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## *Part One*

# PREPARATION FOR THE CONQUEST

(1:1–5:15)

### **I. INITIAL ORDERS (1:1–2:24)**

THE JOURNEY from Egypt to Canaan, described in the earlier books of the Old Testament, has now reached its final stage. The multitudes of Israelites are encamped on the eastern side of the Jordan, on the plains of Moab just north of the Dead Sea. Since the day of God's command to Pharaoh, "Let my people go," the expedition of the Israelites has demonstrated very visibly that this is no project of human design: the directions came originally from God; the daily sustenance was supernatural; the obstacles were overcome by miraculous help; and discipline was meted out by divine wisdom. Now, for the unfinished task, a new day sets in motion the communication of the chain of command: God speaks to Joshua (1:1-9); Joshua commands his officers (1:10-11a; 2:1); the officers in turn command the people (1:11-18). This is the day for the initial orders of the holy war of occupation.

**A. The Mobilization (1:1-18)****1. Charge to the Commander (1:1-9)**

When the thirty days' mourning over Moses' death had come to an end (Deut. 34:8), and when all the tears of deep grief (no professional mourning here!) over the departure of this man of God had cleansed the spiritual eyes to see more clearly from the perspective of the eternities, God spoke from heaven directly to Joshua and reiterated his appointment as successor to Moses which had been given him earlier by Moses.<sup>1</sup> The work of God must go on. His servants die, but God does not die, no less His divine program. "Moses my servant is dead," God said to Joshua; "now, therefore . . . thou . . ." (1:2). Joshua was now sovereignly appointed as the man of the hour, but he was not to forget the one he was succeeding. God reminded him of three important truths concerning Moses' experience: first, that to Moses was spoken God's promise of the land (1:3); second, that God was with Moses in his ministry of leadership (1:5); and third, that the law of God delivered by Moses was to continue as the people's law of life (1:7). These vital reminders to Joshua were certainly to serve him often in the arduous and trying years to come as he would reminisce about his service to his human master Moses and about this day of divine appointment.

But as noted earlier in the Introduction, while this book of the Bible is about the man Joshua, it is primarily about the people of God. In the commission to Joshua, God used the term "thou"—as successor to Moses— but also "and all this people . . . even . . . the children of Israel"

<sup>1</sup>See Numbers 27:15-23.

(1:2).<sup>2</sup> Each individual Israelite was a soul loved by his Maker and Lord, and there was a beautiful dwelling-lot awaiting him in the land of inheritance. He, with Joshua his leader, was commanded to arise, cross the Jordan, and claim the land (1:2). This was the extent of the commission in its most general terms.

Next God spoke in more detail about the land to be occupied (1:3-4). The extent of it was enormous.<sup>3</sup> From the description one can visualize Joshua as standing facing the west, hearing God describe the boundaries. To Joshua's left was the distant southern boundary, "the wilderness," or "desert," the region west and south of the Dead Sea which formed a natural boundary between Canaan and the Sinai Peninsula. Then Joshua's eyes were turned to the distant peaks of the northern limits, "this Lebanon," the mountain range far north-northwest of the Sea of Galilee. Behind Joshua, to the east, lay the eastern boundary, the Euphrates;<sup>4</sup> while in the direction of the setting sun, under the skyline of the Judean hills, spread the western limit, "the great sea." In between the four extremities described was Canaan itself, here represented by one of the major peoples then occupying it, the Hittites. This was the land offered by God. The com-

<sup>2</sup>At only one other place in this commission are the Israelites referred to explicitly (v. 6). But the spirit and principles of the commission unquestionably apply to the nation, as Joshua is charged to lead them.

<sup>3</sup>A study of the passages in the Bible where the land promise is recorded fails to indicate that the one to whom the promise was related (whether Abraham, Moses, or Joshua) had any questions about the details of the geographical boundaries. Whatever the description, the impact of enormity was surely transmitted; the hearer evidently was content to let history write out the boundaries in due course of time.

<sup>4</sup>It was not until the reigns of David and Solomon that Israel's dominion reached this far east.

mand was to occupy *all* of it, not just to register a theoretical claim to it.

