

((PREACHING *the* WORD))

JOSHUA

PEOPLE *of*
GOD'S PURPOSE



DAVID JACKMAN

R. Kent Hughes

Series Editor

“Having been frustrated by so many learned Old Testament commentaries, which may be full of good scholarship but offer little help to preachers, it is a joy to recommend such a fine book, which is so clearly the work of someone who is a very fine preacher himself. It is marked by careful exegesis, which reveals the main thrust of Joshua as a whole and each major section without getting lost in unnecessary details. All the big questions the preacher and congregation will ask are addressed and there are excellent pointers to application. It provides fuel, not only for our preaching, but for our hearts and lives.”

Vaughan Roberts, Rector of St Ebbe’s, Oxford, England; Director, The Proclamation Trust

“Here is another excellent commentary, which combines great insights of exegesis, theology, relevance, and pastoral application. Every page is enriched by David’s extensive experience and wisdom in understanding and preaching the Bible. This commentary is ideal for those preparing to teach or preach the book of Joshua, and it is also invaluable for Christians who want to understand the book of Joshua and read it for personal encouragement. I praise God for David’s ministry.”

Peter Adam, Vicar Emeritus, St Jude’s Church, Carlton, Australia; former Principal, Ridley College Melbourne; author, *Speaking God’s Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching* and *The Message of Malachi*

“This is a fine addition to the Preaching the Word series. Jackman combines pastoral sensitivity, erudition, and an experienced feel for the text to give us a guide through the life-changing book of Joshua.”

Josh Moody, Senior Pastor, College Church, Wheaton, Illinois; author, *Journey to Joy: The Psalms of Ascent*

“As a seasoned pastor and trainer of preachers, David Jackman has a long history of handling God’s Word in ways that benefit the Church. This volume on Joshua only adds to his legacy of gospel usefulness. David’s presentation of the text is clear and accessible. And the road he paves to Christ and the gospel can be trusted. Get it!”

David R. Helm, Pastor, Holy Trinity Church, Chicago; Chairman, The Charles Simeon Trust

Joshua

Copyright © 2014 by David Jackman

Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law.

Cover design: Jon McGrath, Simplified Studio

Cover image: Adam Green, illustrator

First printing 2014

Printed in the United States of America

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are from the *King James Version* of the Bible.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

All emphases in Scripture quotations have been added by the author.

ISBN-13: 978-1-4335-1197-4

ISBN-10: 1-4335-1197-5

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-2377-9

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-1199-8

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-2377-9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Jackman, David.

Joshua : people of God's purpose / David Jackman.

pages cm.—(Preaching the word)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4335-1197-4 (hc)

1. Bible. Joshua—Commentaries. I. Title.

BS1295.53.J33 2013

222'.207—dc23

2013003647

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

VP 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14
15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

<i>A Word to Those Who Preach the Word</i>	11
<i>Preface</i>	13
1 Overture and Beginners (1:1, 2)	15
2 A Double Commissioning (1:3–18)	23
3 Inside Enemy Territory (2:1–24)	33
4 Wonders among You (3:1–17)	41
5 A Memorial Forever (4:1—5:1)	51
6 Essential Preparations (5:2–15)	59
7 The Battle That Wasn't (6:1–27)	67
8 Tragedy Strikes (7:1–26)	77
9 Conquest Resumed (8:1–29)	87
10 Covenant Renewed (8:30–35)	95
11 Flattering to Deceive (9:1–26)	103
12 No Day Like It (10:1–15)	113
13 The Southern Conquest (10:16–43)	123
14 The Northern Conquest (11:1–23)	129
15 Receiving the Inheritance (13:1—14:5)	135
16 Wholehearted Following (14:6–15; 15:13–19)	143
17 The Allotment of the Land (15:1—19:51)	153
18 Refuge and Residence (20:1—21:45)	161
19 Unity Reaffirmed (22:1–34)	167
20 Priorities for the Future (23:1–16)	173
21 The Inescapable Choice (24:1–33)	183
Epilogue	195
<i>Notes</i>	197
<i>Scripture Index</i>	201
<i>General Index</i>	209
<i>Index of Sermon Illustrations</i>	213

A Word to Those Who Preach the Word

There are times when I am preaching that I have especially sensed the pleasure of God. I usually become aware of it through the unnatural silence. The ever-present coughing ceases, and the pews stop creaking, bringing an almost physical quiet to the sanctuary—through which my words sail like arrows. I experience a heightened eloquence, so that the cadence and volume of my voice intensify the truth I am preaching.

There is nothing quite like it—the Holy Spirit filling one’s sails, the sense of his pleasure, and the awareness that something is happening among one’s hearers. This experience is, of course, not unique, for thousands of preachers have similar experiences, even greater ones.

What has happened when this takes place? How do we account for this sense of his smile? The answer for me has come from the ancient rhetorical categories of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*.

The first reason for his smile is the *logos*—in terms of preaching, God’s Word. This means that as we stand before God’s people to proclaim his Word, we have done our homework. We have exegeted the passage, mined the significance of its words in their context, and applied sound hermeneutical principles in interpreting the text so that we understand what its words meant to its hearers. And it means that we have labored long until we can express in a sentence what the theme of the text is—so that our outline springs from the text. Then our preparation will be such that as we preach, we will not be preaching our own thoughts about God’s Word, but God’s actual Word, his *logos*. This is fundamental to pleasing him in preaching.

The second element in knowing God’s smile in preaching is *ethos*—what you are as a person. There is a danger endemic to preaching, which is having your hands and heart cauterized by holy things. Phillips Brooks illustrated it by the analogy of a train conductor who comes to believe that he has been to the places he announces because of his long and loud heralding of them. And that is why Brooks insisted that preaching must be “the bringing of truth through personality.” Though we can never perfectly embody the truth we preach, we must be subject to it, long for it, and make it as much a part of our ethos as possible. As the Puritan William Ames said, “Next to the Scriptures, nothing makes a sermon more to pierce, than when it comes out of the inward

affection of the heart without any affectation.” When a preacher’s *ethos* backs up his *logos*, there will be the pleasure of God.

Last, there is *pathos*—personal passion and conviction. David Hume, the Scottish philosopher and skeptic, was once challenged as he was seen going to hear George Whitefield preach: “I thought you do not believe in the gospel.” Hume replied, “I don’t, but he does.” Just so! When a preacher believes what he preaches, there will be passion. And this belief and requisite passion will know the smile of God.

The pleasure of God is a matter of *logos* (the Word), *ethos* (what you are), and *pathos* (your passion). As you preach the Word may you experience his smile—the Holy Spirit in your sails!

R. Kent Hughes

Preface

It has been both a privilege and a joy to accept the invitation from Dr. Kent Hughes to contribute this volume to his *Preaching the Word* series. We have worked together in a variety of contexts and locations over the years, especially in preaching workshops for pastors, and we have a shared passion to become better preachers of the Word ourselves and to help others develop their skills under God. We long to see a new generation of effective Bible expositors raised up by the Lord to teach and apply his unchanging truth to all the multiplying challenges and opportunities of contemporary life.

