

JOSHUA
and the Flow of
BIBLICAL
HISTORY

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INTRODUCTION BY
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Joshua and the Flow of Biblical History

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INTRODUCTION

By Udo Middelman

Joshua is one of our favorite personalities in the Bible. In a dramatic march around Jericho's strong walls, he leads the band of migrating Israelites for seven days against a major protected settlement in the Jordan valley, until the walls fall with the sound of trumpets, and the city is conquered. We like such stories. David and Goliath is another one, followed by Daniel in the lions' den and Peter's miraculous liberation from King Herod's prison. "Get up quickly, dress yourself and put on your sandals!" an angel says. And then the iron gate, leading into the city, opened of its own accord (Acts 12:7ff. ESV).

These are real events, powerful actions in the flow of history, which later generations refer to with delight and confidence. They greatly appeal also to our age, which craves eyewitness events and defines what has happened in a person's life as significant truth. Here are action stories that could even surface in a video arcade.

Yet such events become merely the seedbed of anecdotes, personal interest stories, and testimonies unless they are rooted in a deeper soil of what Schaeffer called "True Truth." That notion is often foreign to our cultural climate. For now the story alone is the event; our thrill in response to it matters more than what actually happened or why it happened. Each person or each society has heroes who must perform marvels to satisfy what are easily heightened expectations for an overstimulated public.

Part of the reason for this need among our neighbors in town or in the pew is that they are too much affected by various kinds of relativism with regard to personal faith, a loss of confidence in real truth, and an overconfidence in one's own understanding at this moment. Postmodernism, intimidation on an open market for religion, ignorance of a wider world, and hasty conclusions contribute to a lust for attractive events and a disdain for reflection from a wider perspective.

Joshua (and the Bible in its entirety) expands our field of vision. There is more to it than a story for the familiar Negro spiritual "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho." The series of sermons that became this book allows Schaeffer to stretch our minds. We are taken to a higher vantage point to observe a vast landscape with intersecting paths between fields, where the historic, spiritual, and intellectual nourishment for the Christian life grows on the rich soil of God's revelation for the human race after the Fall.

Joshua was the commander of the Israelites at the time when their exodus from Egyptian slavery brings them into the land promised to Abraham some 400 years before. The book of Joshua brings to life real history during a crucial period of transition for a people who now settle down to also become a nation. They are the families of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their numerous descendants in later generations. After bondage they discover freedom and the need to practice discipline. From weakness and exploitation they move to power and responsibility for a state, a society, and the rule of law—God's law. They had known life under Egypt's ruling Pharaohs, but now they crossed the river Jordan to the other side and had to build their own civilization.

What they believed about God and humanity, their ideas about all of life, now more than before, needed to be first

cleansed of any pagan Egyptian influences and then translated into the behavior and action of God's people. The personal faith of their sojourning fathers had to become the public demonstration of truth—about God, about human beings, and about life in history. For that is the Bible's insistence: We believe God to be alive. He has told us in his Word how we should live and order our lives, set our priorities, and what sense to make of being human.

Transitions often involve changes and adaptations. But the book of Joshua speaks also of the basis for continuity. The continuity of nature's laws across the globe and in all history is matched by the continuity of God's laws for human beings everywhere. The text links, going backwards in time, the five books of Moses, or Pentateuch, to the truth of God's character, the shape of creation, and the beginning.

But the book of Joshua also lets us go ahead into Israel's history, for which the social and ethical foundations are laid now in society and in geography: They take possession of their own land. Each Israelite must decide in the end whether he and his house would follow God, as Joshua said about his family. And that choice, repeated in each life and each generation, is then fleshed out in the subsequent texts, starting with the book of Judges, which describes a time when everyone did what was good in his own eyes with often horrendous consequences. The books of Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, and the prophets down the path of history reveal with great honesty the failures and confessions, the struggles and the victories of God's people all in the context of real history.