But there were enemies in the land to be occupied, and their expulsion was the subject of God's next words to Joshua (1:5-6). A lifetime of continuous victory over all enemies was assured Joshua (and therefore the people) through faith and courage on the basis of the un-failing presence and miraculous help of God: "I will be with thee; I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (1:5). The success and prosperity which God promised had their source therefore in God Himself. Without God, there would be defeat; with God, success. But woven into the sovereign design of success for Joshua and the people was the human strand of the condition of their obedience: "Only be strong . . . to observe to *do* according to all the law" (1:7). They were to magnify the Word by their lips, and edify their souls by continually meditating on its precepts. Then *doing* according to the law would be the inevitable fruit.

The enemies in the land? "Be not affrighted, neither be thou dismayed: for Jehovah thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest" (1:9).

\* \* \*

The charge to Joshua is filled with lessons for Christians on enjoying spiritual success and prosperity. Successful living is a promise of God, a gift of God, attainable by the help of God. Its potentialities are enormous, waiting only to be appropriated. Enemies of the soul—Satan, the world, and the flesh—need to be driven out, but they are enemies of God, and so He promises all the help needed for conquering them. The condition laid to the Christian is costly but absolutely necessary: living

in constant obedience in the light of God's Word. The blessings of victorious living come by *invitation* to the Christian, but the conditions for its fulfillment come by *mandate*. Christians, like Joshua, cannot escape the divine words loud and clear: "Have not I *commanded* thee?" (1:9).

2. *Charge to the People* (1:10-18)

Jehovah God, Commander-in-chief of Israel, began His war against the Canaanites by charging Joshua to lead the people into the land. Down through the levels of command, the orders were delivered to bring a host of two million people<sup>5</sup> to their feet to find their places in the complex military strategy of such a vast campaign. The reader of the book of Joshua must continually prod his imagination to visualize the awesome task of General Joshua to lead such a large host of people into the land. The fact that the large size of the Israelite band is not made a prominent factor in the record of the book of Joshua speaks well for the orderliness and discipline with which Joshua maneuvered the hosts. In strict military fashion, reflecting the training he had received under Moses, Joshua delegated the officers under him to mobilize the people to the state of readiness. In a sense they had always been ready, because they knew the journey was not over. But the rigors of the Transjordan campaign demanded a time of respite in camp, which

<sup>5</sup>The number of Israelite male warriors reaching the plains of Moab was 601,730 (Num. 26:51). Assuming the number of all other males to be approximately the same, and the total number of females to equal the total number of males, the total population must have been approximately two million. See Irving L. Jensen, *Numbers*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964), pp. 16-17, 107-108.

they were afforded. Now they must prepare to move, which involved provisions, tents, cattle, and the gathering of fruit and grain from the fields of the plain.<sup>6</sup> The key word of Joshua's order to the people was *prepare*. Joshua anticipated that the Israelites would be crossing the Jordan within three days, though as it turned out, the extended trip of the spies (chap. 2) apparently delayed the crossing by at least three days.<sup>7</sup>

Joshua's second order of business in mobilizing the troops for action concerned the special group comprising the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh (1:12-18). The key word delivered to them was *remember*. They had earlier agreed, in return for being allotted the rich pastureland of Transjordan, to help their brethren possess the land west of the Jordan before settling down in their own territories (Num. 32). Now Joshua brought to their remembrance this promise they had made, and called for the mobilization of their "mighty men of valor," an army of about 40,000.<sup>8</sup> Their reply was enthusiastic, and revealed all the elements of a spirit of devotion and cooperation (1:16-18):

- 1) *obedience*: "we will do," "we will go," "we will hearken"

<sup>6</sup>Daily manna was still being given them at this time; but they were not forbidden to eat of the fruit of Moab. Besides, their cattle needed to be cared for.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. 1:11, 2:22, and 3:2.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Joshua 4:13. The recent census of these two and one-half tribes disclosed there were 110,000 male warriors. Joshua's call for "*all* the mighty men of valor" must not be interpreted as though Joshua was calling for all of the 110,000 men, for (1) the protection of the women, children, and cattle demanded a guard, and (2) mere numbers of warriors do not determine victory. Joshua's battle plans obviously demanded only the 40,000.