I first preached Joshua at the outset of my pastoral ministry in Above Bar Church, Southampton, England, back in the early 1980s, and it has been a favorite book of mine ever since. When this invitation came, I decided to start again from scratch, and my renewed study of this great book has been illuminating, convicting, and challenging, but hugely encouraging to me, as I trust it will prove to be to you too. I have preached it in many different contexts over the past two years or so in pastors' workshops and preaching conferences, in Bible conventions, and to several local churches in pulpit ministry or retreat weekends in several different parts of the world. I am grateful to many who have reacted with the material in question times and informal discussions, which has sharpened my understanding of both the text and its applications. I am also glad to express a special indebtedness to outstanding commentators and writers on the text of Joshua, from John Calvin onward, but in particular, among contemporary writers, to David Howard Jr. and to Paul Copan, whose scholarly and pastoral insights have benefited me greatly in my exposition. Very many thanks also to my good friend Nancy Olsen, who typed and checked the manuscript for me and whose secretarial skills have been such a help and support over many years.

"People of God's Purpose" is the subtitle of the book because I believe a large part of its lasting relevance and helpfulness for us in our generation is to be found in its instruction and challenge to us to enter into all the potential of the gospel blessings (our land of promise) secured for us by our Joshua. We too need to learn to trust God's promises more deeply and so to obey his commands more wholeheartedly. There are urgent and vital lessons in this text for the twenty-first-century church. But Joshua himself is not the focal point of the book that bears his name, and neither is Israel. That honor belongs to God himself, who is the hero of every Old Testament narrative and who is here

revealed in all his dependable faithfulness as the eternal covenant Lord who makes and keeps his promises, the sovereign King of all creation who fulfills every one of his gracious purposes. “Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass” (21:45). How different the church today would be if we Christians would live in the light of that eternal reality!

Finally, I am grateful to dedicate this book to my four grandchildren, in the hope and prayer that they too will grow up to become people of God’s purpose in their generation, in whatever ways he chooses for them.

*David Jackman
London, England
February 2013*

1

Overture and Beginners

JOSHUA 1:1, 2



THE BEGINNING OF THIS sixth book of the Bible is as stark as it is surprising. From Exodus onward, the last four books have been dominated by one giant human figure—Moses. For forty years he has been the constant factor, the mediator and deliverer of his people—always there, always dependable, the man who speaks face-to-face with God, “as a man speaks to his friend” (Exodus 33:11). It must have been almost impossible to imagine life without Moses, much as those of us who are British citizens find it hard to imagine our country without Queen Elizabeth II after her sixty wonderful years upon the throne. But “Moses my servant is dead” is the blunt beginning of this book (v. 2) and life, as always, must go on.

The words are spoken to Joshua, the son of Nun, by no means a young man at this stage, but with his real life’s work just about to open up before him. The words are spoken by the sovereign Lord, Yahweh, whose name reveals his unchanging faithfulness to his covenant promises because of his immutable character and purposes. The words are not unexpected. They are like the starting pistol to a race that Joshua has always known he would one day run and for which he has been trained and has prepared for decades. But they must have come with awesome demand and challenge, and they must surely have provoked that mixture of excited anticipation and inner panic we all know when we stand on the threshold of a major new chapter of our life experience. “Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people . . .” (v. 2).

The time has come to enter the land, to possess in reality all that their covenant Lord had promised Israel through the centuries, since first he told their father Abraham, “I will give to you and to your offspring after you the

land of our sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God” (Genesis 17:8). This was why he brought them out of their slavery in Egypt. This was what their forty years in the desert was always anticipating. This was how the sovereign Lord would now fulfill his often repeated promises.

The pattern had been set right back at the beginning of God’s dealings with Abram, when, in Ur of the Chaldeans, he received the divine summons, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1). This clear command was accompanied by no road map, no detailed schedule, no explanation of how it would all happen, but Abram had all that he really needed—the promise from the sovereign Lord that he would show him the land and then later give it to him and his family (Genesis 12:7). The command and the promise run together throughout the Bible. So it is here for Joshua. The command is to cross the River Jordan, but the promise is that God is now giving his people their promised land. Both command and promise depend upon the sovereignty of God, expressed in his wise will and achieved by his irresistible power. So it is as God’s people both believe the promises and obey the commands that they enter into the experience of fellowship with God at the deepest, relational level. The same is true for us today. Why do we so often fail to obey God’s commands? Because we do not really believe his promises. The two always go together. Faith leads to obedience. Disobedience is always rooted in distrust. We will see this lesson worked out often in the book of Joshua; it is a continuing challenge that we shall often encounter in our contemporary experience of living the Christian life.

It is significant that the designation of Moses as “the servant of the LORD” in verse 1 is matched at the end of the book (24:29) with the same title, but this time it is assigned to Joshua. The story of the book, at one level, is the story of Joshua’s progress and development from the description of him as “Moses’ assistant” (1:1) to his own epitaph as the Lord’s servant. But Joshua is not the hero of the book, as we shall see. That role is entirely occupied by the Lord himself, whom Joshua served. Nevertheless, Joshua features as the central human actor in the drama of the conquest of Canaan, and it is entirely appropriate for us to look at some of his earlier history before we delve into the details of the text.

The Apprentice

We are first introduced to Joshua in the early days of the exodus, before the nation is brought together to Sinai to receive the Law of God. Perhaps a

better translation of the Hebrew word *torah*, translated as “law,” would be “instruction” since this stresses the relational aspect of God’s self-revelation as he reveals how his people are to live in covenant with him. Of course, this is interwoven with the binding effects and sanctions of his commands, which are not just advice but carry divine authority and inflict within them punishment for their infringement.

Just a few months out of Egypt the Israelites face an all-out assault from the Amalekites at Rephidim, where God has provided water from the rock. Without any words of introduction, Joshua is nominated by Moses to select an army and lead the battle, which he does (Exodus 17:8–10). After the great victory (“Joshua overwhelmed Amalek,” Exodus 17:13), God commands Moses to record in writing and cause it to be read to Joshua that he, the Lord, will be at war with Amalek until he will “utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven” (Exodus 17:14). Joshua, previously unknown, is suddenly a successful military leader, but he needs constantly to be reminded that this was God’s victory, not his, entirely dependent on Moses’ symbolic raising of his hands to the throne of Yahweh in supplication and intercession. It is interesting that at this first recorded Joshua incident the written testimony is given a central place in encouraging his faith and reminding him where power really lies. The man of action is to be dependent on the word of the Lord and on the prayers of his people.

We next meet Joshua, described as Moses’ “assistant,” in Exodus 24:13, where he accompanies the great leader as he responds to God’s call to come up Mount Sinai to receive the tablets of the Torah. There is nothing to indicate that Joshua was with Moses when he entered the cloud of God’s presence, but he was certainly nearer to God’s self-revelation “like a devouring fire” (Exodus 24:17) than any of his fellow Israelites. And when the protracted interview ends, it is Joshua who descends with Moses to witness the horrors of the golden calf idolatry in the camp. The young man assumes the noise of the people below to be a sign of war, but Moses knows better, and the orgy quickly becomes evident (Exodus 32:17–19). After the initial acts of judgment and the withdrawal of God’s immediate presence from the camp, it is Moses who sets up a tent outside, a prototype “tabernacle” or “tent of meeting,” where he alone can communicate with God, in personal intimacy. But the privilege of proximity again belongs to Joshua. “When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent” (Exodus 33:11). We don’t know, of course, how much Moses passed on to the young apprentice, but such closeness to the

action and his awareness of God's glory must have been enormously formative in the young warrior's thinking.