Joshua is in the Old Testament in relation to the Pentateuch what the book of Acts is in the New Testament in relation to the four Gospels. This book is the implementation of the insights and instructions given before, exhibiting in a

new era their truthfulness, humanity, and joy from inside the believing and practicing community to the world around it. The importance of what is true, just, and right is fleshed out in continuous history from Moses in the past to faithful believers in all ages. They are not left alone to become an “again-and-again” society of stifled repeaters so common to most of the world’s religions. The text of the Word of God in their midst needs to be understood, argued with, and applied. Judaism and Christianity insist that God has spoken outside our heads or hearts and left a record. Believers also have the promise of power from the only God, whose existence is the only sufficient explanation of *their* existence as human beings, as real persons. They have seen on multiple occasions the supernatural presence of God in their midst. It would be hard to miss the continuity of this in Christ’s words in Matthew 28:18 and in Acts 1:8.

The consequences become evident in people’s lives. We never stand alone, but are grafted into the continuity of confident believers, whether as Joshua or Elijah, as Deborah or Mary. For the same reason we are foolish when we neglect or violate what has been made so amply clear in the text we carry with us as a constant reminder to us of a larger reality than our personal feelings or even experience. The continuity of blessings is matched by a continuity in punishments: The sin of Achan finds its parallel in Acts 5, where Ananias and Sapphira hope to get away with lies. Sin is not to be taken lightly; its effects are real and require a heavy price.

The Bible speaks of a real and historic journey in time and space, not merely an internal, personal, or poetic one. God is the creator and judge of history, not just an idea in the mind of Moses or Joshua, as he is in the mind of Buddha or in the visions of Mohammed and Joseph Smith. Spirituality involves the will-

ing submission to the mind of God, revealed by his Spirit in the form of language with reference to reality. It requires comprehension, not submission and denial. Biblical truth relates to right thinking and right acting, to soul and body, to time and space. It shows people in their obligation to God and their wonder over his interest in them. God's response to the fall of man starts with a question: "Adam, where are you?"

The continuity in Joshua, however, is more than merely historic. It is also a continuity of ideas and their influences over choices. Joshua describes for us the historic flow from revealed ideas, laws, and God's promises to their realization in the landscape of life. God's care of his people becomes obvious, and their struggle with obedience, selfishness, and fear is very human. There is a strained, yet tender relationship between the high calling given by God to the children of Abraham and then the often terrible fall from that position into the pit of greed and lust for power among their descendants.

In all the confusion and contradictions of human history, the steady and reliable promises of the God of the Bible stand out clearly as we pass from Moses to Joshua. They are upheld in the training of a new leader before Moses' death. With references to the past, Moses looks into the future and expects the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises of God. There is a concrete dimension to the promise of God's work of our salvation given already to Adam and Eve right after their fall into sin in Genesis 3:15.

That longer perspective is the reason for Joshua's courage to take the survivors of the Exodus and the desert wanderings into a land where other people practiced inhuman religious rituals that needed to be stopped under any universal moral considerations. That perspective is not rooted in a tribal religion, but applies the continuing requirement to be human and rational,

and to have ear and heart tuned to the mind of the creator of our humanity. The “consecration” required of each Israelite before entering the land was not a religious rite, but an examination by each person as to whether he or she was willing to abide by the law of God, marvelously summed up in the Ten Commandments. That would be their specific civilization: a people under a common law based on the truth of the universe, in which we should love God and our neighbor.

The law was a text written on stone, with expositions and applications remembered in a book of some kind, that would allow the people to come back to a standard of law, to be able to talk about it, and to discuss it, to meditate on it, and to practice it (Josh. 23:6). For God has powerfully exhibited its truth and life in his own dealings with Israel for generations.

The text of the Bible is the definition of reality, not a tribal or private religious code. It addresses humanity, not just believers. It is the moral law of the universe that favors life, reason, and human kindness. The continuous inhumanity of the earlier inhabitants of the land gives the justification for their judgment by the one God, whose unique image we bear, and the termination of their practices. The land, as promised before to Abraham, was given to Israel at a time when the iniquity of sacrificing babies to the gods and goddesses of fertility had overflowed any acceptable measure. The Canaanites could find no court under God to justify their inhuman practices.

Similar continuity is shown between what God’s people believed and what Rahab, a harlot in Jericho, understood and believed when she watched the agreement between revelation from Jehovah and the history of God’s people since their leaving Egypt forty years before. She put word and history together and concluded, as anyone could and still can, that this was not a peculiar and private interpretation of a people in search of a

colorful but invented identity. She heard about and saw the work of the living God, and she believed.