- 2) *faith and hope*: “only Jehovah thy God be with thee” (they knew there would be no victory without God)
- 3) *intolerance of sin*: “he . . . that shall rebel . . . shall be put to death”
- 4) *support by encouragement*: “be [thou] strong and of good courage”

### B. The Reconnaissance (2:1-24)

Joshua had utter confidence in God to lead Israel to victory, as shown in his charge to the people. But this did not mean a laying down of arms to watch God work. The plans of military strategy, the calculated risk of casualties, and the bloody clashes of battle were all to be part of the projected campaigns of conquest. To spy the land before launching the attack was not to doubt God; it was to fulfill the obligation of wise military strategy as to the *manner* and *course* of battle, and then commit the outcome to God.

The most obvious feature of this intriguing chapter is the fact that while it is an account about the mission of two young spies, a woman by the name of Rahab is the main character throughout most of its verses (vv. 2-22). How the story of Rahab is woven into the main plot about the spies is shown in the following double outline for the chapter:

THE SPIES	VERSES	RAHAB
1. Spies are dispatched	1	
2. Spies are protected	2-7	Rahab's works
3. Spies are informed	8-11	Rahab's faith
4. Spies promise safety	12-22	Rahab's reward
5. Spies give report	23-24	



The key paragraph is 2:8-11 because this vital information given to the spies by Rahab constituted the essence of their report to Joshua.

The place of Rahab in the history of Israel was two-fold. *First*, she was chosen by God to provide the information which He desired Israel to have at this time, namely, that He had melted the hearts of the enemy in fear of Joshua and his hosts, even as Moses had prophesied earlier (Exodus 15:13-18). *Second*, Rahab would be for all centuries to come a vivid example of the sinner, through whom God accomplishes His purposes and in whose heart He works a change. Concerning this latter, it is to be observed that a harlot<sup>9</sup> is Israel's helper. Rahab the harlot is cited in the genealogical record of Jesus (Matt. 1:5); and James and the author of Hebrews commend her for her works and faith (James 2:25; Heb. 11:31).

### 1. *The Spies Are Dispatched* (2:1)

The people were camping in the area known as Shittim<sup>10</sup> when Joshua secretly dispatched the two young<sup>11</sup> men to spy out the land on the other side of the Jordan, particularly in the area of Jericho. The reconnaissance project was apparently kept secret from the Israelites,

<sup>9</sup>Some feel that the word translated "harlot" was the official designation of the woman of the lodging house, without in itself designating whether she was an innkeeper or a "pleasure-woman" (Berkeley Version, footnote). But it is to be observed that the phrase "Rahab the harlot" appears also in two instances in the New Testament (Heb. 11:31; James 2:25), where the designation of Rahab's profession seems to be emphasized for a special reason.

<sup>10</sup>Shittim was located in the foothills of the eastern edge of the Jordan Valley, off the northeast corner of the Dead Sea. The distance from it to Jericho was about fourteen miles, with the Jordan dividing the distance equally.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. 6:23.

very likely because Joshua wanted to avoid a repetition of the disastrous sequel to the majority report to Moses of the twelve spies (of which he was one of the minority of two) about forty years previously. That only two spies were sent indicates that the reconnaissance was obviously only for the immediate vicinity of the fortress at Jericho, which did not call for a large expedition. No doubt also the two men Joshua chose were men of strong faith like himself and Caleb, who would turn in an affirmative recommendation for attack despite human odds against them. For the object of the spies' mission was to determine not *whether* but *when* and *how* an attack should be made. Joshua's training in the wilderness was paying off every day.

Joshua's special interest in Jericho reveals his wisdom as a military strategist. A study of a topographical map of Canaan discloses the excellent location of Jericho as a bridgehead for all subsequent advances to the west, south, and north. Jericho was located on a large fertile plain at the foot of the Judean hills and at the entrance to one of their passageways. Here also was ample camping ground for the nonmilitary Israelite hosts while the warriors were off to battle. To the general of the army of Israel, the conquest of Canaan depended on gaining the bridgehead of Jericho.

## *2. The Spies Are Protected (2:2-7)*

The spies could not conceal their identity as Israelites as they walked the streets of Jericho, mixing with the people and posing as their brethren. They found a lodging place for the night in the house of Rahab, unaware that they had already been spotted as spies. The in-

formed king of Jericho sent men to Rahab's house to apprehend them, but believing Rahab's subtle lie that the spies had already left, the king's men continued their pursuit outside the city's gate, while Joshua's men hid safely on Rahab's roof, under stalks of flax.