Still Learning

The next time we meet Joshua, God has called Moses to select seventy elders, upon whom he puts his Spirit so as to enable them to share in the burden of leadership that Moses has been shouldering alone. This unique visitation of the Spirit was evidenced by their speaking God's word (prophesying), a unique occurrence. Even though two of them had not left the camp, Eldad and Medad nevertheless prophesied as well, although so much to Joshua's consternation that he says to Moses, "My lord Moses, stop them" (Numbers 11:28). But Moses' response is, "Would that all the LORD's people were prophets" (v. 29). The meekest man in all the earth demonstrates not the slightest hint of jealousy. He has no concern for his own position or authority, but only for the well-being of the people. So the young Joshua has to learn that leadership is never an exclusive privilege, that he is not to glorify Moses, giant though he is, nor is he to seek to hedge God in to his own preferred agenda. These remain essential insights for godly leadership still today.

But then comes the greatest contribution Joshua has so far made in the purposes of God for Israel, when he is selected by Moses to represent his tribe, Ephraim, as one of the twelve spies commissioned to spy out the land of Canaan (Numbers 13:1–16). Only Joshua and Caleb return with a good report, urging immediate occupation, "for we are well able to overcome . . ." (Numbers 13:30). Not only so, but they plead with the whole congregation to trust in God's grace and favor to "bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey" (Numbers 14:8). They must not fear the Canaanites but rather trust God's promise and his presence with them. Yet the major report of rebellious unbelief prevails, the opportunity is lost, and Israel confines herself to the tragedy of forty more years in the wilderness as that whole generation is condemned to die outside the land, except Caleb and Joshua (Numbers 14:30). A plague removes the ten spies; only Joshua and Caleb remain alive (Numbers 14:37, 38).

Eventually the years pass, and God commands Moses to view, but not enter, the land of promise before his own death (Numbers 27:12, 13). Moses' concern is with the succession. Still, it seems, his dominating passion is the welfare of the nation. So he petitions God in specific terms that become increasingly significant as the mega-narrative of the Bible unfolds. He asks for a man "who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not

be as sheep that have no shepherd” (Numbers 27:17). He asks for a shepherd, doubtless influenced by his years tending the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, as well as his years leading the flock of God. And God’s answer is immediate: “Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him” (Numbers 27:18). Accordingly, Joshua is publicly commissioned with some of the authority Moses had. This is not perhaps a reference to job-sharing so much as a recognition that although Joshua is clearly God’s man, his relationship will be different from that which Moses had with God. Joshua will not have the face-to-face fellowship Moses experienced. He has a written record by which God’s will is made known, coupled with access to Eleazar the priest “who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the LORD” (Numbers 27:21). In this sense he is the first Israelite leader who, although directly commissioned by God, is dependent on the word of God already spoken and written and the prayerful inquiry of the priest to provide the wisdom he needs to make godly decisions for the people.

From now on, until Moses’ death, Joshua and Eleazar are included together in the government of the nation. So in Numbers 32:28 they are told to ensure that the people of Gad and Reuben will not inherit their assigned land east of the Jordan unless they enter Canaan with the rest of the tribes and play their part in its armed conquest, which they agree to do. The fulfillment of this command with its promise will have considerable prominence in the book of Joshua.

Heir Apparent

The book of Deuteronomy, the second giving of the Law, sees the nation of Israel encamped on the plains of Moab prior to their entry into the land, when Moses dies. But the old leader has much to pass on from God to the people before God calls him into his presence. Reminding them of the exclusion of their parents’ generation through unbelief, Moses recalls not only God’s promise to Caleb and Joshua that they would enter, but also God’s instruction to him about the new leader: “Encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit [the land]” (Deuteronomy 1:38). Two chapters later we are given more insight into Joshua’s preparation, as well as encouragement he received for imminent future challenges. Moses relates how, under God’s direction, he told Joshua at the time of their victory over Og, king of Bashan, and Sihon, king of the Amorites (Numbers 21), “Your eyes have seen all that the LORD your God has done to these two kings. So will the LORD do to all the kingdoms into which you are crossing. You shall not fear them, for it is the LORD your God who fights for you” (Deuteronomy 3:21, 22). And on this basis the instruction

is renewed. “Charge Joshua, and encourage and strengthen him, for he shall go over at the head of this people, and he shall put them in possession of the land” (Deuteronomy 3:28).

This note of encouraging and strengthening Joshua now becomes increasingly persistent, serving as an introductory motif to the first chapters of the book of Joshua. Deuteronomy 31 records the passing of the baton from Moses to his assistant. Speaking of his own imminent departure, Moses assures the nation that they will possess the land, “and Joshua will go over at your head, as the LORD has spoken” (Deuteronomy 31:3). This succession planning is divine in both its origin and execution. But in his words to Joshua, Moses is more specific. He calls Joshua to be “strong and courageous,” not fearful or easily discouraged, because of the sure and certain promises of God (Deuteronomy 31:7). “It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31:8). This is clearly echoed by New Testament faith in the last chapter of Hebrews, where the writer quotes the same promise, given directly by God to the new leader in Joshua 1:5 and links it with the bold affirmation of the psalmist in Psalm 118:6: “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” (Hebrews 13:5, 6). Here is the thread of faith in the promises of God as the antidote to fear, and these promises bind the whole Bible together.

Joshua is then commissioned by the Lord, in the presence of Moses, with the repeated message, “Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring the people of Israel into the land that I swore to give them. I will be with you” (Deuteronomy 31:23; cf. Deuteronomy 31:6, 7). At the end of the book everything is prepared and ready for the conquest. Along with the death of Moses there is also a sense of expectation about what is about to happen, since Joshua is “full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him” (Deuteronomy 34:9). And then, as we turn the page, from the Pentateuch to the first of the historical narratives (or former prophets), we hear God’s command, “Now . . . arise, go over this Jordan” (Joshua 1:2). Joshua’s moment has arrived.

Reflections

Important principles can be derived from the Moses and Joshua narrative and are exemplified and expanded elsewhere in Scripture concerning the training of leaders and the ordering of succession. What comes across most clearly is the way in which Joshua’s own knowledge of God and resulting dependence on him become the key equipping method for the work he has to do. As Moses’ right-hand man, Joshua is privileged to share in some of the greatest

moments of divine revelation, albeit at a distance. But this is not in order for him to learn how to be a leader as much as to learn how totally dependent on God he is. And then he learns the character of the God on whom he must depend.

It is quite clear that Joshua is far from being a person of superhuman qualities. Otherwise would he have needed so constantly to be exhorted to “Be strong and courageous”(1:6)? This doesn’t seem to indicate that Joshua was a natural for leadership. But this is not an unusual selection for the God who chooses the foolish, the weak, the despised and “even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are” (1 Corinthians 1:28). The root of the matter is that Canaan is not conquered by Joshua’s superior military strategy or dominating heroism, but the Lord gives his people the land (1:2). That is why the land becomes Israel’s. Joshua is the necessary and highly valued human agent at the heart of the process, but as he learned from his first encounter with the Amalekites, the battle belongs to the Lord. Contemporary Christian leadership badly needs to relearn that lesson. God is the hero of the book of Joshua. Everything is directly and categorically attributed to him, as the end of the book makes abundantly clear. The Lord gave Israel the land. The Lord gave Israel rest as he delivered their enemies into their hands. Every one of his promises was fulfilled (see 21:43–45).