Schaeffer elaborates many other areas where the continuity of truth is shown. God's interest is not to test obedience in teaching bits and pieces of peculiar doctrines. The truth is a whole cloth, not a patchwork invention as people went along in the face of various experiences. Circumcision as the sign of God's covenant with his people continues into baptism, both of which are neither magic nor exclusively external. They represent the circumcision of the heart and the cleansing from sin. The Passover feast since the Exodus is continued into the Communion observance around the Lord's body and blood for our forgiveness in the New Testament.

Discovering such continuity clarifies all kinds of puzzles that may often surface in a first reading of the Bible. It places the bits and pieces, the passages and verses, into a larger context and sheds light on what we are meant to understand of the wholeness of God's Word and work. This continuity gives weight to the understanding that God's interest is to make himself known and to use all kinds of instructions, events, and situations to let us know of his loving and persistent interest to not remain a mystery, but to become known and loved.

There is a flow to history. The fall of Adam and Eve had a devastating effect of separating us from an immediate presence of God. Yet against all that, all Scripture is given to us to work on our minds and hearts in preparation for what God desires to accomplish with his people, with his creation. Schaeffer sees in Joshua a stretch of time that, like all of God's work in succeeding generations, reveals his sorrow over our sin and his gracious favor to us.

As Francis Schaeffer says, "God's unconditional promise stands when men violate the character of God. This is not ordi-

nary sin but stupidity. It is like rubbing your hand over a rough board and getting splinters. For it opposes what we are made to be and what the universe really is. God has revealed his character, and, if God's people obey his character, the conditional blessings stand. Once we understand this, we really understand the flow of history.”

JOSHUA'S PREPARATION

JOSHUA IS AN IMPORTANT book for many reasons—for the history it records and for its internal teaching. But what makes the book of Joshua overwhelmingly important is that it stands as a bridge, a link between the Pentateuch (the writings of Moses) and the rest of Scripture. It is crucial for understanding the unity the Pentateuch has with all that follows it, including the New Testament.

The story of the man Joshua begins not in the book of Joshua but in the book of Exodus. After the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea in their flight from Egypt, they came just a few days later to Rephidim (Ex. 17). There they began to murmur against God; Moses, by God's direction, smote the rock, and God provided water in a miraculous way. Almost immediately after this, the Amalekites came against the Israelites to make war with them, the first battle the Israelites had to fight during their days of march.

At this point Joshua is named for the first time: "And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek" (Ex. 17:9). So we first meet Joshua as the general of the forces of the Lord, a role that would immediately in this set-

ting teach him a lesson—namely, that God will not tolerate the rebellion of men against himself.

The Amalekites, of course, were not included in the promise made to Abraham. They were non-Jews—Semitic, but non-Jews. The Amalekites were rebelling against the living God. This action is clearly portrayed as rebellion in Exodus 17:16: “Because the hand of Amalek is against the throne of the LORD [or, Because there is a hand against the throne of Jehovah], therefore hath the LORD sworn, the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” In other words, the war of Amalek and the Amalekites against the Israelites was not just the surrounding world making war with God’s people; the war was a blow against the throne of God. The Amalekites were challenging with the sword God’s rule, God’s throne, God’s rightful place over all the world.

Exodus 17:16 indicates that the Amalekites understood something of the fact that they were fighting not only against the Israelites, but also against the God who stood behind the Israelites. One can question how much knowledge they had, but their actions remind me of people today who understand that what they are really fighting against is at least the concept of the Judeo-Christian religion and the culture based upon it.

So Joshua is introduced to us as a general in the midst of a warfare that impressed upon him that God will not tolerate the rebellion of men against himself.

Joshua also learned another important lesson through the conflict with the Amalekites: Power is not merely the capability of the general and the sword, but power is of God. Moses sent Joshua out to fight while he himself climbed to the top of a hill with the rod of God in his hand—the same rod that he had stretched over the Red Sea until the sea had rolled back, the same rod that God had used in many of the miracles. The rod

had originally been the rod of Moses, but had become the rod of God, a representation of God's power. As the rod was raised, the Israelites prevailed; as it sank, the Amalekites prevailed (Ex. 17:11). This is not to be thought of as magic. God was teaching these people a serious lesson in their first warfare, and no one was to learn it better than Joshua the general. In the midst of battle, is one to fight? Yes. To be a good general? Yes. But when everything is done, the power is to be understood as God's, not man's.