There can be no question but that Rahab lied. Her lie was the protection of the spies. Did therefore the end (protection) justify the means (lying)? The answer must be negative, since lying is always sin, and sin is never justified by God. Rahab's actions must be interpreted in light of the total picture. First, one must believe that God could have protected the spies without Rahab's lie. Further, the commendation of Rahab's words in James 2:25 is not commendation of the lie which she adopted in the weakness of her flesh (and not beyond the scope of God's forgiveness), but of the selfless act of doing something to help God's cause in defiance of her own national ties.<sup>12</sup>

### 3. *The Spies Are Informed* (2:8-11)

Before the spies went to sleep, Rahab opened her heart to them, and revealed the reason for her protection of their lives. What she said to the spies would document their report and recommendation to Joshua concerning the Canaanites. Rahab was emphatic in her disclosures:

- 1) *her own conclusion*: that the Israelites would take Canaan by the help of their Lord: "I know that Jehovah hath given you the land" (2:9).
- 2) *her people's defeatism*: that the Canaanites were fearful and benumbed after hearing the report of

<sup>12</sup>Compare also the actions of the Hebrew midwives (Exodus 1:17 ff.) and the woman at Bahurim (II Sam. 17:18-20).

God's drying up the Red Sea and Israel's slaughter of the Amorites (2:10).

- 3) *her own faith*: this was faith in seed stage, identifying Israel's Lord as God over all—heaven above, and earth beneath (2:11).

4. *The Spies Promise Safety* (2:12-22)

In return for Rahab's sparing their lives, the spies gratefully consented to her request for protection. Rahab and the other members of her father's household would be spared death in the day of Israel's assault on Jericho on three conditions: (1) they should remain in the house during the assault (2:19)—the very house which was the haven for the spies; (2) a cord of scarlet thread or yarn should hang from the very window through which the spies were let down by a strong rope (2:18); and (3) the mission of the spies must be kept secret (2:20). On Rahab's acceptance of the conditions, the spies departed into the wilds of the nearby mountain,<sup>13</sup> while she lost no time in binding the scarlet thread in the window, *sealing her deliverance*. What a beautiful picture of the believer's salvation, very much like the earlier experience of the Israelites in Egypt, when God said to them, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exodus 12:13). When Joshua's army saw the scarlet thread, they would spare the lives of all in the house.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup>This very likely was the mountain region of limestone cliffs and caves south of Jericho and off the northwest corner of the Dead Sea, well suited for hiding. (It was in the caves of this vicinity that the Dead Sea scrolls were later hid, to be found twenty centuries after.)

<sup>14</sup>Some Bible students see in the scarlet thread a symbol of the redemptive blood of Christ (cf. footnote, Berkeley Version). A very clear illustration of salvation in this story is the deliverance for those being found "in the house" (2:19).

### 5. *The Spies Report* (2:23-24)

Having eluded the pursuers from Jericho, Joshua's spies after three days' hiding left the mountain area, crossed the deep, flooded Jordan—obviously by swimming—and returned to Joshua in the night to recount all that had befallen them. Their own personal experiences were merely the background to the main report they delivered to Joshua. That report is concisely recorded in the last verse of chapter 2: "Truly Jehovah hath delivered into our hands all the land; and moreover all the inhabitants of the land do melt away before us" (2:24). One can sense the thrill of expectancy of victory that surged through Joshua to hear such news. Whether he slept through the rest of the night or used the hours for last-minute preparations, he was up early in the morning, organizing the hosts of Israel for the assault on Jericho (3:1).

An important lesson for Christian living derived from this chapter of Joshua concerns the Christian's *knowing the enemy*. Trust in God's help for Christlike living does not preclude being forewarned of the tactics of Satan and being alert to this one who goes about seeking whom he may devour, as he works through such destroyers as lust, pride, disobedience, doubt, discouragement, and neglect. Just as the demons despaired in the presence of Jesus, enemies which need to be driven from the Christian's life will melt for fear, and thus be conquerable, when they see God as *Lord of the Christian's heart* leading His child to victory by faith. It behooves the Christian thus to live *daily* following God his Lord.