The other factor to remember is how daunting and seemingly impossible this task must have appeared as Joshua and the people faced the crossing of the Jordan and the conquest of the land. That was why they needed constantly to be exhorted to listen to, remember, and put their faith in the word of their God, revealed in his promises. This was to be the first generation dependent on the written instruction of God in the Torah and on the requirements of faith and obedience recorded in the book of the covenant. Face-to-face conversation with the Lord was not Joshua’s constant privilege, as it had been Moses’. He had to lead the people dependent on the written word and the spirit of wisdom, just as Christian leaders do today. When we face the daunting task of reaching our increasingly hostile culture with the good news of Christ, our equivalent dependence on the Word of God in the hands of the Spirit of God to accomplish the work of God is just as vital. That is our only means of advance too. So as we unpack the book of Joshua, we are not dealing with ancient history so much as with the living God who rules all history for the accomplishment of his eternal purposes of grace and glory. If we are to be people of those purposes in our desperately needy generation, we shall need to learn well the lessons of this magnificent book and put them into practice.

Perhaps the greatest incentive to do this is provided by the New Testament

22 JOSHUA

reflection on this whole episode of salvation-history as the writer to the Hebrews looks beyond Joshua to Jesus and the greater fulfillment in the gospel of all that was foreshadowed in the Old Testament.

For if Joshua had given them rest [permanently], God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. (Hebrews 4:8–11)

2

A Double Commissioning

JOSHUA 1:3–18



NATIONAL TRANSITIONS, from one leader or government to another, are always times of uncertainty and stress. The conventional wisdom is often for the new leadership to take its time to settle in, familiarize itself with the situation, and weigh the options before launching into any decisive action. That is especially so when either the previous leader has been greatly revered or when the future is unsettled and problematic. But Joshua is afforded no such luxury. As we have seen, God does not say, “Moses my servant is dead. Now take your time to settle in. Win the confidence of the people gradually. Don’t take on anything too demanding just yet!” On the contrary, there is a peremptory command to get ready to cross the Jordan into the promised land “now” (1:2). It is as though the final barrier to the entry has been removed and God cannot wait to fulfill his promises.

Purpose and Structure

The structure of chapter 1 is significant and formative for our understanding of the rest of the book. This is a history book. Some scholars suggest that it should be attached to the Pentateuch,¹ as the conquest of the land is the natural climax of the sequence of covenant promises beginning with Abraham and stretching on through the exodus and the wilderness wanderings. But it is also persuasive to see it as the first of the historical narratives that lead from the period of the conquest through the judges to the institution of the monarchy and on through the division of the kingdom to Israel’s ultimate defeat at the hands of the Assyrians and Judah’s exile to Babylon. This unit runs from Joshua to 2 Kings. Clearly Joshua is not the author of the book of which he is the eponymous human “hero”; perhaps it was the work of Samuel or an

unknown historian. But we have here a true record of events that really took place. At the start of the book Israel is still awaiting the crossing of the Jordan, and by the end much of the land has been conquered and all of it allotted to the twelve tribes. It really did happen.

Yet the arrangement of the Hebrew Scriptures categorizes Joshua as the first of the “former prophets.” For us today it seems strange to call a history book prophetic. But Biblical prophecy is not history written in advance. Rather, it is the telling of what God has done and will yet do from the divine perspective. The task of the prophet is to declare the mind of God to the people, to “forth-tell” God’s infallible word into their situation, and this is achieved by learning the theological implications of the history. Here is God’s interpretation of what happened and why. This book of Joshua has its own unique contribution to Biblical theology as we see the work of God begun under Moses coming to fruition under Joshua, because he is the faithful covenant-keeping Lord who always keeps the promises he has made.

By extension, then, this is also a teaching book. Paul reminded the Christians in Rome that “whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Romans 15:4). That is why the book of Joshua is of such great potential benefit to the twenty-first-century church. The God of Joshua is our God. He does not change his purposes or renege on his promises. So we can learn from this book great principles of Christian life and faith, for our edification. Of course, we shall need to read and study the book as New Testament believers and preach it as followers of Christ, not as Jewish rabbis. But the Christ who is the center and focus of all the Scriptures (Luke 24:44) is not difficult to find in this book. Joshua means “savior,” and Jesus is another form of the same name. Joshua points us on to the Lord Jesus Christ, the ultimate great fulfillment of all that the Old Testament deliverer foreshadowed. Similarly, we shall not find it hard to identify with the people of Israel in this book, because we are God’s new Israel (Galatians 6:16), the universal community of the people of God’s purpose. We too are in a battle fully to possess all that God has given to us. We too have not yet reached the fullness of rest in the heavenly kingdom, but we are set free to fight against the world, the flesh and the devil and so to enter into more and more of the blessings of the everlasting gospel. We too have life-changing lessons to learn about the priorities of faith and obedience.

Chapter 1 is all about receiving and passing on God’s word. From verses 3–9 God is speaking directly to Joshua in a blend of promise and command designed to deepen his faith and nerve his obedience. In verses 10, 11 Joshua

passes on the instruction to the people via their officers. There follows a special word to the two and a half tribes (Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh) reminding them of Moses' instruction that they are to cross the Jordan and fight in the conquest with their brothers, although their inheritance will be east of the Jordan, where their families can already settle (vv. 12–15). In return the tribal leaders assure Joshua of their obedience and loyalty, along with the hope that he will experience strength and courage through God's presence (vv. 16–18). The only conditional element in these exchanges is that Joshua will lead the people by his own example of faith in the promises and obedience to the commands.

God Commissions Joshua (1:3–9)

By Promise (vv. 3–5)

After the original command of verse 2, the next three verses are entirely promises. God is declaring his intentions and is relating them to his character as he proclaims the integrity of his covenant faithfulness. There are three things to which God unreservedly commits himself: (1) to give them the land to its fullest extent (vv. 3, 4); (2) to overcome their enemies (v. 5a); (3) to be with Joshua as he was with Moses (v. 5b). And each of these promises is guaranteed as fulfillment of the word already spoken (“just as I promised to Moses,” v. 3) and continuation of the blessing already experienced (“as I was with Moses,” v. 5b).

The Land (vv. 3, 4)

Note that although none of the land is yet in their possession, God can say, “I have given [it] to you” (v. 3), using the past tense to express the absolute certainty of a future occurrence. There is no doubt about who will receive the land, nor about its amazing extent. The area described in verse 4 is enormous, though very much in tune with the original promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:18–20. David Ogunde comments, “In terms of current political boundaries, the promised land would thus cover modern Israel, the whole of Jordan, a large part of Saudi Arabia, half of Iraq, the whole of Lebanon, part of Syria and the whole of Kuwait!”² But as he points out, even at the height of the monarchy in the days of David and Solomon, Israel actually only occupied a small section of this total area.

This raises an important question for the expositor. If Joshua's forward advance was dependent on believing God's promises in detail, how is it that so much of this promise was never fulfilled? Preachers need to deal with such

objections and queries or they will certainly undermine the faith of their hearers. There seem to be two important considerations to bring out. The first is that the actualization of what is promised is dependent on the wholehearted obedience of God's people. The sadness of the book is that the conquest was far from complete, that compromise and comfort took over, and that many of the inhabitants of the land were never dislodged. The same unbelief and lack of faith that precluded their entry to the land forty years earlier surfaced in the next generation in an unwillingness to push forward with the complete conquest after the initial gains had been secured. "They were unable to enter because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:19)—that is said of the exodus generation, but by extension exactly the same weakness was revealed in their descendants.