In Exodus 17:14 another note is added: "And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in *the* book. . . ." It seems clear that a definite article is used here. There was a book of God that continued to grow, and this was the Pentateuch itself. What was written in it was what God said should be put there. Early in Joshua's life, therefore, he was in a definite way wrapped up with the *book*. As we shall see, this becomes exceedingly important in the book of Joshua itself.

ON MOUNT SINAI

The next time we see Joshua is in Exodus 24:13: "And Moses rose up, and his minister Joshua: and Moses went up into the mount of God." Immediately before this, these two men had been joined by some others for a very special event: "Then up went Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel: And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink" (Ex. 24:9-11).

The leaders went partway up the mount, and they ate. Then Joshua apparently went up still farther with Moses. In this event were two strong emphases: the first upon *the reality of God* and

the second on *the glory of God*. All the leaders would have perceived this as they ate before him.

The eating before God was not unique. In fact, one of the great things in Scripture is that we eat before God. This is beautiful, because eating is such a lowly activity. It is connected with our body and our bodily functions in a way that hardly anything else is, for what we eat becomes our body. Yet constantly in the Scriptures God's people are brought together to eat in his presence. For instance, the Passover, which was established in Egypt and then at Mount Sinai, was really a meal in the presence of God. So is the Lord's Supper, which took place in the New Testament and continues today. Finally, we are expressly told that at the second coming the marriage supper of the Lamb will take place, and all the redeemed, with resurrection bodies, will eat in the presence of God. Among the many things that are marvelous about this is the very reality of it—the solidness of it. It highlights the fact that the whole man was made by God and is accepted by God.

Another thing is clearly seen in God's preparation of Joshua: Joshua was reminded of the interplay between the seen and the unseen worlds. There is no vast chasm between them; the unseen world is right here. The unseen world is always immediately present, not far off. Above everything and overshadowing everything is the reality of God in his glory. It undoubtedly stood Joshua in good stead many times for him to understand that God was close at hand, that he is the God who exists and who is "here."

In Exodus 24:17 we read, "And the sight of the glory of the LORD was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel." All the children of Israel saw space-time, historic manifestations on the top of Mount Sinai, so that later, after this generation had died, Moses could stand

on the plain of Moab and say to those who had been little children when these manifestations occurred, "You saw! You heard!" This is the very opposite of the modern concept of the existential religious leap, for it is woven into a strong space-time fabric.

AT THE GOLDEN CALF

Joshua is mentioned next at a very sober time, the time of the golden calf (Ex. 32). God said to Moses, "Go down quickly because even while you've been up here on the mount, the people have revolted against me!" So down came Moses and Joshua from the mountain.

As he came down, "Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, [and] he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp" (Ex. 32:17). Maybe he heard this with his general's ears, with his mind attuned to battle. But Moses responded, "It has nothing to do with war." It would have been much better if it had been war, for the problem was much more serious. "It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery," Moses said. "Neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that sing do I hear" (32:18). "Singing," you say. "Well, that's better than war." In this case, though, it was worse. War is not the greatest evil to come upon a people. "And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath [at the foot of] the mount" (32:19).

Let us visualize Moses' response. He came down from the mountain and into the foothills—the slope at the bottom. He and Joshua saw the golden calf, and Moses immediately smashed the tablets of stone upon which God had written the Ten Commandments. These were the very tablets upon which

God himself had written with his finger. God had communicated in verbal form and put his words on the tablets in the language of the people. Now Moses had destroyed them.

Imagine how the young man Joshua felt. Moses had left him and gone beyond. There had been thunder and lightning. Moses came down and had stone tablets in his hands, and on these tablets were words that could be read, words that had been placed there by God himself. Imagine the emotion! Yet when the two men came back into the camp, the people were in total rebellion. Here Joshua learned another truth: the terribleness of sin, especially among the people of God. This was sobering, and Joshua never forgot it.