## II. MILITARY PREPARATION (3:1–5:1)

Ever since leaving Egypt, the Israelites had not been required of God to take the initiative to *reach* the land of Canaan. They simply followed the pillar of cloud. Now, to *possess* the land they must take the initiative to drive out the idolatrous nations already inhabiting it. So the offensive was now theirs. The Canaanites were waiting—though with melting hearts of fear—for the arrival of the conqueror. It was Joshua's task, as general of the army, to bring his hosts into tactical position for the first clash, identify their leadership, and measure their might. This was the military aspect of the Israelites' preparation for battles to come.

### A. Tactical Positioning

Joshua's objective was to gain the bridgehead of the fortress and plain of Jericho from which he could then launch all subsequent assaults westward, southward, and northward. It was basically a strategy of position, and he must have felt himself very fortunate to have such a tactically blessed location as his first objective—not to speak of the fact that he now knew its people had, in spirit, already given up.

Before the hour of his siege against Jericho, Joshua encountered two major tasks: (1) crossing the Jordan and (2) encamping near Jericho. For the encampment, Joshua chose a plain on the eastern side of Jericho (4:19) which was to be later named Gilgal (5:9*b*). The crossing of the Jordan presented the major problems, some of which were:

- 1) The Jordan River was in its flood stage (3:15*b*) in the month of April during the grain harvest season. At

such a time there was no possibility of wading across the otherwise shallow ford opposite Jericho.

2) The number of the hosts of Israelites was legion. To funnel across, at one spot, two million people with cattle and possessions was not only unimaginable but unwise, militarily speaking.

3) The crossing should be completed in the daylight hours of one day.

The three days of encampment along the shores of the Jordan (3:1-2) provided the time necessary for final preparations on the eve of battle, and it was during this time that Joshua was given assurance that *somehow*, through wonders of God, his people would be able to pass over: "Tomorrow Jehovah will do wonders among you" (3:5). God apparently withheld the details of the miraculous crossing until the morning of the crossing itself (3:7).

A survey of Joshua 3 and 4 reveals the underlying intent of the historical record of Israel's movements at this time. The following chart will be helpful in understanding the basic organization—somewhat hidden—of these two chapters:

#### JOSHUA 3:1–5:1

3:1	3:17	4:1	4:14	4:15	4:18	4:19	5:1
CROSSING THE JORDAN						ENCAMPING AT GILGAL	
PEOPLE		TWELVE LEADERS		PRIESTS		ALL	
LEADERSHIP PROMINENT HERE						STRENGTH PROMINENT HERE	

Geographically, the account is made up of two parts: crossing the Jordan, and encamping at Gilgal. In the section of the crossing, the *main* characters of each of the three parts are (1) the people, (2) the twelve leaders, (3) the priests.

When the chronological sequence<sup>15</sup> of the narrative of the Jordan crossing is sought in this section of Joshua (3:1–4:18), the order of action is the following:

1) On the day before the crossing, the people were instructed (a) as to their spiritual preparation: to sanctify themselves (3:5); (b) as to the march: to keep a distance of 2,000 cubits (3,000 feet) from the ark, following the ark as they began to see the priests bearing it (3:3-4).

2) On the morning of the crossing Jehovah gave instructions to Joshua concerning the details of the crossing. Joshua instructed the priests, the twelve leaders, and the people of their duties for the day (3:8-13).

3) March toward the river began (3:14). Joshua and the twelve leaders apparently followed immediately after the priests; then the people.

4) Priests bearing the ark reached the swollen river line and dipped their feet into the water at its edge, at which instant the river began to drop, being miraculously held back "in one head" upstream at Adam,<sup>16</sup> a city

<sup>15</sup>The section 3:1–4:18 (crossing the Jordan) was composed by the biblical author in a manner often found in Hebrew biblical history, similar to that of the flood and creation narratives. The pattern is first to recount the story to its completion, in general form, and then to backtrack chronologically, to amplify parts of the narrative without grammatically indicating such a backtrack. The continuity of this section is preserved when one reads 4:1 and 4:15 respectively thus: "And it came to pass . . . that Jehovah . . . [had spoken] unto Joshua, saying . . ." (cf. 3:12); "And Jehovah . . . [had spoken] unto Joshua, saying . . ."

<sup>16</sup>The reading of the Berkeley Version of 3:16 suggests the possibility that the wall or dam of water extended from the place of the crossing to Adam.



sixteen to twenty miles north of the Jericho ford (3:16).