But there is another more theological reason, to which John Calvin draws attention at the start of his commentary on Joshua.³ He attributes their failure to press the conquest to these boundaries to their sloth, which was the product of unbelief. The liberality that God was offering them they refused to appropriate. Indeed, the full fruition of what God promised had to wait for its completion until Messiah came. Just as Christ offers a rest superior to that achieved by Joshua, so he offers a kingdom more glorious in its extent than any earthly empire ever has been or could be. That great land mass could have been Israel's had she risen to the challenge in faith and obedience, but like them we know only too well what it is to settle for the attainable and, doubtless, to miss vast dimensions of God's potential grace. Because there is never any shortage of power or depletion of God's purpose on his part, it must be true that none of us has less of God and his promised blessings than we truly desire.

The Conquest (v. 5a)

The promise of verse 5a is particularly personal to Joshua. It is a commitment of limitless divine power to overcome all merely human and therefore merely transitory and mortal opposition. No man can stand in opposition to God. But as Joshua viewed the prospect facing him, the innumerable tribal groups and city-states that occupied the land, their security and wealth, their cutting-edge technology and powerful war machines, he could surely be forgiven for thinking that this was "mission impossible." But with the promises of God, he was more than fully equipped to accomplish God's purposes. The parallels are striking with our contemporary challenges. The citadels of atheistic materialism and reductionist psychology seem impregnable. Indeed they are to human beings, but "if God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). The answer is that there are many enemies—tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, and sword, to name a few (Romans 8:35). Yet

“in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans 8:37). Nothing can separate his people from the love of Jesus, and nothing can stand in the way of the fulfillment of his purposes. In the words of Horatius Bonar (1808–1889) in his hymn “Blessed Be God, Our God”:

Blessed be God, our God,
 Who gave for us His well-beloved Son,
 The gift of gifts, all other gifts in one;
 Blessed be God our God!

Who shall condemn us now?
 Since Christ has died, and risen, and gone above,
 For us to plead at the right hand of Love;
 Who shall condemn us now?

The victory is ours!
 For us in might came forth the mighty one;
 For us he fought the fight, the triumph won:
 The victory is ours!⁴

The Presence (v. 5b)

Here is the greatest promise of all, which undergirds everything else the Lord has said. When God had threatened to withdraw his presence from his people after the incident of the golden calf, Moses had pleaded eloquently and persuasively that if God were to desert his people they would lose everything that was distinctive about them (Exodus 33:12–16). This was what made Israel unique. And now God graciously assures Joshua that this blessing will be his as well. He will never let him down and will never let him go—an assurance that is equally our own, sealed with the blood of Christ’s cross. It is a wonderful strength to know that the Lord is more committed to his people than we ever can be to him. “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20) is still Christ’s promise to his missionary church.

By Commands (vv. 6–9)

Personal Courage

We show that we really believe God’s promises only when we begin to obey his commands. So three more times God exhorts his agent to “be strong and (very) courageous” (vv. 6, 7, 9). At the end of the chapter (v. 18), even the people are saying the same words to him. Clearly Joshua is no omniscient superhero. The same command had already been issued three times in Deuteronomy. And now, on the verge of Jordan, it would not be at all surpris-

ing if his knees were knocking and if the people were aware of it. There is no Moses now to fall back on. There is a good and glorious prize ahead—a land flowing with milk and honey—but the prospect of actually fighting the Canaanites with an almost untried army was terrifying. Moreover, Joshua knew only too well the weaknesses and fickleness of his people. Even God had spoken about giving them up! So we may certainly not claim any superiority over Joshua in these verses, as though he ought not to have needed the repeated exhortations. What we often tend to regard as natural courage is perhaps, in the last analysis, a self-discipline that resolves to overcome our all too natural fear in order to achieve a greater good. “You shall cause this people to inherit the land” (v. 6) is the promise, which generates the courage to obey.

Personal Faith

But while the will is certainly involved, the courage that Joshua is called to exercise is of divine origin, generated by the divine word. In God’s economy there are no imperatives without indicatives, no commands without teaching as to how those commands can be obeyed and what it means actively to trust God’s promises. Here is no exception. Verse 7 tells us that strength and courage are directly dependent on careful, detailed obedience to the written word of Yahweh, in the Law given to Moses. Joshua is to be under the authority of God, mediated by his written word, as is every believer who has become the recipient of direct revelation through the Bible writers. In this sense Joshua stands with us and for us as we face the spiritual battles and challenges of our time in history.

Notice what this personal faith looks like—an unswerving devotion to practice in detail everything God has commanded. Obedience like that keeps the channels of grace open, so that goals are achieved, ministries are effective, and God’s purposes get fulfilled. In turn that means a deep and detailed acquaintance with the content of God’s revelation. Day and night it is to be the subject of Joshua’s meditation (v. 8). Clearly this cannot mean that he did nothing but study God’s Law; he was a man of immense action and energy. But nothing is excluded from the comprehensive Hebraism “day and night”; it means there is never a moment when, whatever decision has to be made, the book of God is not in the driver’s seat. It is to be constantly read aloud to Joshua and to others, constantly rehearsed and remembered, and constantly obeyed in action that is meticulous and enthusiastic (v. 8). Unswerving and unconditional obedience to the Lord’s will is the guarantee of prosperity and success, which has nothing to do with the size of Joshua’s bank balance and everything to do with the purposes of the living God being fulfilled. Mission impossible will then become mission accomplished.

If this was the case when only five of the sixty-six books of the Bible were as yet committed to writing, how much more must it be so for Christian believers who have been given the full and complete revelation? And yet, in the midst of all the confusion and debate about how the contemporary church is to meet the challenges of this generation, how little we hear about the centrality of daily, disciplined, and detailed obedience to all that the Lord has spoken in his word of truth! The quest for the bizarre and unusual, through visions, dreams, and “prophecies,” has taken over the central place in many congregations today. Biblical teaching, we are told, is old hat, out-of-date, boring, ineffective. But “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). Without that word there will be no lasting faith. Without faith there will be no obedience. Without obedience there will be no fundamental change, no gospel advance. Accepting an alternative to the centrality of Scripture, in the church and in the Christian, producing fear and dismay, is forbidden to Joshua in verse 9. Such alternatives are not hard to find in the western church as major denominations continue to turn their backs on God’s revealed Word and to embrace a compromise arrangement with the sinful world.

Personal Action

If God in his kindness has shown his people how we are to live in relationship to him, then obedience that is active, and not merely intellectual assent, is the only way to appropriate his goodness. If we want to know God’s promises in practice and experience their growing potential in our lives, we must obey God’s commands. That is what the life of faith is all about. The promises of God are unconditional in terms of God’s own commitment, but their enjoyment depends upon our detailed obedience, and that means faith, which shows itself in works (James 2:21–26). Suppose you are given a check for 1,000 dollars. It is unconditional. It has the signature of the person who has written it. He has the money in his account to meet it. It’s all there, with no condition entailed, except that you act in faith and go to the bank to cash it. When you believe that everything is above board and genuine, you enter into the promise by cashing the check, and the money is yours. But you don’t get the benefit of the 1,000 dollars by framing the check, putting it up on your wall, and looking at it from time to time.

