CENTRAL CAMPAIGN		PHASE ONE		PHASE TWO		PHASE THREE	
The commission (1)		Jericho (6)		Southern campaign (10)		Rueben, Gad, ½ Manasseh (13)		Benjamin (18)	
The spying (2)		Defeat at Ai (7)		Northern campaign and survey (11)		Caleb's autobiography (14)		Simeon, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, Dan, Joshua (19)	
The Jordan (3)		Victory at Ai (8)		Summary by kings (12)		Judah (15)		Cities of refuge (20)	
The memorials (4)		Gibeonites (9)				Ephraim (16)		Levites—48 towns (21)	
The consecration (5)						½ Manasseh (17)		Civil war threat (22)	
CHAPTERS 1-5		CHAPTERS 6-9		CHAPTERS 10-12		CHAPTERS 13-17		CHAPTERS 18-19	
CHAPTERS 20-21		CHAPTER 22		CHAPTERS 23-24					

OUTSIDE CANAAN / PROMISES GIVEN

INSIDE CANAAN / PROMISES FULFILLED

Theme

Obedient faith brings abundant blessing.

Key Verses

1:8; 24:14-15

Christ in Joshua

Typified by Joshua, a victorious leader whose name means "Yahweh is salvation"; pictured in Rahab's scarlet cord, which symbolizes safety through Christ's blood