5) The riverbanks and bed drained of the flow of water, and the ground under the feet of the priests (who had advanced from the water's edge toward the midst of the river) dried at least to firmness. The Israelites, led by Joshua and the twelve men, now walked over quickly<sup>17</sup> on firm ground, "until all the nation were passed clean over the Jordan" (3:16-17). The two and a half tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh (including 40,000 warriors) were among the hosts (4:12-13).

6) The twelve men representing the twelve tribes each lifted a heavy stone from the river's bed where the priests were standing, to be eventually set up as a memorial at Gilgal (4:1-8, 20).

7) Joshua then set up a memorial of twelve stones in the Jordan at the spot where the priests were standing (4:9).<sup>18</sup>

8) At Joshua's signal, the priests bearing the ark left their spot in the Jordan bed and joined the Israelites on the western shore of the river. At this moment, "the waters of the Jordan returned unto their place, and went over all its banks, as aforetime" (4:18).

### **B. Recognition of Leadership (3:1-4:18)**

While it is true that the Israelites were given a visible

<sup>17</sup>Cf. 4:10. The haste was to accomplish the crossing before dark. "This could easily have been accomplished in half a day, if the people formed a procession of a mile or upwards in breadth." C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1950), p. 47.

<sup>18</sup>It was fitting that a memorial be placed at the location of the deliverance, in addition to the one to be set up at camp.

demonstration of the omnipotence of God by this miraculous parting of the Jordan, even as the Red Sea had been parted for their ancestors, the first lesson they were taught was that of leadership—for there would have been no miracle if first they had not obeyed in following the ark. The predominant lesson of 3:1–4:18 is that of leadership. Triumphant possession of Canaan demanded Israel's unceasing devotion to two leaders: God, the divine Commander, and Joshua, God's appointed general. It was vital that the divine leadership be identified and impressed upon the people at the commencement of the campaign.

### 1. *Divine Leadership*

The ark of the covenant of Jehovah was the visible symbol which God used at this time to direct the Israelites' eyes to His leadership. The ark, by symbol, was Jehovah. The *Wycliffe Bible Commentary* suggests this literal rendering of 3:11: "Behold the ark of the covenant! The Lord (*'adon*) of all the earth is about to proceed before you into the Jordan."<sup>19</sup> It was really Jehovah—not Joshua or priests or other leaders—who was at the lead of the nation. "When ye see the ark . . . go after it" (3:3). The ark would show the way over an uncharted course: "that ye may know the way by which ye must go; for ye have not passed this way heretofore" (3:4). Further, the presence of the ark would miraculously touch off the awe-inspiring sight of a river suddenly parted. The ark was the key to the miracle. This fact is first shown in the account by the oft-repeated

<sup>19</sup>John Rea, "Joshua," *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), p. 210.

phrase “priests that bear the ark” (3:8, 13, 14, 15, 17) and its relation to the event. The clearest evidence, however, is explicitly given in Joshua’s words in connection with the stones of memorial which were to be later set up at Gilgal: “Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of Jehovah: *when it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off*” (4:7).

The divine leadership was impressed on the people in another way. This came by way of the command of preparation, “Sanctify yourselves.” Military preparation—men, arms, food, water—was one thing. Spiritual preparation to follow Jehovah as Commander-in-chief was another. For this, the people must sanctify themselves. Joshua was not calling for ablutions for the body, nor washings of the clothes. This was a command to examine the soul, to confess sin, and to be in right relationship to the One who was going to lead to victory.

## 2. *Human Leadership*

As God was with Moses, so would He be with Joshua. This was the essence of God’s appointment of Joshua to succeed Moses. Now had come the time to demonstrate visibly and impress indelibly upon the hearts of the people that Joshua was their leader in behalf of God. Joshua’s leading them through a miraculously parted river would be the first of his credentials for the days and years to follow. This is what God said on the morning of the crossover: “This day will I *begin* to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee” (3:7). That the people reacted favorably is shown by the record

written after the event was over: "On that day Jehovah magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life" (4:14).