Similarly, we shall not get far in our Christian discipleship by listening to God’s Word but never acting on it. All that will happen is that our hearts will harden (Psalm 95:7ff.). Knowing and walking with God requires faith and a willingness to act within the terms of the contract or agreement. And we have

seen that those terms are trust and obedience. Martin Luther used to define faith as saying, “Yes, this is for me.” That is the lesson we are being taught here, as Joshua was. We are called to say yes to God’s resources—his grace and power, his constant presence—and appropriate them to the exact point of our conscious need. That is the source of strength and courage. “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might” (Ephesians 6:10). “Be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:1). “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

Faith responds to promise by action. I can move forward through Christ. He is the dynamic, the energy, and he will take me where he wants me to be, if I trust him. Faith does not fear and give up. Faith does not underestimate the enemy and relax. Faith watches and prays, “Lord, help me now. Give me your courage, your strength to help in this time of my need.” But this is faith in Christ as revealed in his Word, not faith in faith! Even well-taught congregations need to beware of an intellectualism that is theologically accurate and exact but never translates into active obedience, which is costly and totally dependent upon God.

Joshua Commissions Israel (1:10–18)

The first sign of Joshua’s active faith and obedience appears in his unquestioning relay of God’s word to the people through their tribal leaders in verses 10, 11. The instructions are very practical, and everyone is to be involved. They need food prepared for the crossing because in three days they will enter the land to take possession of it. Probably at this time Joshua does not know in detail how this crossing is to be achieved. He would certainly have known what we, the readers, are not made aware of until 3:15, that the river “overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest.” That is yet another impossible ingredient in a growingly terrifying commission. But the promise is in the driver’s seat. It is “the land that the LORD your God is giving you to possess” (1:11). If Yahweh says that now is the time to go forward and cross the river, it is!

The final part of the chapter deals with Joshua’s special instructions to the two and a half tribes who will settle east of the river in the lands that had been taken from Sihon and Og, kings of the Moabites (see Numbers 21:21–35). Moses had granted them permission to occupy this good grazing country provided they agree to join forces with the other tribes when they invaded Canaan (Numbers 32), and it is this recorded agreement, which Joshua and Eleazar had witnessed, to which he now recalls them. Their families could stay behind in what came to be called Gilead, but their fighting men are to be committed to the conquest (Joshua 1:14).

The last three verses of the chapter underline for us how God is already fulfilling his promises to Joshua. There is not only no opposition to his leadership, as promised in verse 5a, but not a whiff of resentment at the transfer of leadership. Indeed, not only do they affirm their unquestioning loyalty to Joshua as the new leader, they even agree that whoever rebels against his commands will be “put to death” (v. 18). There are, however, two provisos, each introduced in English by the word “only.” In verse 17 we read, “only may the LORD your God be with you,” and in verse 18, “only be strong and courageous.” The first is covered by faith in the already expressed promises of God and the second by Joshua’s commitment to do everything according to God’s word. This concludes a very auspicious start to Joshua’s ministry. God is with him. The people are with him. Plans are already afoot to cross the river, and soon they will be at Jericho, the fortress city that guards the entry to the land of promise. All this is guided and orchestrated by God himself. He is the central character of this chapter, as he is of the whole enterprise that the book will go on to describe.

Of course, we are not Joshua, and we cannot put ourselves precisely in his shoes. But as Jesus mediates to us, his rescued people, the mind and will of the unseen Father, through his teaching we do stand in a similar position—dependent on God’s word to lead us and called to a life of faith and obedience. We all know what it is to need courage for an unseen future and faith in God’s promises to generate obedience to his commands. What strikes me in this chapter is the divine urgency about it all. This day has been a long time coming, but when it dawns, there is no room for delay. Our problem is that we often fail to act as we know we should because we do not believe sufficiently to launch out on the bare word of our promising God. Yet nothing can be more certain or more secure. I’m not talking about bright ideas we have thought up or notions we like to entertain but about a clear word of God from Scripture. When God applies his word to our lives in regard to something he is calling us to do, we must begin to do it, in the strength that he supplies, as soon as we can. Our temptation is to wait and then ask for further light, without acting on the light he has already given us. But all I need to do for my heart to harden, after God has spoken his word, is . . . nothing! All progress in our discipleship begins by God speaking with clarity (and often persistence) through the Scriptures, commanding and promising, and then the Spirit of God applying that word of truth so relevantly and potently that we cannot escape its demand. This is the purpose of God’s commission—a life that trusts and obeys, which is a life that he can use.

3

Inside Enemy Territory

JOSHUA 2:1–24



IT IS OFTEN SAID that the United States and Great Britain are two nations divided by a common language. In fact, cultural differences usually run deeper than their linguistic delineation, and presuppositions—certainly not articulated and often not even realized—dictate what we think we are hearing as much as what we think we are saying. But when the cultures are diametrically different, when not only the vocabulary but the very mind-set of the other side is bewilderingly opaque, we need firsthand testimony of what is actually going on and careful interpretation of what is being assumed. Enter the two spies of verse 1.

Joshua faces a quandary. Still based in Shittim (a Hebrew word for the wood from acacia trees) where Israel had succumbed to idolatry and immorality with the Baal of Peor and its Moabite devotees (Numbers 25:1ff.), Joshua is aware that across the Jordan the Canaanite city of Jericho stands, walled and defended, like a sentinel to bar Israel's progress into the land. As yet, though, he has no strategy for its conquest. He has divine assurance that God will most certainly give them "every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon . . . just as I promised to Moses" (Joshua 1:3), but no instructions as to how to defeat Jericho. So, like the good general he is in process of becoming, he does as Moses did and sends out spies (not twelve but two) on a reconnaissance mission of the land, "especially Jericho," which is challenge number one. This is wisdom rather than faithlessness, of which some accuse Joshua.

Consider the situation. Jericho is a well-defended garrison with trained troops in residence. First Israel has to cross the Jordan, in flood season, and then face an apparently impregnable citadel. Their position will be extremely vulnerable—an enemy in front of them and a river in full flood behind them.

In the absence of any direct divine instruction, Joshua is doing the responsible thing in sending out his scouts. He is using the means that are at his disposal. That is not an unspiritual course of action. Indeed, to pray without using the means that God has given us is almost as foolish as to use the means without praying. The two need to be combined together in all our battles. This was a lesson Israel learned throughout her history, finally enshrined in the post-exilic Psalm 126 celebrating the return of the captives to Zion. The situation is met with prayer—“Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negeb!” (Psalm 126:4)—but that has to be accompanied by dedicated action—“Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy” (Psalm 126:5). Praying and sowing belong together. So here Joshua’s commonsense approach is evidence that he has great faith in the promises of God and not at all the opposite.

God’s Unlikely Choice

The focus shifts, then, to Jericho and especially to one of its citizens, Rahab, a prostitute (v. 1), whose house the spies enter. Some translations and commentators want to designate her an “innkeeper,” following the later rabbinic insistence that she be held in reverence by the Jews. Calvin’s comment is typically forthright. “It is indeed a regular practice with the Rabbins [sic] when they would consult for the honor of their nation, presumptuously to wrest Scripture and give a different turn by their fictions to anything that seems not quite reputable.”¹ Certainly the New Testament holds Rahab in great repute as a woman of faith in Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25, but both references clearly refer to her as a prostitute. Her rescue is far more to the glory of God than any attempted whitewashing of her behavior. The point is that an immoral, pagan woman would never have been considered as a candidate for God’s rescuing grace in the midst of the judgment that he was about to inflict on her city. Yet she and her family are the ones who are rescued when Jericho is destroyed, an example of God’s compassion and mercy in response to faith. And they were not only rescued and brought into the covenant community but also were given an honored place in the genealogy of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5).