The people made a god that was no god. And as soon as they had done this, there was a complete moral breakdown. The people took off their clothes and threw themselves into the same kind of sexual rite practiced by the cultures surrounding them. We can think here of the orgy in Schoenberg's opera *Moses and Aaron*. Though most of the rest of the opera is not true to the Scriptures, this part is. There was an orgy at the golden calf. In this case the moral breakdown was not separated from their worship, but was properly connected with it, because they were worshipping a god that was no god. As Paul points out in Romans 1, turning away from the living God always leads to moral breakdown. It has in our day. The last few generations have turned away from the living God, and now we are surrounded by a moral breakdown, including an all-prevailing sexual orgy.

In addition to having this terribleness impressed upon him, Joshua saw that merely using the name of God is not sufficient. After Aaron had made the calf, he said, "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (Ex. 32:4). According to tradition, the children of Israel actually

placed the most holy name of God—the Tetragrammaton—on the golden calf. But merely to use the name was nothing. This was worse, much worse, than not using the name of God at all. So Joshua would have understood that merely using the name of God is not enough.

Joshua would also have seen that there is a place for godly anger. Moses broke the tablets, and God never scolded him for this, not even a little. There was good reason for Moses' anger. After he had broken the tablets of stone, Moses ground up the golden calf, put the powder upon the water, and said to Israel, "All right! This is your drinking water. Go and drink it!"—a tremendous statement of godly anger against what is sinful. We must say that the exercise of godly anger is dangerous to us because we so often mix it with egoism. But let us not forget that there *is* a place for godly anger. There were times when Christ, too, was angry. We can think, for example, of him driving out the moneychangers (John 2:15) and his anger at the abnormality of death before the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:33).

IN THE TABERNACLE

The fourth time we see Joshua is in Exodus 33: "And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the LORD talked with Moses. . . . And the LORD spoke unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. And he turned again into the camp: but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle" (33:9, 11). Moses was unique. The Lord spoke with him face to face as one speaks to his friend; and in the midst of this unusual situation, the young man Joshua was being taught. Joshua was going to school; Joshua was being prepared for his future leadership. It was imperative that he learn, since the great man Moses would

die, and Joshua would be left to carry on. Here, as in Exodus 24, he learned the reality of God in his glory, but with an additional note: God could and would guide. God not only exists, but he guides his people as they live in, and walk through, the world of time and space.

PROPHESYING IN THE CAMP

Joshua is next mentioned in an intriguing passage in Numbers:

And Moses went out, and told the people the words of the LORD, and gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people, and set them round about the tabernacle. And the LORD came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the Spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, that, when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease. But there remained two of the men in the camp, the name of the one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad: and the Spirit rested upon them; and they were of them that were written, but went not out unto the tabernacle: and they prophesied in the camp. And there ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them. And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the LORD's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his Spirit upon them! (Num. 11:24-29)

Joshua had another lesson to learn, and a very serious one: God's glory is to come first. There is a great difference between leadership and self-aggrandizement. There is to be leadership among the people of God, according to the gifts he bestows, but there is not to be glorification of oneself or other men. Joshua asked that Eldad and Medad be forbidden to prophesy because they had not come before Moses in the tabernacle; but Moses answered magnificently, "Don't envy for my sake." Maybe

Moses' response is one of the reasons the Bible says that Moses was a meek man. Though Moses was such a tremendous leader, he would not tolerate Joshua's glorifying him.

The young man Joshua was learning a lesson that anybody who is ever going to be worth anything in leadership must learn. None of us learns it completely, of course, and yet we must master it if we are going to be of any use in the church of God. A leader must never confuse himself with God. When a person begins to exercise certain gifts and God brings him to a place of leadership in the church of Christ, how easy it is to take the glory. Yet this is the destruction of all true spiritual leadership.

Joshua also had to learn that a person cannot bind God with man-made rules. Joshua had a man-made rule: God really should not have placed his Spirit on the two men in the camp. This did not fit into Joshua's concept of what was good and proper. God has bound himself with rules based on his own character, which he will never break; but men (including God's leaders) must never try to bind him with their own rules. He will not keep these rules.