### C. Recognition of Strength (4:19–5:1)

In the midst of the awesome spectacle of the raging torrent subdued and parted *for them*, the Israelites were given the immediate impression of God *before them* (cf. 3:11). Now, having followed their leaders to the land of Canaan, their minds were stirred to reflect more intently on the *strength* of the One who led them thus, and who would continue to lead. This accounts for the added emphasis of Joshua's interpretation of the meaning of the stones of memorial which he had set up at Gilgal (4:19-24). Earlier, he had attached the significance of *leadership* (4:6-7). Now, he exalts the *might* of God, a truth of ageless significance that should bolster Israel's confidence in the present task, and, conversely, intimidate her enemy: "For Jehovah your God dried up the waters of the Jordan . . . that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of Jehovah, *that it is mighty*; that ye may fear Jehovah your God for ever" (4:23-24).

The miracle of the Jordan crossing left no possible suggestion of mere coincidence or favorable chance. This is confirmed by the reactions of the enemies of the land, whose hearts melted in fear when the report reached them that "Jehovah had dried up the waters of the Jordan" (5:1). Actually, the Jordan miracle was a supernatural creation of a complex of many factors:

- 1) the fulfillment of the foretelling of the event (3:13-14)

2) the exact timing of the event—the priests dipping their feet (3:15)

3) the rising up “in one heap” of a wall of water<sup>20</sup> (3:16)

4) the fact that this happened at flood stage (3:15)

5) whatever was the retaining power or “wall,” it had to hold back the onrushing Jordan north of the spot, including all its tributaries, throughout most of a day

6) in very short time the drained soft river bottom became firm as “dry ground” (3:17)

7) the timing of the returning flow of the Jordan, as the priests with the ark left the river bottom (4:18)

The might of their Leader was the message of the day, as the hosts of Israel encamped on the east border of Jericho<sup>21</sup> on the tenth day of the first month, very appropriately on the fortieth anniversary of the preparation of the paschal lamb which anticipated the exodus from Egypt (Exodus 12:3).

The Christian’s quest for the secret of victorious living is aided much by the experience of Israel crossing the Jordan. The major obstacle of the Christian’s entrance into the rest-land of a victorious, abiding life is that which appears to be the *impossible* factor in his life. But the bigger the obstacle the greater the manifestation of God’s might. God requires faith in the face of the obstacle, but He will always go before. According to the measure that one follows God’s leadership, he will personally experience His might. And just as Joshua was

<sup>20</sup>The reported blockage of the Jordan in 1927 by a landslide does not demand that the event of Joshua took place in the same manner.

<sup>21</sup>The location is identified here, proleptically, as Gilgal, though it was not given this name until later (5:9b).

God's representative leader, walking with his people and bringing them over, so Jesus, the Captain of our faith, invites the Christian to warm, intimate fellowship and sure, loving guidance by obeying His simple call, "Follow me."

### III. SPIRITUAL PREPARATION (5:2-15)

Israel was not yet fully prepared to enter into battle on the soil of Canaan. The unfinished business was spiritual in character. Partly, it involved the observance of Moses' law (cf. 1:7-8); wholly, it was Israel's heart relationship to Jehovah. This chapter records four experiences which God brought to Joshua and the people, each one centered about a token, or symbol: circumcision, blood, fruit, and a sword.

#### A. The Token of Circumcision: Restoration to covenant favor (5:2-9)

The covenant promise of God to Israel had been temporarily suspended during the nearly forty years' judgment of exclusion from Canaan because of Israel's sin. Since the judgment was a national one, everyone, including young people and babies born in the wilderness, had to live in the environment of a punished nation. Until the ban would be lifted, the rite of circumcision, which was the *token of God's covenant* between Himself and His people (Gen. 17:11),<sup>22</sup> was purposeless, and so the rite was discontinued (5:4-6). Now that the ban was officially lifted, on Israel's entrance into Canaan, the day to renew the rite and restore the nation to positional

<sup>22</sup>Read Genesis 17:9-14 for the record of the first circumcision and its significance.

relationship of covenant favor had arrived. And so Joshua, at the command of God, had all the children of Israel circumcised.<sup>23</sup> The reproach of Egyptians who scoffingly suggested that God had delivered Israel from Egypt in order to slay them in the mountains (Exodus 32:12) was now rolled away (5:9a). As a historical marker for this bright new day, the area was appropriately named Gilgal (literally “rolling off or away”).

### **B. The Token of Blood: Anticipation of deliverance (5:10)**

Israel’s first Passover was observed in Egypt (Exodus 12:1-20). The slaying of the paschal lamb, and the applying of the blood to the doorposts and lintels, anticipated deliverance from the oppression of that land. The blood was a token assuring such deliverance: “And the blood shall be to you for a token . . . and when I see the blood, I will pass over you” (Exodus 12:13). Israel’s second Passover was observed in the wilderness, when hopes of reaching the land were high (Num. 9:5). Now, as the people of a new generation reached Canaan and recalled from history how God delivered their forefathers out of Egypt, they also could anticipate deliverance in the battles to come, as the lamb was slain for the Passover. The circumcision rite was for positional relationship; this Passover sacrifice was for stirring up hopes of deliverance.

### **C. The Token of Fruit: Appropriation of the blessings (5:11-12)**

Manna, the daily food which God supernaturally gave

<sup>23</sup>The terms “again” and “second time” of verse 2 refer to the reinstatement of the rite.

Israel during her desert and wilderness years up to the day of Passover at Gilgal, now ceased (5:12). Manna was a miraculous provision to sustain through a difficult journey, but now Israel could begin to enjoy the changed diet of the fruits of the land of Canaan, the first token of the wealth of blessings promised them in this land of milk and honey. And so, "on the very next day after the Passover, they ate what was raised on the land, unleavened bread and parched grain" (5:11, Berkeley Version). The fruit of the land was a foretaste of blessings to come.

**D. The Token of a Sword: Revelation of a holy war  
(5:13-15)**

The circumcision, the Passover, and the produce of the land were intended for the edification of all the Israelites. Now their leader Joshua was given a divine revelation, experienced by him alone, but passed on subsequently to his people.

As Joshua was looking in the direction of the fortress of Jericho, he thought of one thing, his responsibility in the battle. In mind's eye he envisioned the two foes, Canaanites and Israelites, in mortal combat, and though he had already been given assurances of victory, he could not avoid wondering about the outcome as he compared the military strength of both. The closer the hour of actual combat, the more he felt that this was *his* war. At such a critical moment he saw ahead of him a man holding a drawn sword. The drawn sword told Joshua that whatever the man was up to, or had to say, concerned battle. Joshua approached him with the challenge "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?"



(5:13). The conversation that ensued did not produce a direct answer to that question as such, but put into focus that which Joshua needed to see very clearly at this time, that the *battle was not his but the Lord's*. The man identified himself as the prince of Jehovah's host, suggesting that he came with a message from God (5:14). With this identification Joshua now sensed the crisis of the moment, and, prostrating himself before the prince, besought as a servant the message from his Lord. The message was short but urgent: "Put off thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy" (5:15). Canaan ground was holy ground. A battle fought over it by God's people for the fulfillment of God's promise was *God's battle*, a holy war. This was not Joshua's war! What a tremendous revelation to God's servant given at the commencement of battle. And Joshua removed his shoe, for the place was holy, and he revered it.

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The Christian who sincerely desires to live his life in God's blessed will and favor—in God's rest-land—will find that it is not he living the life, but Christ living in him. Therefore, in the face of all the enemies of his soul who would keep him from this living relationship to Christ as Lord, he must prepare his heart. First, has unconfessed sin broken fellowship with God, causing a suspension of claim to His blessing? Confession will mark the day of reproach rolled away. Then, is there a lurking doubt whether God will give the victories He has promised, because of unworthiness? When God sees the blood of Jesus His Son, He passes over and delivers. Perhaps the Christian has been hesitant to partake of a token of

the blessings of Canaan land. He needs but taste and see! The fruit of the land is so much more delightful than the manna of the desert. And if the weight of battle against Satan and his hosts is too heavy to bear, the Son of God goes before to wage His holy war, to meet "the tyrant's brandished steel." One has nothing to lose, and all to gain!

The Israelites on the plain of Jericho had committed themselves when they crossed the divided Jordan and watched it close behind them. Practically speaking, they had reached a point of no return. But they were not led here to be shut up to a life of squalor, shame, and subjugation; rather, a glorious land lay open before them—a land for them to enjoy with its milk and honey, its homes and temples for the worship of God. The yesterdays were days of preparation; the tomorrows would be days of conquest. Written in the skies above were the timeless words of the mandate, "Go in to possess the land, which Jehovah your God giveth you" (Joshua 1:11). And God's people of generations later have been joining in the spirit of commitment to such a life by saying, with the writer of Hebrews, "Let us therefore give diligence to enter into that rest" (Heb. 4:11).