This is one of the great salvation stories of the Old Testament. Initially everything is stacked against Rahab. She has no family background of a knowledge of the living God. She lives as a pagan in a thoroughly pagan city. She is known as a prostitute, making her living in a way that is a constant offense against God. The Bible doesn’t say this is the worst of sins because it doesn’t deal in comparative evaluations as some Christians seem to do. But it certainly sees sin as alienating the sinner from a holy God, making every

human being (for we are all sinners) subject to God's condemnation and righteous judgment. Yet this is the woman whom God chooses to rescue by what seems an almost accidental sequence of circumstances. She receives the spies and hides them from the king's investigation squad (vv. 2–4). The spies seem rather inept since they are spotted almost as soon as they enter the city (v. 2). But the king's men are equally naive since they are sent on a wild goose chase after the spies by Rahab's lies (vv. 4–7), while all the time their quarry lies hidden under the stalks of flax on Rahab's roof.

Clearly Rahab set no great store on honesty of speech. Her denial of knowledge about the spies and deliberate misleading of the pursuers seem both fluent and without any pangs of conscience. She is, after all, a pagan woman. But not surprisingly these verses have raised a considerable ethical debate, which is given a detailed treatment by David M. Howard in his very valuable commentary.² Her lies are neither condemned, nor are they commended in the text. The narrative does not teach that lying is justifiable or that the end justifies the means. Rather Rahab seems to have been trapped in a moral choice in which either option would involve sin. Either she could have disclosed the spies and almost certainly brought about their execution, or she could have denied that she knew their whereabouts, which was clearly untrue. A lie is a distortion or denial of the truth with the intention to deceive, and that is clearly what Rahab did. Probably it came quite naturally to her since, like us, she was a fallen human being living in a fallen world, as we need to remember before we are too eager to point the finger.

She had to choose the lesser of two evils, and as far as she was concerned that meant lying to save the spies' lives. It was, of course, motivated also by her growing spiritual awareness, as the next few verses show, but that does not exonerate her from her sin. All false witness calls out the judgment of God who is the Truth. So we cannot say that God saved her because she saved the spies. As James points out, that high-risk strategy constituted the "works" that demonstrated the reality of her faith (James 2:25). But it was her faith that saved her and her family. God did not need Rahab's lie to protect the life of his men. Had she told the truth, God could well have worked in other ways to deliver the spies, as the rest of the Bible frequently illustrates. God has total ability to confuse and redirect those who are seeking to abort his purposes. But this is only speculation. Rahab was being herself. Lying came naturally to her, as it does to every sinner. No one would have imagined that she could become the object of God's saving grace. But her story is wonderful evidence that no one is beyond the reach of divine mercy.

Rahab's Unlikely Faith

Undoubtedly, the focus of this wonderful chapter lies on Rahab's amazing confession in verses 9–11. This speech reveals a situation that not even the most optimistic Israelite could have imagined. Jericho, that impossible barrier to the people of God, is in fact already a defeated foe. Before the first feet are placed in the Jordan to bring the people into the land, the hearts of the inhabitants of Jericho are melting in fear (v. 9). The agent of that defeat is the word about what God has already done for his people and how this reveals his character. Look at Rahab's testimony. "I know that the LORD [Yahweh—the covenant name of God] has given you the land" (v. 9). How does she know? By what she and her fellow citizens have heard (v. 10) concerning the exodus from Egypt, the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, and the destruction of Sihon and Og. That is what has caused hearts in Jericho to melt and their courage to fail. But more than past progress or military victories is involved, at least in Rahab's case. She traces these events back not to any inherent superiority of the sons of Abraham but to the reality she confesses in verse 11: "The LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath." For Rahab there is nowhere where God is not God, including Jericho.

The truth of who God is and what he has done for his people has already penetrated Jericho, and when the word of God gets into enemy territory, only two reactions are possible. Either there is faith in the greatness of the Lord and a casting of oneself entirely on his mercy (vv. 12, 13), or there is fear, which determines to resist God's supremacy, challenge his will, and continue to fight against his purposes. We shall meet the same pattern on at least three other occasions in the book. The same language is used in 5:1 regarding "all the kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea." In 9:24 the Gibeonite deception is explained by the same mechanism. Again in 10:1, 2 Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem, reacts to the news of what God has done in Jericho and Ai in the same way. The mighty acts of God in Israel's history always serve to reveal the character of Israel's God, and once the uniqueness of his sovereign authority and power over the whole of creation is realized, the reaction can only be submission or resistance. In the face of God's purposes, neutrality is impossible.

Of course, the same is true today. Contemporary attacks on the reasonability of Christian belief often depend on ignoring the historical evidence of Biblical revelation, especially with regard to the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. If Christianity can be reduced to

religious speculation or an ethical code, it can be easily dismissed, which explains why the anti-supernatural and anti-historical destructive Biblical criticism of the past 150 years has emptied the churches of the western world. But the Biblical revelation is gloriously and stubbornly historical, which we must never tire of asserting. “The Word became flesh and dwelt [literally, pitched his tent] among us” (John 1:14)—that is a historical statement. Certainly it contains an explanation of the event that may be contested, but the factual existence of Jesus of Nazareth on the pages of history is beyond dispute. Refusal to acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord does not lead to neutrality; ultimately it leads to fear that fans the flames of denial and resistance.

Rahab has no other explanation for the astonishing event of the exodus and all that flowed from it, even though she seems a most unlikely candidate to come to faith in Israel’s God and appears to stand entirely alone among her fellow citizens in Jericho. The sheer historical force of what God has done and what he will yet do generates within her the faith that is prepared to risk her life in order to save it and the lives of her family (vv. 12, 13). She is prepared to cut herself off from her background, to risk being charged as a traitor, and to do everything she can to help the spies because of her new faith-allegiance to the only true and living God. All her future now depends on this God; so she casts herself upon his mercy and on the faithfulness of his representatives (v. 14). Because it is the Lord who is giving his people the land, they will replicate his faithful character in the way in which they deal with this newest convert and her extended family.

Faith’s Unlikely Test

Rahab’s eventual rescue depends not only on her initial confession of faith leading her to seek God’s mercy, but on her continuing obedience to the instructions that the spies give her about the scarlet cord (v. 18). This is why she is such an attractive example for James to use in his New Testament letter. In that key passage relating faith and deeds (James 2:14–26), James several times asserts their indivisibility. “Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:17). “I will show you my faith by my works” (James 2:18). Abraham’s “faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works” (James 2:22), in his being prepared to offer up his son Isaac. “You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone” (James 2:24). “Faith apart from works is dead” (James 2:26). Rahab is the other example James uses of this “faith revealed in actions” principle. The primary significant action is her provision for the spies and their protection, but the life of faith is always to be expressed in the activities of obedience. Indeed,

obedience to what God commands is the only credible confirmation of belief in what he provides.