SPYING OUT THE LAND

In Numbers 13 we see more of Joshua's preparation. He was one of the twelve men God sent to spy out the promised land. Numbers 13:6 says that from the tribe of Judah Caleb was sent, and 13:8 (ASV) mentions: "of the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea the son of Nun." In 13:16 (ASV) we find that "Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun Joshua." So this was Joshua. *Hoshea* means "he saves"; but Moses changed his name to *Joshua*, "Jehovah saves" so that Joshua would even in his name remember that it is not man who saves, but God. *Jesus*, of course, is the Greek form for the Hebrew name *Joshua*.

When the spies returned, they gave contrasting opinions.

The majority advised, “No. Trying to conquer the land is too dangerous. The people are too great.” But two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, remembered who God is and reported in line with the greatness of God and his covenant promises: “And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it” (Num. 13:30). Here Caleb was affirming, “It’s a great land, and we will be able to conquer it because we have a great God.”

The people, however, followed the ten spies. “All the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night” (Num. 14:1). We can see the fiber of these two men as they spoke out and rebuked those who were following the majority report:

And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes: and they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defense is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not. (Num. 14:6-9)

Despite this rebuke, the people still acted upon the *majority report*. I emphasize this phrase for a purpose. We cannot go by majority reports. A democracy works on the basis of the majority, but this does not imply, by any means, that the majority opinion is always right. In this case, the majority was desperately wrong. Two against ten—nevertheless, the minority was right! When the people acted upon the majority report, they were indeed doing what Joshua and Caleb warned them against—they were rebelling against God.

So the young man Joshua learned another lesson. He learned that even when the majority was totally against him, he had to be willing to stand with God. He had to resist his own people when they were wrong, even if it led to physical danger. In this case it did: "But all the congregation bade stone them with stones" (Num. 14:10). "Kill these two! Get them out of the way!" the majority cried out. The people did not kill Joshua and Caleb; nevertheless, Joshua learned to exhibit courage even in the midst of physical danger and even though the majority in error were the people of God.

Joshua also learned once more the terribleness of rebellion against God among God's own people, for God decreed that none of these rebels would enter the promised land. We must understand that this moment was a watershed. Back around 2,000 B.C. God had given a promise to Abraham, and the Jewish *race* had begun. Before that, there were Semitic people but no Jews. In the time of Moses (about 500 years later), what had been a race was constituted a *nation* when the people came out of Egypt, crossed over the Red Sea, came to Sinai, and received their laws from God. The Bible was not only their religious law; it was also their civil law as a nation. All that remained, therefore, was to possess the land.

For the Jews, the land was the cord that bound together the other blessings. The Abrahamic Covenant included a national promise to the Jews that was related to the land. The first promise God had given to Abraham was, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee" (Gen. 12:1). When God next spoke to Abraham, he emphasized the same thing: "For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. . . . Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee" (Gen. 13:15, 17).

Later God said to Abraham, “I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it” (Gen. 15:7).

But God also told Abraham he would not have the land at once: “Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; . . . But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full” (Gen. 15:13, 16). God told Abraham that his descendants were not going to have the land immediately and that there was a reason for this: The iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full.

At the time the spies went out, the iniquity of the Amorites had become full; so it was time to go into the land. The third piece was now to be put into place. The race, the nation, and the land were to be brought together.

The Israelites had traveled from Egypt to Sinai in only two months. God kept them at Sinai for one year, to consolidate them, no doubt, and especially to give them the Ten Commandments, the entire civil law, and all the other great things revealed in the books of Moses. This means that by the time the spies went out, only one year and two months had elapsed from the people’s being slaves in Egypt to the unity of the promises of the race, the nation, and the land standing ready to be fulfilled. Suddenly came the rebellion of the people, and God stretched out a year and two months into forty years. For thirty-eight years after this, the Israelites wandered in the wilderness until everybody over the age of twenty, except Joshua and Caleb, had died.

So Joshua learned a lesson of the terribleness of God’s people rebelling against him. Surely he never forgot—thirty-eight years lost because of rebellion! Rebellion against God is no light

thing. It always brings its results in the present life. At this time it postponed the completion of the complex of race, nation, and land.

God told the people, "Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I sware to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun" (Num. 14:30). Only two people who were adults at this time would live to go in. Here Joshua learned something else: God keeps his promises. Just imagine the Israelites as they walked for thirty-eight years through the wilderness. One person would die, and then another; one set of bones would be laid aside, and then another, until every single person in that generation was dead. Moses went into the plain of Moab with only two men from that generation behind him—Joshua and Caleb. Joshua saw in dramatic fashion that God keeps his promises and distinguishes among people in the structure of history.

JOSHUA'S ORDINATION

On the plain of Moab, when "there was not left a man of them, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun" (Num. 26:65), the time came for Joshua's ordination. This is what we read:

And the LORD said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him; and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight. And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the LORD: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation. And Moses did as the LORD commanded him: and he took Joshua, and set him

before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation: and he laid his hands upon him, and gave him a charge, as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses. (Num. 27:18-23)

After all the years of preparation, Joshua was now marked in the presence of God's people as the man of God's choice. Thus he would have learned that leadership, if it is real, is not from men. It was not even from Moses, but only from God. Men can ordain, but leadership does not derive from them. Men, even Christian men, can generate leadership, but leadership generated by men is only on the level of any human leadership and will bring no more true spiritual results than any human charisma.

MOSES' FINAL ADDRESS

In the book of Deuteronomy, we are close to the end of the time of Moses and close to the beginning of the book of Joshua. Moses addressed the people several times before his death, and among his words were these:

I am an hundred and twenty years old this day; I can no more go out and come in: also the LORD hath said unto me, Thou shalt not go over this Jordan. The LORD thy God, he will go over before thee, and he will destroy these nations from before thee, and thou shalt possess them: and Joshua, he shall go over before thee, as the LORD hath said. And the LORD shall do unto them as he did to Sihon and to Og, kings of the Amorites, and unto the land of them, whom he destroyed. And the LORD shall give them up before your face, that ye may do unto them according unto all the commandments which I have commanded you. Be strong and of good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and of a good

courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the LORD hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it. And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fall thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed. (Deut. 31:2-8)

“I am going to die,” Moses said, “but don’t be afraid. God is going to go over before you.” Notice the order, which must not get reversed. God goes before; therefore, his people can go without fear. The human leader, Joshua, went before, too, but the reason Joshua could go without fear was not that his natural abilities and his faithfulness were so great (though these were evident by this time), but that God would go before him. This order must always be carefully maintained.

Undoubtedly Moses was thinking back to the time thirty-eight years before when the parents of these people were afraid, and God condemned them to die in the wilderness; so he warned, “Don’t do it again!” But there was something else. Moses was pointing out that as God had acted in the past, he would act in the future. The promises were not “pie in the sky.”

Those who are the people of God should reflect often on the continuity of the promises of God. The people of God should look back through the Scripture. They should also be able to look back through the history of their own lives. Seeing that God has cared for them in the past, they should not be afraid of tomorrow, because God is going to go before them then as well. Moses emphasized that the reason the people did not need to be afraid was not that they had Joshua (though wasn’t it wonderful that they did have Joshua?), but that God would go before both them and Joshua.

So we see here three steps: The Lord goes before his people, the Lord goes before the human leader, and then the people can

go without fear. The line is laid down. And as it has been in the past, it will be in the future.

Shortly after Moses spoke these words, a touching thing occurred—touching because it hearkened back to a memory from Joshua’s youth. Now when Joshua was much older, “The LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thy days approach that thou must die: call Joshua, and present yourselves in the tabernacle of the congregation, that I may give him a charge. And Moses and Joshua went, and presented themselves in the tabernacle of the congregation. And the LORD appeared in the tabernacle in a pillar of a cloud: and the pillar of the cloud stood over the door of the tabernacle” (Deut. 31:14-15). We do not know if this had happened many times in the intervening years, but we do know that when Joshua was a young man, he had gone into the tabernacle with Moses, and the cloud of the glory of God had come down upon them. I think God means for us to see a link. As a young man, Joshua had learned something. As the time came for Joshua to step out into leadership, this lesson was repeated. The two men were again in the tabernacle, directly under the Shekinah-glory of God.

In Deuteronomy 31:1 is another point of extreme importance. “Moses went and spake these words unto all Israel.” This was a verbalized communication from God through Moses. But in 31:9-12 the importance of this message is revealed:

And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and unto all the elders of Israel. And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, when all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is

within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law.

The commands of God were carried through Moses to the people in a written, propositional form. We are watching here the Scripture growing before our eyes. The text has already said that Moses wrote; now he writes again. And what is he writing? The Pentateuch—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

In Deuteronomy 31:24-26 the mention of the Pentateuch continues:

And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, that Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying, Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee.

The book was placed in the ark or by the ark to remind the people that it was connected with God. It was the Word of God in written form. The first five books of the Bible were now complete. God had given in written propositional form the great religious truths he wanted people to have up until that point of history, and he had told them (and us) facts about the cosmos and history as well.

Deuteronomy 34:7-8 describes the death of Moses: “And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated. And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days: so the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended.”

Joshua, I think, now learned his final lesson in preparation: No one is indispensable. I do not like that statement if

it is left alone, simply because I think the Bible says more than that. We must say, “No one is indispensable,” but we must not forget Deuteronomy 34:10: “And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face.” Here Moses’ uniqueness is emphasized. So we can say at the same time, without being contradictory, no one is indispensable, but everyone is unique. People are dispensable, but this does not mean that one person fills another’s place in the same way a person would remove one concrete block and put another concrete block in its place. In the final analysis, nobody takes the place of anybody else. This is the wonder of personality and the wonder of God using personality in leadership.

JOSHUA IS READY

Now after all these years of preparation, Joshua was ready to enter the land: “And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the LORD commanded Moses” (Deut. 34:9). This was not a mechanical readiness. An act of the will was involved. If we do not stress this, we will be giving an inaccurate picture of Joshua’s preparation. It is not that you feed preparation into a mill, and a leader comes out the other end. It is not that way, any more than that you feed facts into a mill, and a Christian comes out the other end. There must be an act of the will in becoming a Christian, and there must be an act of the will for any person, no matter what his or her preparation, to become a leader in God’s work.

At the end of his own life, Joshua said to the people, “And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served

that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Josh. 24:15). This was not a choice Joshua made only at the end of his life. All through his preparation we see a series of acts of his will.

There is no leader who does not have to choose. You can take two people with equal preparation, and one serves the Lord, while the other does not. We must realize that whether we are young or old, God does not deal with us as sticks and stones. He has made us as people, and he expects us to respond as people. Even when God has prepared a person, if there is to be real spiritual leadership, the leadership will require a constant, existential, moment-by-moment act of the will: “If the rest of you wish to go the way of the majority, go! As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Is there always a long time of preparation for spiritual leadership? Not always, but usually. We can think of those in the Scripture, including Christ, who for years were prepared for the crucial leadership they would exercise. We must be careful; we cannot make this a rule, because Paul did say to Timothy, “Let no man despise thy youth” (1 Tim. 4:12). We must not insist that people have gray hair—or no hair at all—before they can be given important leadership positions. At the same time we must understand that if we are young and want to be used in the Lord’s work, we must be ready for a time of preparation. Usually there is preparation before leadership. Both Moses and Joshua had many, many years of preparation.

Let us review what Joshua learned in his preparation:

God will not tolerate rebellion against himself.

Power is not merely the power of the general and the sword. It is not to be the power of man, but true power is the power of God.

God is not far off; he is always immediately present.

Sin is terrible, especially among the people of God.

Merely using the name of God is not sufficient.

God can and will guide.

God's glory is to come first. There is a real difference between leadership and self-aggrandizement.

A person cannot bind God with man-made rules.

A man of God must stand and trust God—even against his own people, even if in the minority, even in the midst of physical danger.

Even in his judgment, God keeps his promises and distinguishes among people. He does not treat people like a series of numbers.

True spiritual leadership does not come from human hands but from God.

No one is indispensable; yet each person is important and unique.

Usually there is preparation before leadership.

God taught Joshua all these things as Joshua followed Moses in the wilderness. Then, with these lessons learned, Joshua was ready to lead the people into the promised land.