The obligation laid on her by the spies is to hang a scarlet cord in the window, through which she will let them down by rope to escape the city, since “her house was built into the city wall” (v. 15). It seems unlikely that the scarlet cord was the escape rope since verse 18 calls it “*this* scarlet cord,” implying that the spies give it to her. Also different Hebrew words are used for “rope” in verse 15 and “cord” in verse 18. Woudstra suggests that they would have brought it with them, as they “probably came prepared for various eventualities.”³ The reason is practical. Expecting to attack the city by siege and bombardment, the Israelite forces would need to identify clearly the house whose occupants are to be spared. They will be faithful to their rescue promise provided Rahab keeps the terms of the agreement, gathering all her family into the house marked by the scarlet cord (vv. 17–20). Rahab agrees to the terms, the spies escape through the window, down the city wall, and make for the cover of the hills (v. 21). The scarlet cord remains tied in the window.

Many commentators have seen the scarlet cord as a replication of God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Back in Exodus 12, the only houses that were saved from the destructive judgment of the firstborn when God passed through the land were those where the shelter of the Passover lamb was demonstrated by its blood applied to the sides and tops of the doorframes. “The blood shall be a sign for you [instead of you], on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you . . .” (Exodus 12:13). The color of Rahab’s cord, scarlet, has sometimes been taken to illustrate that deliverance is only possible through the blood of sacrifice, projecting forward to the New Testament reality of rescue solely through Christ’s blood shed on the cross. Taking seriously the unity of the sixty-six books of the Scriptures, we rightly identify recurring patterns or types of God’s dealings with his people at different stages of redemption history. The danger is that connections become imaginative and fanciful rather than real and then become an imposition on the passage rather than an exposition of its significance. In this case the color alone would seem to be a weak ground on which to justify a typological link to the cross. But the principle of obedience as the outward expression of inner faith and even more the dependence on God’s mercy as a guarantee for salvation are certainly principles that have New Testament currency, as we have already seen in James.⁴

To Rahab, it may have seemed strange to have to tie a red cord in her window, but she did it for what it symbolized of her faith in and obedience to Yahweh, Israel’s God, not because the object itself had any greater power than

that of a sign of unseen realities. Perhaps a useful reminder to us is the need to continue in trust and obedience even when we cannot see why it should be in certain terms or how things will work out. For the Christian believer, that same mercy of God is conveyed to us through Christ's death on the cross as our Passover lamb, under whose blood we find shelter from God's righteous wrath (1 Corinthians 5:7). But the cross is still the foolish stumbling-block it was to the Greeks and Jews of sophisticated first-century Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:23). "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18). That is the urgent issue that the Rahab narrative presents to us.

The chapter ends (vv. 22–24) where it began, with the spies. The plan to evade their pursuers is successful, as is their crossing of the Jordan, and their consequent report to Joshua is triumphant. "Truly the LORD has given all the land into our hands. And also, all the inhabitants of the land melt away because of us" (v. 24). It is a striking contrast to the negativity of the ten spies and their report in Numbers 13—we came, we saw, we cannot. How different now and how like the content of the report that Caleb and Joshua had brought back to Moses! These two spies had not traveled extensively through the land or visited its settlements. Rather, their conviction was that if God could do this in Jericho, there could be no limit to what he would do in the rest of the land. It's a good lesson for us to bring away from this exciting chapter. As the church of Jesus Christ, we are never so strong as when we are recognizing and rejoicing in the sovereign grace of God.

If God can rescue a Rahab, no one is beyond his reach or his concern. He is no respecter of persons. This should teach us not to categorize our as yet unbelieving family, friends, or acquaintances according to how likely we think they will respond to the good news of grace. God is at work behind the scenes. The city of Jericho presented itself as a hard nut to crack, but within its shell it had already crumbled. So we should never write off anyone because of their background or record. God's delight is to save sinners. "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). "This man receives sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2). We must not fall for the lie that Christianity is for a few people who have a religious kink in their inadequate personalities. The truth of God is for every man and every woman, all made in his image, all needing to be redeemed and restored. There is no life so impervious that God's grace cannot break into it in transforming power. But neither must we ever imagine that the opposition is invincible. God's word can get into territory that the enemy holds, and when that word of God begins to work, strong citadels become vulnerable. The dynamic lies in the power of the Holy

Spirit taking the word of God and so penetrating minds and hearts that people cannot escape from God's truth, faith or fear being the alternative outcomes.

This chapter is a clarion call to have confidence in the mercy and grace of our God, in the gospel of his saving acts. When that is rooted deeply in us, we shall both pray and expect God to work—not one or the other but both. It means that we shall give weight to the word of the Lord over against all other human factors. In our technical and technique-dominated culture we are not short of sociological analysis about why Christianity is in decline in the twenty-first-century Western world. There may be considerable help in such diagnoses, but they do not provide a remedy. The answer lies in the Word of God in the hands of the Spirit of God and in the prayerful obedience of God's people. There is no reason why the Word of God should not "speed ahead and be honored" today (2 Thessalonians 3:1). God has conquered many Jerichos down the centuries and totally transformed situations, and he is well able to do it again. Perhaps he is waiting for us, his people, to demonstrate our faith in obedience and trust by dependent prayer. However, there is no doubt that God is mightily at work across the planet. "In the whole world [the gospel] is bearing fruit and increasing" (Colossians 1:6). He is rescuing Rahabs and their families, pulling down Satan's strongholds, calling whoever will to come and take shelter under the provision of the sacrificial death of his Son upon the cross.



The PREACHING *the*
WORD SERIES
IS WRITTEN BY
PASTORS FOR PASTORS
AND THEIR CHURCHES



crossway.org/preachingtheword

The Preaching the Word series is written
BY PASTORS FOR PASTORS
and their churches

Preaching the Word commentaries are written by pastors for pastors, as well as for all who teach or study God's Word. With pastor R. Kent Hughes as the series editor, these volumes feature an experienced pastor or teacher who models expository preaching and practical application. This series is noted for its steadfast commitment to Biblical authority, clear exposition of Scripture, and readability, making it widely accessible for both new and seasoned pastors, as well as men and women hungering to read the Bible in a fresh way.

This commentary on the book of Joshua traces the history of Israel's conquest of the promised land and explores the fulfillment of God's covenant promises to his chosen people.

PRAISE FOR THIS SERIES

"This series resonates with the priorities of the pulpit. No academic aloofness here, but down-to-earth, preacher-to-preacher meat for God's people."

Bryan Chapell, Senior Pastor, Grace Presbyterian Church (PCA), Peoria, Illinois

"The single best resource for faithful Biblical exposition available today. A great boon for genuine reformation!"

Timothy George, Dean, Beeson Divinity School, Samford University

"There is a long history of informed, edifying Biblical expositions that have been mightily used of God to shape and strengthen the Church. These volumes admirably fit this tradition."

D. A. Carson, Research Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

"Throughout the Christian centuries, working pastors have been proving themselves to be the best of all Bible expositors. Kent Hughes stands in this great tradition, and his exciting expositions uphold it worthily."

J. I. Packer, Board of Governors' Professor of Theology, Regent College

"It is a pleasure to commend this series of homiletical commentaries. They fill an enormous vacuum that exists between the practical needs of the pastor/teacher and the critical exegetical depth of most commentaries."

Walter C. Kaiser Jr., President Emeritus and Distinguished Professor of Old Testament and Ethics, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARY